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Significant factors contributing to the successful inclusion of students with moderate to severe disabilities into general K-2 classrooms

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SIGNIFICANT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESSFUL

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES

INTO GENERAL K-2 CLASSROOMS

By
Bonni Rubin-Sugarman

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan College
April 28, 1997

Approved by

                                                    Professor

Date Approved_____   4/28/97 ____

ABSTRACT

Bonni Rubin-Sugarman

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1997

Dr. Margaret M. Shuff

Masters Degree Of Learning Disabilities

Since 1975 a federal law has made the local school district responsible for the
education of ALL children living within its geographical boundaries. This law, originally
known as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), and now known
as IDEA or The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, guarantees that children with
disabilities will have a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive
environment. This free and appropriate public education would afford children with
disabilities the opportunity, to the maximum extent possible, to be educated in their
neighborhood school alongside of their non-disabled peers.

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies / practices used regularly
by successful kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers who have included children
with moderate to severe disabilities in their general education classrooms in hopes of
determining how to best support teachers providing inclusive placements for primary
students. It examined the supports made available to those teachers, and it investigated

whether successful teachers were more experienced teachers.

Five districts in southern New Jersey, located in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester Counties, were identified as districts who had included children with disabilities in general education classrooms. A district administrator, known to have knowledge of special education placements, by contacted by phone, and asked to recommend two K-2 teachers whom they felt had successfully included a student(s) with moderate to severe disabilities in their regular education class.

Taped interviews were conducted using open ended questions, developed by this researcher, and then transcribed for analysis. Data was analyzed using ratio, percentage, and Chi-square distribution.

Results indicated that of the fifteen strategies or practices used by the teachers interviewed, **cooperative learning, peer buddies, and collaborative / team teaching** were statistically significant. The question of experience and its relationship to a successful inclusive program was not clearly defined by the research.

Supports described as significant to the successful general educator came from a variety of sources: a mutually respectful relationship with the parent(s) of the included child, which included regular on-going communication between home and school, direct support from the resource center teacher, for at least a portion of the day, to both the student and the classroom program, and a positive, encouraging attitude towards inclusion by building principals.

MINI ABSTRACT

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This study examined the significant factors contributing to the successful inclusion of primary students with moderate to severe disabilities in regular education classrooms. Ten successful teachers, from five districts were interviewed using open ended questions. Data was analyzed using ratio, percentage and Chi-square distribution. Three specific practices and a variety of supports were identified.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several years ago I received a letter from a parent whose child was involved in the camp program I direct. The letter expressed her gratitude for the opportunities that the program provided her daughter. She revealed her sentiments by quoting from a recent popular song entitled "Colors of the Wind".

She wrote, "How high does the sycamore grow?

If you cut it down, you'll never know."

Successful inclusive environments provide opportunities for ALL children to grow to their potential. Successful inclusive environments provide opportunities for administrators, teachers, parents, and children to create classroom and school communities which reflect the attitude that all members of a community can be valued, contributing members. The joy of this research came from the enthusiasm and the optimism expressed by the ten successful teachers interviewed. My heartfelt thanks to all of them for the time they spent with me and for the commitment they have made to the children of their communities.

Like the sycamore I too have had the opportunity to continue growing. My wonderful experience at Rowan, my home away from home, has become the impetus to continuing on this academic path.

First my gratitude to Dr. Sharon Bianco who has inspired, motivated, and navigated this journey, so I could capitalize on my skills and accomplishments, and whose faith in me has bestowed both recognition and professional opportunities I had never dreamed possible.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

A child's invitation to attend her neighborhood school is generally determined by invisible geographic boundaries and age. There is an implicit understanding, between schools and the communities they serve, that all children will become members of their neighborhood community school when they reach a certain age. This understanding enables families to choose homes and neighborhoods that meet a variety of social, economic, and, in some cases, cultural needs. That is, unless the child has a significant disability.

Prior to 1975, children with disabilities were almost always educated in isolated schools and classes (Bradley & Switlick, in press). In 1975, Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was passed by Congress to guarantee that children and youth with disabilities would receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Turnbull, 1990). To meet the intent of this law, many school systems nationwide responded by emphasizing the provision of appropriate programs rather than placement in the least restrictive environment, causing the delivery of special education to occur, for the most part, in separate and pull-out programs (Bradley, 1993). These "appropriate programs" streamlined the delivery of service, maximizing efficiency, but sacrificing the concept of least restrictive environment. But what about the neighborhood school? Was this school only intended for non-classified children?

In 1986, Madeline Will, the former Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, proposed the regular education initiative (REI). She conveyed the notion that students with mild disabilities could be educated

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within the general education setting (Meyers, Nevin, Thousand, & Villa,1996). Advocacy efforts soon expanded the REI concepts to include those students with severe and profound disabilities in general education classrooms in neighborhood schools.

In many communities throughout the country, a child's attendance and participation, as a member of the community school, is based solely on the geographic boundaries and her chronological age. She is a valued, welcomed member of her school community regardless of ability or skill level achieved. These school communities adhere to a philosophy of "supported inclusive education," where students have the opportunity, regardless of their disabilities, to be educated in age-appropriate regular classes, in naturally occurring proportions, in their neighborhood school. Inclusive education is a process of operating a classroom or a school as a supportive community and, thus, is qualitatively different from integration or mainstreaming efforts of the past, which attempted to "fit" a particular category of students (e.g., students with severe disabilities) into a standardized educational mainstream in which uniformity was valued over personalized learning (Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1996). All necessary supports are provided to the students and educators to ensure meaningful participation in the total school community. Supports can include, but are not limited to, curricular or instructional strategies, specialized instructional strategies, additional adults in the classroom, team teaching strategies, environmental adaptations, peer support, assistive technology, and/or integrated related service (SPAN, 1994)

Every student will bring her own unique circumstances to the classroom, and with every age and every stage, educators will be challenged. Semmel , Abernathy, Butera and Lesar (1991) have pointed out that, although the changes involved in including students with disabilities in general education classes have a major impact on both special and general education service providers, little attention has been given to the views of these educators. Kauffman, Gerber and Semmel (1988) emphasized the lack of input, especially from the general educators, in the following statement:

Strangely absent from the models of teaching that are implicitly

assumed by most REI proponents is a realistic model for the cognitive

operations of persons who actually teach. Our concern, therefore,

is that enough respect be shown for regular classroom teachers, to ask

them what they perceive, based on teaching practice, is feasible,

desirable, and in the best interest of students (p. 9).

Therefore, practices that will enhance the meaningful participation, and meet the educational goals of students who are included in regular education classes, are the focus of this study. Data will be collected from those classroom teachers who have utilized, refined, and adapted those practices in hopes of making the road to inclusion somewhat smoother for students and their families.

Definition of Terms

Supported inclusive education is defined as the opportunity for all students, regardless of their disability, to be educated in age-appropriate regular classes, in naturally occurring proportions, in their neighborhood school. All necessary supports are provided to the students and educators to ensure meaningful participation in the total school community (SPAN, 1994). For the purpose of this study, included students must be spending at least three hours a day in regular education classes.

Successful general educators are defined by their own admission as successful and as those who have been recognized as such by their building administrator and/or Director of Special Services.

For the purpose of this study **students with moderate to severe disabilities** will be defined as those with one of the following classifications, as described in the New Jersey Administrative Code for Special Education (6:28-3.5).

1. Autistic

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2. Emotionally Disturbed

3. Educable Mentally Retarded

4. Trainable Mentally Retarded

5. Multiply Handicapped

6. Neurologically Impaired

Research Questions

Students have always brought their unique strengths and challenges to the classroom experience, and teachers have had the responsibility to apply the strategies they have been trained to implement in order to meet that diversity. It seems obvious that teachers are in the best position to recommend practices that facilitate learning. It also seems obvious that teachers who have successfully included students with disabilities are in the best position to recommend strategies that seem to work best in inclusive classrooms. This study is interested in addressing the practices that primary teachers have successfully implemented in their inclusive K-2 classrooms. It also hopes to address whether those teachers who are considered successful practitioners, by their own admission and/or selection by their building administrators and/or Directors of Special Services, are experienced teachers and what supports have contributed to their success.

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that the following factors are significant in the successful inclusion of students with moderate to severe disabilities in the regular K-2 classroom:

A. **Actualization of LRE**

B. **Staff Support**

B. **Collaboration** .

C. **Use of Effective Strategies For Inclusive Classrooms**

Limitations of the Study

1.   The scope and size of the study may not be representative of the diversity within the state, making it difficult to generalize results to a variety of populations.

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2.   Self-reported perceptions of classroom practices may be different from what would be reported through observation and may not describe classroom events accurately.

3.   Questions may be interpreted differently by those interviewed based on varied backgrounds.

Overview

Chapter 2 will reflect a Review of the Literature by addressing the following themes: (1) **How inclusion (LRE) has been defined and implemented**, (2) **Effective Classroom Strategies**, (3) **Staff Support**, including administrative and teacher support and (4) **Collaboration** between general and special educators, and related service providers, for the planning and implementation of the program, as well as on-going communication between parents and teachers . From this review a rationale for the current study will be developed.

Chapter 3 will describe the Methodology that will be utilized in the study. Included will be a comparison with previous studies, the design of the study, and the method describing participants involved, the development of the interview questions, and the procedure used for the selection of the teachers participating. In addition, a description of how the research questions were recorded will also be included. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the study by describing how interview responses were both recorded and analyzed. Individual teacher responses will be compared and the recommended practices highlighted in a summary of findings.

Chapter 5 will reprise the purpose of the study and highlight the recommended practices of Hypothesis 1. A discussion regarding Hypothesis 2 will follow. The results will serve as a catalyst for future studies. Conclusions will then follow.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Definition and Implementation of LRE

There are a small but growing number of schools throughout the United States of America, such as Hansen Elementary in Cedar Falls, Iowa; the Winooski School District in Winooski, Vermont; and Ed Smith Elementary School in Syracuse, New York, which represent a new breed of schools that are effective, caring, and inclusive. These schools, however, are still the exception rather than the rule. That is, there remains an enormous amount of work to achieve effective, fully inclusive, and caring schools on a widespread basis (Stainback & Stainback, 1994).

Defining, identifying, and locating that elusive, Least Restrictive Environment, appears to have to have been the cause of many debates amongst educators, parents, and certainly lawmakers since the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA). As defined in IDEA, the least restrictive environment provision requires that states assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who do not have disabilities. Removal or separate schooling should occur when the severity of the child's disability is such that the general curriculum cannot be modified to achieve satisfactory performance (Sloan, Denny & Repp, 1992). Along with the LRE provision of the law, additional regulations mandating that a continuum of alternative placements be available to meet the needs of individuals to include instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and hospitals and institutions (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett and Schattman, 1994). Although the Act and the regulations create a presumption that students with disabilities will be

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educated in general education settings, the need for alternative placement options has also been acknowledged. Therefore, the challenge at the local level, is in choosing the service delivery option that, in fact, will meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of a student in this "Least Restrictive Environment".

The law specifies that this decision be made through a team process, by a group of professionals and parents. Although this process is steeped in the best of intentions, is every team looking at the picture of the child through the same eyes, and with the same belief, understanding of, and faith in that "Least Restrictive Environment"?

Sawyer, McLaughlin and Winglee (1994), analyzed national data to determine the extent to which students with various disabilities have been integrated into general public schools since 1977, and general education classes since 1985. Placement trends, for all disabilities, were examined over specific periods of time, using placement data from the Office Of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The data includes information, on all students who receive special education and related services with public funding, using six major placement categories: regular class, resource room, separate class, separate school facility, residential facility, and home / hospital. Placement data was analyzed for students ages 6-21 identified as having specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance, hearing impairments, visual impairments, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, and other health impairments. Overall, placements in the general education classroom show a relatively consistent increase over time for almost all disabilities. However, placement trends at the level of the general education public school, for all disabilities combined, show very little change over time. When examining placement trends based on specific disability, it appears that there is an increase in the number of students educated in general education classrooms; but, because inconsistencies exist, the trend does not apply to all disabilities. It is therefore essential to look at, and describe the factors contributing to these varying approaches.

Hasazi et al. (1994) investigated how 6 states and 12 local school districts implemented the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) over a 3 year period beginning in 1989. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe factors and conditions that contributed to varying approaches to implementation of LRE policy across both local and state school districts.

At each of the 18 sites (12 local sites plus the 6 state sites), 16-24 people, who were discovered through the use of "networking techniques" and considered by both reputation and position to be knowledgeable in the implementation of LRE, were interviewed. A total of 350 interviews were conducted, including interviews with school board members, superintendents, special education directors, other central office administrators, principals, general and special educators, and parents, in schools, administrative offices, and community locations. Four of the sites were in rural areas, two were suburban, and six were in urban settings. Six states were selected based on the differing approaches used in implementing LRE. Three states were selected because of their relatively "high" use of residential facilities, separate schools, and separate classes, and three states were selected because of their relatively "low" use of these separate placements. For the purpose of the study, groups were known as "high users" and "low users".

Findings of the study were summarized by factor, noting similarities and differences between the sites known as high and low users of separate facilities, schools, and / or classes at both the local and the state level. Six factors were identified that seemed to influence the implementation of LRE: finance, organization, advocacy, implementers, knowledge and values, and state/local context. Although impossible to identify, a factor that could be singled out as most important is how the leadership at each site chose to view LRE was critical to implementation. When people chose to view LRE as the integration of special education and general education programs, and as a program option that truly benefits students, more choices became available.

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Dempsey (1992) and McLaughlin and Owings (1993), as cited in Sawyer, McLaughlin, and Winglee (1994), noted that substantial variation exists across states and local school districts in integration trends. Local context, such as fiscal and demographic characteristics, including special education formulas, can and do contribute to placement decisions. Although the above studies addressed the fiscal and demographic characteristics that contribute to placement decisions, variables such as teacher attitude, personal experience and bias were not considered. These considerations were addressed, however, in the following study.

Semmel, Abernathy, Butera and Lesar (1991) surveyed 381 regular and special education teachers regarding attitudes and perceptions surrounding the placement of students with mild disabilities in regular education classrooms. A 66 item instrument that assessed teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding current practices used in the education of children with mild disabilities served in special education pullout programs, as well as attitudes toward the REI reforms was developed and utilized. The results indicated that both regular and special education teachers were not dissatisfied with the special education delivery system of pull-out. Many of the educators surveyed did not foresee improvement in the achievement levels for either regular or special education students as a result of REI reforms, and, a relatively high number of respondents believed that full-time placement of students with mild disabilities in the regular classroom could negatively affect the distribution of classroom time. In addition, regular classroom teachers perceived themselves as not having the appropriate skills to modify the curriculum for special education students.

Clearly, as reported by Dempsey, 1992; Hasazi, et al., 1994; McLaughlin and Owings, 1993; Sawyer et al.,1994; Sloan et al.,1992 placing special education students in general education programs, where general educators do not feel competent or confident in their own abilities to meet their needs, may not bring the desired educational results. The science of education provides teachers, both general education and special education,

with well defined, research based strategies that have been proven effective in student achievement. However, the art of education is dependent upon the teachers' ability to modify and adapt those strategies in order to benefit the diverse student population found in today's classrooms. Defining those strategies, training teachers and providing the necessary teacher / student supports, to meet the challenge of diversity, may contribute significantly to how teachers perceive their own abilities and the potential success of their students.

Effective Classroom Strategies

The roots of special education can be traced to a sincere belief that students with disabilities, could not be successfully educated in general classroom settings. Parents and professionals spent decades convincing boards of education and policymakers that special settings, more powerful interventions, and specially trained teachers were necessary if students with disabilities were to achieve their potential (Meyen, Vergason & Whelan, 1996).

However, many people adhere to a belief system that the segregated environment, with the specially trained teachers, and the more powerful interventions, are not nearly as effective as the general education environment. Sometimes supported by their school colleagues, and sometimes supported by their district, some general educators have stood firm in the face of parents' and special educators' charges that they are inadequately equipped to deal with youngsters who have disabilities (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). If the general education classroom setting can be the most appropriate placement, or at very least the first choice placement, for all students, it becomes incumbent upon those professionals to identify those strategies that provide greater opportunity for overall student success in heterogeneous classrooms.

King-Sears and Cummings (1996) described practices that general educators have used to successfully implement inclusion. In addition to identifying specific practices, they found that the frequency which which these practices are used in general education

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classrooms are determined by the comfort, competence, and proficiency that educators feel while implementing them.

The practices featured were identified through a partnership, in the form of a graduate program, formed between a school system and a university. This graduate program was established to provide support to certified teachers working in the field, across all disciplines, to provide inclusive program experiences to students with mild, moderate and severe disabilities. Teachers involved in the program were working toward special education certification and required to complete a sequence of practica. It was expected that each graduate student work with at least one student with a disability during academic instruction, using a research based instructional strategy that was new for them. In addition, each had a requirement to implement one behavior change project that was designed to promote independence and academic success. Throughout the semester, technical assistance was provided by a university supervisor and a special education teacher.

The following seven practices were identified as those which facilitate inclusion in general education classrooms: (1) Curriculum-based Assessment, (2) Cooperative Learning, (3) Self-Management, 4) Classwide Peer Tutoring, (5) Strategy Instruction, (6) Direct Instruction, and (7) Goal-Setting. Interestingly enough, these practices are not only effective in promoting academic achievement for students included in general education classes, but for all students.

Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman and Schattman (1993) described the experiences of general education teachers who had a student with severe disabilities in their class. Teachers reported favoring approaches that encouraged cooperative learning and group problem solving. They also emphasized approaches that were active, participatory, and typical. (**Typical** being defined as a strategy or approach that could be used with the whole class and not just for an individual student). Gersaten and Woodward (1990) also concluded that many of the effective practices associated with the achievement

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of regular students are the same as those advocated for students with disabilities. If strategies that benefit more students are more likely to become a lasting part of the general education program because they simply describe generally effective teaching behavior (Schloss,1992), then the challenge is, and continues to be, in determining why these practices have become more commonplace in some general education classrooms then in others.

In terms of a specific strategy, Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips and Bentz (1994) examined the effectiveness of curriculum-based measurement (CBM) within general mathematics instruction. CBM is a set of assessment methods for indexing student achievement within the school curriculum. It has been used over the past twenty years, primarily in special education settings, where the special education teacher frequently measures student proficiency to determine program effectiveness. Inherent to the special education program is the attitude that when a strategy or a program appears inadequate, the program is adjusted or changed. Obviously, the roots of special education as a program option is steeped in this philosophy; however, managing large numbers of instructional adjustments for students in large, heterogeneous classes, may explain why regular education teachers do not use CBM routinely. The purpose of this study was to identify the support necessary to increase the regular educator's capability to use objective, on-going assessment information to provide more appropriate, individualized instruction to students as well as the effectiveness of adapting the original CBM methods for use in general education classes.

Participants in the study were 40 general educators in 11 schools in a southeastern, urban school distract. Teachers who participated had to include at least one student with an identified learning disability in their regular mathematics instruction. The 40 teachers were divided into the following three groups: (1) CBM with classwide reports that summarized assessment information, but provided no instruction recommendation, (2) CBM with classwide reports that both summarized information and provided instructional

recommendations, and (3) no CBM. Teachers implemented treatments for 25 weeks and the effects on teacher planning and math achievement for average, low average, and learning disabled students were studied.

Results of the study indicated that CBM decision-making strategies can be successfully modified in order to improve student achievement in the general education setting. When CBM strategies were designed with a classwide focus, teachers improved student achievement. Most important, and critical to both the success of the students and to teacher satisfaction, was the on-going support teachers received through specific recommendations for how to incorporate the CBM strategies into the instructional program. It appears that the technical support during the early stages of implementation was critical to the successful implementation of that strategy. Those teachers receiving summarized assessment information without recommendations for instruction did not have the same success as those teachers who received instructional guidance. Therefore, it may be assumed that teachers who are implementing a new strategy need, and welcome, specific recommendations in order to become comfortable and confident in its implementation.

Staff Support

Scruggs and Mastrophieri (1996) examined twenty-eight investigations between 1958 and 1995, in which general educators were surveyed regarding their perceptions of including students with disabilities in their classes. In the 28 survey reports, 10,560 teachers were surveyed regarding their attitudes towards mainstreaming / including students with disabilities. Although the surveys reported represented a wide variety in procedures, time, and geographical areas, the results were found to be highly consistent. A majority of teachers agree with the philosophy or the concept of inclusion; however, support for, and the willingness to implement, inclusion appeared to vary based on the severity of the disability and the amount of additional teacher responsibility required.

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Only about one fourth to one third of the teachers surveyed believed they had sufficient time, training, and / or materials to implement inclusion successfully. In some investigations, with extended training, teachers appeared to become more positive about their own abilities to provide successful experiences for students.

It appears that most general educators do not feel they have either the time, training, or materials to successfully include students with disabilities into their general education classrooms, although most agree with the philosophy. Clearly, if successful inclusive classrooms, inclusive schools, and, ultimately, inclusive school districts is a goal we hope to achieve, this goal must begin with the optimistic, competent, and confident attitude of the teaching staff responsible for implementation. Teachers need training in, and information regarding, inclusive practices that are validated, benefit most, if not all, students in a class; allow the integrity of the curriculum to be maintained; and are practical in terms of time and implementation. (Meyen, Vergason & Whelan, 1996). Obviously, those individuals who are closest to the day-to-day workings of the general education classroom must play a vital role in shaping their own training and support if the level of comfort and usage of these identified strategies is to increase.

Janney, Snell, Beers and Raynes (1995) explored the general educators' perceptions of factors that initially had created, but later reduced, their resistance to inclusion. While doing so, they were also able to look at the educational change process. The study's focus was "not in determining whether integration had been accomplished successfully according to recognized indicators of effective practice, but rather, the interest was in studying participants' beliefs and attitudes about the success of their own integration" (Janney et. al., 1995).

Participants in the study were 53 teachers and administrators from five Virginia districts that had undertaken an effort to increase the number of students with moderate to severe disabilities in their regular education classes. Seventeen school districts were involved in the project, which, initially, was promoted by the interest each district had in

receiving technical assistance from a state-wide project. Project consultants were available on site to participants 3-4 days per month for at least one semester.

A variety of school personnel participated in personal interviews conducted by the research team to evaluate the efforts of the support team. In addition to the special education director, principals, and assistant principals, special education teachers were also interviewed. However, for the purpose of this research, interest was focused on the regular education teachers, who ranged from having a single student with a moderate to severe disability integrated into a non-academic subject, to having an identified student integrated for the entire day.

Each participant was interviewed using a semi-standardized interview with primarily open-ended questions. Interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes and were taped by one of the researchers. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim, with the authors looking for the following two themes: (a) On what factors did interviewees' judgments of successful integration hinge? (i.e., "success" themes)? and (b) What factors were perceived to have facilitated or hindered success (i.e., "advice" themes)?

There were two major themes defining success and 15 themes defining advice. All interviewees, except one, reported that the integration effort in their school was successful. Criteria for success was described by the positive benefits for students in comparison to the additional workload expended by the teacher. Perceived student benefits included increased independence, improved functional skills, increased alertness, and interest in the environment, depending on the needs of the individual student. In addition, increased social benefits included acquiring age-appropriate behaviors and tastes, developing friendships, and "becoming a part" of the classroom and ultimately the school community. In addition, students without disabilities were perceived to have developed a greater acceptance of individual differences within their peer group while developing increased self-esteem.

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Administrative support was viewed as the responsibility of the building principal and included access to resources, including staff, materials, and inservice training, and for handling the logistics of scheduling. Administrative advice included: (a) setting a positive tone; (b) starting with teacher volunteers; (c) involving everyone in preparation and planning; (d) providing information, orientation, and training; (e) providing resources and handling logistics; (f) starting small and building on success; and (g) giving teachers the freedom to do what they need to do.

In addition to administrative support, general educators attributed their success to the effective supports, both task related and interpersonal, received from their special education counterparts. General education teachers stressed the importance of the special educators personality or affect in ensuring the success of the integration effort, with the special educator described as non-threatening, low keyed, and flexible being considered a desirable teaching partner. They also saw the special educator's willingness to plan and collaborate on a regular basis, as important, although at least half of the general educators were assuming much or all of the responsibility for planning and implementation of integrated activities.

General educators also had the following advice for colleagues including students with disabilities for the first time. First, have an open mind as original fears and expectations were based on inaccurate preconceptions about the integrated student's abilities and needs. Second, problem-solve as a team, do a lot of brainstorming, talk things through and then experiment. And third, help the student to belong and recognize that non-disabled students take their cues about how to interact from the teacher.

Providing opportunities for teachers who have successfully included students with disabilities in their regular education classes to assist in the planning for colleagues new to the process was one of the outcomes of a study by Giangreco et al. (1993). The subjects of this study were 19 general education teachers who worked in 10 Vermont public schools teaching kindergarten through grade 9. Each of the teachers selected had included

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a student, who was severely disabled and had met the Vermont definition of being dual sensory impaired, sometime during the last three years. Through a combination of interview and survey, data was collected regarding teacher experiences including a student with severe disabilities.

Regardless of how the student with severe disabilities was placed in the general classroom, most teachers reacted either cautiously or negatively at the beginning of the experience. Many even questioned the wisdom of such a placement. After spending the year together, 17 of the 19 teachers included in the study experienced increased ownership of, and involvement with, the included student. Cautious and negative comments were replaced with positive and enthusiastic descriptors. Transformations were described as gradual and progressive rather than discrete and abrupt, indicating that including students was more a process than a placement.

An overriding theme of what teachers viewed as helpful and supportive was the value of teamwork. When teamwork was present, teachers reported feeling productive and supported. Experienced teams were reported as providing ongoing technical, resource, evaluative, and moral support. Planning teams were viewed as adults working together on behalf of an individual child.

Although transformational experiences have been reported by teachers, opportunities to share experiences, strategies, fears, concerns, joys and benefits, may increase the general educator's willingness, comfort and confidence to successfully include students. This opportunity early in the experience may provide teachers with the opportunity to approach these uncharted waters with greater anticipation of success.

Collaboration

One key to the effective integration of students with disabilities into regular education programs is the professional relationship established between special educators, regular educators, ancillary personnel, and parents. Ideally, this relationship should

produce solutions to instructional problems that combine the expertise of all relevant disciplines as well as the parent / consumer (Schloss, 1992).

Elliot and Sheridan (1992) described the nature and use of consultation and in-school teams in service delivery. An explicit problem-solving approach that had been shown to facilitate problem resolution was described as a series of stages that direct and focus the problem-solving inquiries between the consultant and the consultee. Bergen (1977) developed the four-stage framework for guiding the process which was found to also increase the knowledge of the adults participating in the process. These stages were labeled as problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation and plan evaluation. The stages identified provide opportunities for on-going consultation between members of the school team, as the expectation would be the continuous evaluation of the existing plan, to determine the future path.

This need to implement collaborative consultation effectively in order to successfully include students in regular education settings has, for the most part, become the responsibility of the special education teacher. This educator needs the combination of the **scientific** aspect of consultation, and the **art** of utilizing the process (Idol, 1990). The technical components of consultation include the teaching methodologies and intervention strategies used to solve problems of program implementation for a student with disabilities. However, the consultant must also demonstrate effective communication-skills, problem-solving skills and decision- making-skills to convey this information to the general educator (Idol, 1990).

In 1988, West and Cannon reported the results of an extensive study conducted to determine the competencies which special educators must have to function successfully as consultants. They found that eight major categories of skills emerged. These are: (a) a working knowledge of consultation theory and models; (b) familiarity with the research on theory, training, and practice in consultation; (c) personal characteristics; (d) a working knowledge of, and skills in, interactive communication; (e) skills in collaborative problem

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solving; (f) knowledge of systems change; (g) experience and knowledge in equity issues, values, and beliefs; and (h) the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

Identifying these competencies is the first rung on the ladder. As more students with disabilities are included, the expectations of special educators shift from the role of the direct service provider to the collaborative partner. Special educators are spending more time in general education classes consulting with classroom teachers about appropriate ways to structure lessons to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, special educators are spending more time team teaching with general educators to implement instruction that is meaningful and sensitive to the individual needs of students (Falvey, 1989).

The above studies consistently identify the ability of the special educator and the regular educator to form a collaborative as a factor inherent to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities into general education programs (Elliot & Sheridan, 1992; Falvey, 1989; Idol, 1990; Schloss, 1992; West & Cannon, 1988).

Conclusion

This literature review begins by looking at the factors and attitudes that influence the interpretation of Least Restrictive Environment and how that interpretation impacts on student placement in general education classes. It then identified specific strategies that have been identified as effective for implementation in heterogeneous classes. However, permeating the literature was, the question of teacher comfort with the strategy and reasons why the strategy was not an on-going part of the classroom program. It appeared that, with appropriate support for implementation of a new strategy and opportunities for collaboration and consultation, teachers were more inclined to use the strategy regularly. As a result, attitudes towards including students with disabilities and the confidence in their own abilities were significantly improved.

The current study, reported in chapters 3 through 5, attempts to address, more specifically, those practices identified by successful K-2 teachers that contribute to the

successful inclusion of students with moderate to severe disabilities into general education classrooms along with recommendations for increasing teacher usage.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Comparison with Previous Studies

Janney, Snell, Beers and Raynes (1995) examined the educational change process, through the factors identified by general educators, as those creating initial resistance to inclusion and those that later reduced their resistance. Through interviews conducted with 53 teachers and administrators, themes of advice were developed based on the experiences of those interviewed. Although each interviewee had experience including a student with moderate to severe disabilities, those interviewed had worked with students from kindergarten through high school, from the point of view of the administrator, the special educator, and the general educator.

King-Sears and Cummings (1996) described practices used by general educators to successfully include students with disabilities in their general education classes. A description of each strategy was included along with an analysis of teacher comfort levels using each of the target strategies. Necessary actions to increase teacher comfort levels and competence were also reported.

This research was designed to target kindergarten through second grade general education teachers who have successfully included students with moderate to severe disabilities into their classrooms. School and classroom practices that are regularly implemented will be reported, along with recommendations from these successful educators.

Research Design

This study examined the practices implemented by successful kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers, in their general education classes, where a student(s) with

moderate to severe disabilities was included for at least 50% of the school day. It was designed to correlate practices being used and recommended in these primary classrooms with those identified in the literature, and to identify factors contributing to the regularity in which specific inclusive practices/strategies were used in general education classrooms.

Participants

Five districts in southern New Jersey, located in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester Counties, were identified as districts who had included students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This information had been made available to this researcher through workshop presentations, conferences, and conversations with district administrators and/or teachers. In addition, some of the students included were known to the researcher through a professional partnership between the district and the Jewish Community Center of Southern New Jersey.

In each district, the Director of Special Services or the Director of the Child Study Team was contacted by the researcher, by phone, and the study was explained. Each administrator was asked to recommend two K-2 teachers whom they felt had successfully included a student(s) with moderate to severe disabilities in their regular education class.

Of the ten teachers recommended, and interviewed all were female. Two had taught kindergarten, six had taught first grade, and five had taught second grade. In addition three reported having experience teaching grades three and five and one had taught three different self-contained special education classes. All respondents were teaching kindergarten through second grade during the year of inclusion

Materials

The only materials used in this research was an interview, developed by this researcher, which included both background information on each interviewee, and open-ended questions. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Procedure

Participants were contacted at their elementary school, by telephone, after administrative recommendations were made. Each received an in-depth explanation of the project as well as clarification of how they were selected. Individual appointments were made for the interview at the convenience of the interviewee. All interviews were taped to insure accuracy when documenting responses.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Data regarding the following three research questions will be addressed in this chapter.

    1. What practices have kindergarten, first, and second grade used regularly to include students with moderate to severe disabilities?

    2. Are successful teachers more experienced?

    3. What supports have been provided to successful teachers?

Data

Respondents

Interviews were conducted with ten primary teachers from five districts in Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester Counties. The districts representing Burlington and Camden Counties serviced students in Kindergarten through the eighth grade with students feeding into a regional high school for grades nine through twelve. The districts representing Gloucester County serviced students in district from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Teacher experience ranged from two to twenty years with four teachers reporting having taught a single grade level and five teachers reporting having taught more than one grade level. One teacher's experience included teaching self-contained special education classes in a private school for special education students, Resource Center in a public school, and regular education classes.

All ten teachers reported having Elementary (K-8) Certification and two teachers also reported having the Early Childhood Endorsement. One teacher's certification also included Teacher of the Handicapped. In addition to the Elementary endorsement,

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another teacher reported having Guidance Certification as well as certification in Music Education (See Table 1).

Instructional Environment

Teachers reported class sizes ranging from a low of sixteen (16), in a kindergarten class, to a high of thirty-four (34), in a second / third grade combination. Eight out of ten teachers interviewed reported having an included student whose classification was Multiply Handicapped, while four out of ten reported having a student classified as Neurologically Impaired. One reported having a student classified as Emotionally Disturbed, two reported having students classified as Communications Handicapped, one reported having a student classified as Hearing Impaired, while one other teacher reported having a student classified as Autistic.

The teachers interviewed reported having a total of seventeen (17) included students, however the focus of this study were ten (10) students who were considered to have moderate to severe disabilities. These students received instruction in the general education classroom anywhere from 72% to 100% of the week. All ten were included for all special subjects, and since all the teachers interviewed reported that their classified children were included on the regular education rosters, all ten had lunch and recess with their general education classmates.

Related services and replacement services reported as part of each child's program were Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and /or Resource Center. Eight out of ten students included in this study received Occupational Therapy, eight out of ten students received Speech Therapy, and three out of ten received Physical Therapy. A combination of models was used for delivery of these related services, including both pull-out as well and in-class support. Three teachers reported having students who received replacement in one or more of the academic content area subjects. These students received services in the Resource Center from 2.5 hours per week to 7.5 hours per week (See Table 2).

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Training

The topic of training was divided into the following three time frames: pre-service training (college), in-service training before having the included child, and in-service training during the year the child was in class. Ten out of ten teachers reported not having any training in college relative to including students in general education classes; however, two mentioned having a course related to teaching "slow learners."

Six out of ten teachers reported having in-service training before having the included child in class. This training not only represented a variety of models, but also covered a variety of topics. It appeared that the topics, in part, reflected the specific needs of the child. For example, a child using an Augmentative Communication system was included in a first grade classroom. Prior to September, the teacher received training on the system from an outside resource person who was brought to the school. Another teacher explained that her in-service preparation included specific strategy training for a child who was Autistic. Still another reported that in her district a training session on the topic of inclusion was held in the evening for teachers who were new to having children included in their classrooms. Two other teachers explained that their districts' in-service programs focused on program modifications for the included students, while another's experience included a summer workshop at Rowan College (then Glassboro) on the topic of inclusion.

Five out of ten teachers were provided in-service training during the year the child was included in their classroom. Three of these teachers had also received training prior to receiving the child. Topics of training included In-Class Support, Circle Of Friends, and general workshops focusing on the goals of inclusive education.

Support

Central Administration Staff

The question of support was divided into six parts, with each concentrating on a particular person or group of people. Teachers were first questioned about the support

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they were given from central administration staff. This group of people would include the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, the Director of Pupil Personnel Services, and the Director of Special Education or the Director of the Child Study Team. Six out of ten teachers described their central administration staff as supportive. Four of these administrators lent support that could be described as indirect and sporadic, i.e., those administrators who offered verbal recognition of efforts and minimal classroom visits and another who provided opportunities to attend conferences and to schedule visits to other schools. Another teacher explained that the Director of Special Education was responsible for the common planning time that was made available to her and the special education teacher.

Two administrators provided support that could be described as direct and regular. Two teachers reported that monthly planning meetings were held with classroom teachers, resource center teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers and parents in order to plan and implement the child's program.

Principal

Support from the building principal was investigated next. All ten teachers described their building principals as supportive. The support provided by four out of ten principals could be described as indirect. These principals were always available to lend an ear or to use as a sounding board. Six principals provided support that was much more direct. Three were responsible for scheduling that enabled the special educator and the regular educator to have common planning time, while two others created special subject schedules, based on teacher request, which complimented the inclusive program. One principal conducted planning meetings relative to the in-class support model used in a specific classroom, while another conducted weekly planning meetings which also included special subject teachers. These meetings not only provided opportunities for problem solving in the regular classroom, but in special subjects classes as well. Another

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principal was reported to have requested a classroom assistant for a class which was in need of more adult assistance.

Case Manager

Teachers were next questioned regarding the support they received from the student's Case Manager. Two out of ten teachers reported not having any contact with the Case Manager. Four out of ten Case Managers were involved on a regular basis relative to planning sessions with the teacher(s) and the parents. In addition, one was reported to directly work with other students and the teachers in facilitating a specific inclusive strategy. Two made a variety of resources available to the teacher upon request, while two others observed and gave feedback at the beginning of the school year.

Other Teachers

When questioned about support which came from other teachers and/or colleagues, teacher's responded overwhelmingly that the Resource Center teacher provided the most support. Three out of ten teachers reported that a special education teacher was in class with them full time. This team teaching model enabled the general educator and the special educator to assume responsibility for all the children in the classroom. Four out of ten indicated that the Resource Center teacher spent a portion of the day in the regular classroom and that they had opportunities for common planning time. Three others reported that the Resource Center teacher was available on a consultative basis and was available to discuss and brainstorm solutions to issues of concern. One teacher also described grade level colleagues as supportive in helping the included child to establish relationships with children in other classes.

In addition to support from an individual teacher, two teachers described committees that were formed in their schools that would support classroom teachers who were including students. In one building, this committee, was known as the IST (Instructional Support Team) and in another building it was called ECHO (Every Child Has Opportunities). Operating similar to a PAC (Pupil Assistance Committee), teachers

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needing support could meet with core committee members to discuss issues of concern and brainstorm possible solutions.

Parents

When describing the support that came from the parent(s) of the included student every teacher described a positive, mutually respectful relationship. Six out of ten teachers had daily communication with parents through a communication notebook that was developed between home and school. This vehicle enabled parents and teachers to have on-going dialogues relative to daily classroom occurrences, successes and highlights, homework, and issues of concern. It also provided opportunity for a parent to stimulate conversation with the child about her school day.

Two out of ten teachers described regular monthly planning meetings that were scheduled with parents, the case manager, an administrator, and the general and special education teachers. These meetings were reported as opportunities to evaluate program implementation and problem solve classroom challenges. It also enabled parents to share ideas and strategies with the teaching staff that they found to be successful. One teacher gave personal daily feedback to a parent who drove her child to and from school every day.

Strategies

A total of fifteen (15) strategies or practices were described by the teachers interviewed as those that were effective when including a student with disabilities in the general education program. In each case, an explanation of how the strategy was implemented into that particular classroom, at that particular grade level, followed. Every teacher's account also included how the strategy was utilized with the general population of students as well.

Of the fifteen strategies described **Cooperative Learning, Peer Buddies,** and **Collaborative / Team Teaching** were found significant above the others (See Table 3). Cooperative learning was reported by six out of ten teachers, peer buddies were reported

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as effective by seven out of the ten teachers, and collaborative / team teaching was also reported by seven out of ten teachers interviewed. Three out of ten teachers described small group instruction, portfolio assessment, collaborative team teaching, differentiated outcomes, and Circle of Friends as part of their repertoire, while two out of ten felt that peer tutoring, flexible grouping, and modeling were important strategies. Those described the least, in this case meaning by only one teacher, were as follows: adjusts teaching, positive reinforcement, cross age student buddies, task analysis, and behavior management.

Advice

Eight topics of advice were described by the respondents during the interview sessions. Six out of ten recommended **a positive attitude and an open mind**. As one teacher explained, "There is no pre-packaged way to guarantee success for an inclusive experience and the attitude that the teacher brings to the classroom will be essential to his/her success." Four out of ten felt that **a cooperative and/a collaborative relationship** would be essential to a teacher's success. This was described by one teacher as "having the ability to seek out the appropriate person and to pick their brains in order to solve a problem." Another teacher said, "It was my first full year of teaching and the thought of having another teacher in the room, along with classified students was terrifying. I was sure I wouldn't know what to do with them. But it was wonderful. Two heads are better then one and I got so many wonderful ideas from the in-class support teacher."

Another four teachers described the inclusive classroom as worth the effort because it was **a positive experience for kids**. As one kindergarten teacher reported, "There's no better way to go. I have only seen tremendous growth with all my students." A first grade teacher's experience was equally as positive. "You have to really figure that it's an investment from you that's well worth it, because what you get back from the kids and what you learn from the kids, is worth the lost lunch hours or the time spent at

meetings before and after school." A second grade teacher concurred that "Inclusion is a natural thing. What better way to show children how to function then to be involved in an inclusive environment."

Three teachers recommended **flexibility** as an important component of an inclusive classroom. This was described by one teacher as the teacher's ability to work through program changes based on the needs of the students as well as to adapt to the needs and schedule changes of the adults who have become part of the classroom program. Two teachers felt that it was important to have the **support of the special education teacher in the room**, while two also felt that having an inclusive classroom was **rewarding for the teacher**. One teacher recommended that **talking to successful teachers** would be beneficial for someone getting involved in an inclusive program. This would help to ease the way in a non-threatening environment while giving a new teacher the opportunity to ask questions that may not otherwise be asked. Another felt that developing **peer support** was an important strategy and component of a successful inclusive classroom. Although in part this strategy could be linked to cooperative learning, it also encompasses those times and school environments that are more social than academic.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the strategies used regularly by successful kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers who have included children with moderate to severe disabilities in their general education classrooms. It also examined the supports made available to those successful teachers and investigated whether successful teachers were more experienced.

Results indicated that fifteen (15) strategies or practices had been used by the teachers interviewed. Of these, **cooperative learning, peer buddies, and collaborative / team teaching**, were determined to be statistically significant in their usage. Although a variety of practices and strategies were both described and recommended, their usage was not necessarily corroborated by other successful teachers.

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Of the ten teachers interviewed, four (4) had 1 to 5 years experience, two (2) had 6 to 10 years experience, and (4) had ten (10) years or more. The question of experience and its relationship to a successful inclusive program was not clearly defined by the research. It appeared that more successful teachers were those with 5 years experience or less or those with more then 10 years.

Supports made available to successful general education teachers came from a variety of sources and were implemented both directly and indirectly. Although six out of ten teachers described their central administrative staff as supportive only two of those administrators offered support that was both direct and regular. Results regarding principal support was similar. Although all ten teachers described their building principals as supportive, only six were provided with support on a regular basis. When questioned about support from the child's case manager, four teachers reported involvement on a regular basis.

When describing support from other teachers / colleagues it appeared that the most notable support came directly from the resource center teacher. In three classrooms, the resource center teacher and the regular classroom teacher were team teaching all day; while in four of the classes, the resource center teacher spent a portion of the day in the general classroom. The other three resource teachers were described as having a collaborative relationship with the regular classroom teacher.

Every teacher interviewed described their relationship with the parents of the included student as positive and mutually respectful. Seven out of ten had daily communication with the regular classroom teacher, while two had regular monthly planning meetings with parents along with other significant school personnel.

In conclusion, supports described as significant to the successful general educator came from the following sources: a mutually respectful relationship with the parent(s) of the included child which was described as regular on-going communication between home and school, and direct support from the resource center teacher, for at least a portion of

the day, to both the student and the classroom program. In addition, although more then half of the teachers interviewed described their central administrative staff as verbally supportive, only two described contact that directly impacted on the classroom program. However, all ten successful teachers described their building principals as supportive of their efforts on behalf of the service delivery model, and their individual programming needs. Although these administrators may have been limited in their ability to generate major change, it appears that acknowledgment of the problem was perceived as positive.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Purpose of Study and Findings

Strategies and / or practices utilized by successful general education teachers in their kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms and the support made available to these teachers and their programs was the focus of this study. It also hoped to determine whether successful teachers were more experienced teachers. It was hypothesized that the following factors were significant in including students with moderate to severe disabilities in regular K-2 classrooms: **actualization of LRE, staff support, collaboration, and use of effective strategies for inclusive education.**

Results indicated that of the fifteen (15) strategies described by successful general educators, **cooperative learning, peer buddies,** and **collaborative / team teaching** were determined to be used significantly more than the others. In addition, the question of experience and its relationship to the success of general education teachers did not appear clearly defined, with four out of ten teachers having five years experience or less and four having ten years experience or more.

Supports described as notable to these general educators came from a mutually respectful relationship with the parent(s) of the included child and daily communication between home and school. Direct support to the child and the classroom program from the resource center teacher, for at least part of the day, and verbal support of individual teacher efforts and program needs by the building principal seemed to contribute significantly.

Actualization of LRE

The design of this study was based on individual interviews conducted by this researcher with successful kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers who had included

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children with moderate to severe disabilities in their general education classrooms for at least 50% of the school day. Successful teachers were defined as those who were successful by their own admission and whose success was also validated by either the Director of Pupil Personnel Services, the Director of the Child Study Team, or by their building principal. After contacting the appropriate administrators in five (5) districts in three (3) counties in the south Jersey area, it became abundantly clear that the number of children with moderate to severe disabilities who have been included in regular education settings for at least 50% of the day was relatively small.

One particular district far outnumbered the others in its ability to recommend successful teachers, primarily because they had included a larger number of students. It appeared that the administrator contacted was truly recommending teachers based on her definition of success. It also became apparent, based on conversations with administrators, that many of the children of this particular age range, whose placements were in-district, were spending less than 50% of the day with non-disabled peers.

It is obvious that the trend for placement of children with moderate to severe disabilities, in this tri-county area, is a more restrictive environment. As defined in IDEA, the least restrictive environment provision requires that states assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who do not have disabilities. Removal or separate schooling should occur when the severity of the child's disability is such that the general curriculum cannot be modified to achieve satisfactory performance (Sloan, Denny & Repp, 1992). Are we to assume that the children with moderate to severe disabilities in this tri-county area have disabilities which make it impossible to modify the general curriculum adequately, or are the current school personnel inadequately trained and / or supported for doing so successfully? Clearly, as reported by many researchers (e.g.) (Dempsey, 1992; Hasazi, et al., 1994; McLaughlin & Owings, 1993; Sawyer et al., 1994; Sloan et al., 1992) placing special education students in general education programs, where general educators do not feel competent or confident in their own abilities to meet the

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students' needs, may not bring the desired results. However, since placement is primarily determined by the Child Study Teams in the various districts, a closer look at trends for this population of students, and more importantly, the reasons for these trends may provide additional insight.

Staff Support / Collaboration

In discussing staff support, general education teachers had an opportunity to talk about the support they received from individuals or groups of people involved with the child's program. Although more than half of the teachers interviewed described central administration staff as supportive, their support was more indirect and sporadic. These administrators did, however, offer verbal recognition of efforts and provided opportunities for teachers to attend conferences and / or visit other schools where teachers could connect with other teachers who were also including students. This type of support appeared to be understood by classroom teachers and interpreted as acceptable. Comments such as "they are so busy" and "they have so much paperwork" indicated that personal interaction with this group of people was not an expectation.

All building principals were described as supportive, although it was obvious that there were many variations in how that support was put into place. Verbal support and availability appeared to be significant to all respondents; however, more than half of the principals provided more direct support. In addition to scheduling planning meetings which enabled key personnel to meet and discuss specific programming needs, supportive principals had also been responsible for scheduling common planning time between the general and the special educator.

Support from the special education teacher was overwhelmingly important to the successful general educator. Although a variety of service delivery models were implemented, clearly the collaborative effort between these two professionals was significant. In addition, all teachers interviewed described their relationships with the parent(s) of their included child as "mutually respectful". They also had regular on-going communication with parents and

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depended upon each other to share strategies and problem solve solutions to the daily challenges of inclusion.

This collaborative effort is enhanced when administration provides opportunities for the on going planning and reflecting that families and professionals need for successful inclusive placements. As stated by Giangreco, Cloninger, and Iverson (1993), we have only begun to discover the myriad of beneficial possibilities created when teams collaborate to teach diverse groups of students.

Although the amount of direct support from a special educator depended upon the needs of the included child, classroom teachers who had collaborative classroom opportunities were enthusiastic about the opportunities they had to emulate strategies that were modeled by their special education counterparts. These opportunities were described as "invaluable" by classroom teachers who felt more empowered to work with the child even when the special educator was not scheduled in the classroom.

It is obvious that the combination of time for program planning and for the implementation of those plans in a collaborative teaching environment is essential to the success of the inclusive program.

Use of Effective Strategies

Implementing instructional strategies that provide the optimum learning experiences for all students has probably been both the challenge and the goal of every teacher who has ever faced a group of students. The teacher, as the decision maker, must determine what will motivate, stimulate, and ultimately educate the group of learners in her charge. When the complexity of this group is compounded by including students with a range of instructional, social, and emotional needs, the task becomes that much more complicated. As one might suspect, successful interventions in inclusive classrooms do not appear magically and proficiently in the professional repertoire of educators. Before new practices can be implemented, teachers need: (a) an awareness of techniques from which to choose, (b) preparation in how to use the new techniques, (c) practice that results in a comfortable level

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of implementation, and (d) support while they begin to implement the new techniques (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996).

The successful teachers interviewed described a variety of strategies and practices utilized in their primary classrooms. They also described program accommodations and modifications made for these students as well and identified them as strategies. As reported previously, the three strategies utilized most frequently in these classrooms were **peer buddies, cooperative learning, and collaborative / team reaching.** Since none of the teachers interviewed reported having any pre-service training in inclusive practice and only half reported having training before the child was placed in their classroom, it may be safe to assume that these particular teachers did not have an awareness of the variety of strategies available to them. In addition, it is obvious that they would not have had subsequent opportunities for preparation in using the strategies, practice to develop a comfortable level of implementation, or support through the process.

Considering that these teachers felt successful in their attempts to include students, and their administrators also felt they were successful, can we assume that regular use of a wide variety of "best practice" strategies is not necessarily the most important factor in the successful inclusive primary classroom. It seems that teachers can be successful with limited training in "best practice" strategies as long as their attitude toward the philosophy of inclusion is positive. This could obviously have significant impact on the content of teacher training programs and on decisions regarding acceptance into these programs.

Recommendations for future studies

Future studies can include placement trends across the state of New Jersey for children with moderate to severe disabilities in order to compare how LRE is interpreted and implemented between districts and counties, and, ultimately, a comparison within the state. Specifically, looking at students with moderate to severe disabilities as compared with students with mild to moderate disabilities may provide insight in determining how to support

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teachers including these students at the pre-service level, the in-service level, and certainly within the classroom.

In addition, a longitudinal study which would begin by looking at the attitudes of undergraduate regular education students towards inclusion and then whose implementation practices were followed, monitored, and compared after training for a specific period of time. This could indicate what effect teacher attitude has on utilizing "best practice" strategies.

There may be significant changes in placement trends as a greater number of teachers, with positive attitudes toward inclusion, join a school district, feeling well trained and empowered to work with diverse populations.

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Table 1

Respondents professional data

TEACHER NUMBER	YEARS EXPER.	GRADES TAUGHT	K	1	2	3	4	5	SC	RC	CERT.(S)	EC	EL	M	G	TH
1	7		X									X	X			
2	3			X									X			
3	4			X	X								X	X	X	
4	20			X									X			
5	2				X								X			
6	5				X		X						X			
7	8			X		X	X						X			
8	15		X	X	X	X							X			
9	18		X	X					X	X		X	X			X
10	17			X	X								X			

EC: Early Childhood
EL: Elementary
M: Music
G: Guidance
K: Kindergarten
TH: Teacher of the Handicapped
SC: Self Contained Special Education Class
RC: Resource Center Class

Table 2

Weekly services provided to each student and percentage of time spent in the general classroom

STUDENT	CLASS	LENGTH OF DAY	RELATED SERVICES	TIME OUT OF CLASS	PERCENT OF TIME IN/WK
1	MH	2.50	OT / PT / SPEECH	20 MIN/WK	98%
2	MH	6.26	OT / PT / SPEECH	3.33 HRS/WK	90%
3	MH	6.50	OT / PT /SPEECH	30 MIN/WK	99%
4	MH	6.16	OT / RC	3.5 HR/WK	89%
5	NI	6.00	OT / SPEECH	60 MIN/WK	97%
6	MH	6.33	OT / SPEECH / RC	9.0 HRS/WK	72%
7	MH	6.33	OT / SPEECH	60 MIN/WK	96.80%
8	MH	2.50	OT	0	100%
9	AUT	2.50	RC	60 MIN/WK	92%
10	MH	6.60	RC / SPEECH	5.75 HRS/WK	82%

AUT: Autistic
MH: Multiply Handicapped
NI: Neurologically Impaired
OT: Occupational Therapy
PT: Physical Therapy
RC: Resource Center

Table 3

Comparison of strategies described and the probability of useage using CHI-square distribution

VARIABLE	N-of-Cases	MaxDif	Probability (2-tail)
CL	10.000	0.400	0.059
PT	10.000	0.800	0.000
PB	10.000	0.383	0.079
COF	10.000	0.800	0.000
FG	10.000	0.700	0.000
SGI	10.000	0.800	0.000
PA	10.000	0.900	0.000
AT	10.000	0.800	0.000
COLLT	10.000	0.400	0.059
MODI	10.000	0.900	0.000
BM	10.000	0.900	0.000
POSR	10.000	0.900	0.000
STBDS	10.000	0.900	0.000
TASK	10.000	0.900	0.000
DIFFOT	10.000	0.800	0.000

CL: Cooperative Learning
PT: Peer Tutoring
PB: Peer Buddies (Same Age)
COF: Circle of Friends
FG: Flexible Grouping
SGI: Small Group Instruction
PA: Portfolio Assessment
AT: Adjust Teaching
COLLT: Collaborative / Team Teaching
MODI: Modeling
BM: Behavior Management
POSR: Positive Reinforcement
STBDS: Student Buddies (Cross Age)
TASK: Task Analysis
DIFFOT: Differentiated Outcomes

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Introduction: Our interview will reflect your thoughts and experiences including students with moderate to severe disabilities into your regular K-2 classroom. Of the students who have been included, please focus on students who have been in your general classroom, for at least 50% of the day.

1. How long have you been teaching and what grades have you taught?

2. What teaching certificates do you hold?

3. Do you currently have or have you had students with moderate to severe disabilities in your class? If so, what was the student's (students') classification?

4. How many students (total) are there (were there) in the class we are discussing?

5. What is the length of your school day? Of that time how much time was spent with your class (including non-academic activities and lunch / recess)?

6. Do you feel you have successfully included students with moderate to severe disabilities in your general education classroom?

7. How much of the included child's day was spent in the regular education classroom?

8. How much of the child's day was spent out of the classroom?

9. What related services were provided and where?

10. Describe the training / preparation you have had for working with included students?

     A. Pre-Service (College)

     B. In-Service (Before having the included child)

C. In-Service / Technical Assistance (During the course of the school year)

11. What support, have you received from:

      A. central administration staff?

      B. your principal

      C. your supervisor if your principal was not your supervisor

      D. your case manager

      E. other teachers

      F. the parents of your included student

12. Please describe the strategies that have been effective when including a student(s) with disabilities in your instructional program?

13. If another teacher asked your advice about inclusion, what would you tell them?