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THE EFFECT OF EDUCATIONAL  
PLACEMENT ON SELF-CONCEPT

By  
Karin Dech Pescatore

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 4, 2000

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved 5/4/2000

## **ABSTRACT**

Karin Dech Pescatore  
The Effect of Educational Placement on Self-Concept  
2000  
Dr. S. Jay Kuder  
Master of Arts Degree

The purpose of this study was to examine self-concept of students from different placement settings. Academic, social, and general self-concepts were considered. Subjects were chosen from four placement settings: regular education classroom, basic skills instruction (BSI), resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classroom. A sample size of forty-eight students from grades five and six was used. Data was collected through the use of a self-concept scale as well as several student interviews. Data was recorded and analyzed on a computer using the StatView program. Mean scores and standard deviations were compared to determine differences in self-concept scores among the four groups. The results of this study indicated a significantly higher self-concept of regular education students when compared with the other three groups. Although the comparison of scores among the BSI, resource, and self-contained students did not produce statistically significant data, some differences were found. These findings support the notion that a relationship does exist between self-concept and educational placement.

## **MINI-ABSTRACT**

Karin Dech Pescatore  
The Effect of Educational Placement on Self-Concept  
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The purpose of this study was to examine academic, social, and general self-concept among students in regular education classrooms, basic skills instruction (BSI), resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classrooms. The results of this study indicated a significantly higher self-concept among regular education students when compared to the other three groups. Although the comparison of scores among the BSI, resource, and self-contained students did not produce statistically significant data, some differences were found.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **Chapter 1**

The issue of self-concept is important in the field of education. How a student feels about oneself often determines success or failure. Students who have a poor self-concept have difficulty making friends, receive low grades, and have more discipline problems. There are many factors that can affect a student's self-concept. Family issues, such as divorce, abuse or neglect, or a death of a family member can have a devastating effect on a child's self-esteem.

Many times there are negative factors outside the home that can cause a student to develop a poor self-image over a period of time. There are several issues in the school environment that impact self-concept. Some major ones are relationships with peers and teachers, academic success or failure, and social acceptance.

When students enter school they are placed in an environment most suitable to their abilities and learning style. For regular education students, this means a classroom of twenty-five to thirty students and a teacher. Some classrooms have an aide to assist students in basic skills areas. For special education students, there are more options. In most districts students are placed in a self-contained class with about eight to ten students. Another option is a pull-out resource room, which means they spend part of the day with a special education teacher and the remainder of the day in a regular education classroom. Unfortunately, students who require a special education placement are labeled as such, and their special needs become apparent to other students. Children who are singled out often have a lower self-concept;

however, the students are placed in an environment in which they can find academic success. This success should increase their self-concept. Placement can have both positive and negative effects.

Special education is a broad field that includes children with all types and degrees of disabilities. I work with students at the upper elementary level who have mild learning disabilities. My program consists of pull-out replacement instruction in the resource room. I also provide in-class support in the areas of science and social studies.

Since I began my career in special education, I have always been sensitive to students' feelings. It is important for me that my students feel good about themselves. One of my goals as a teacher is to provide situations in which students can find success. After reading some of the literature regarding resource room programs' effect on students' self-concept, I began to wonder how my students felt about being in special education, and more specifically, about being pulled out of their regular classroom.

There are several issues that I found in an article entitled, "Stories from the Resource Room: Piano Lessons, Imaginary Illness, and Broken-Down Cars" that I also want to address in this study. I want to find out how students' learning disabilities affect their self-concept. Another issue is their relationship with non-disabled peers. Do they appear to be accepted in the regular education classroom? Finally, I hope to gain insight into whether the students are happy being instructed in the resource room. I plan to measure how their self-concept compares to their regular education peers (Albinger, 1993).



## **Research Question**

In this study I examine the following question:

Are there differences in academic, social, and general self-concept among students in upper elementary school from the following placement settings: regular education, basic skills instruction, resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classroom?

## **Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that:

- 1) Regular education students have a higher self-concept in all three areas when compared with students from the other three groups.
- 2) Students receiving resource room instruction have a higher social self-concept than an academic self-concept.
- 3) Resource students have a higher academic self-concept when compared to students in basic skills instruction.
- 4) Students in self-contained special education classrooms have a lower self-concept in all three areas when compared with students from the other three groups.

## **Definition of Terms**

1. **Regular education students** - Students who spend their entire school day in a regular education classroom and receive no additional academic support.

2. **Basic skills instruction (BSI)** - Students spend the entire school day in a regular education classroom but receive additional support from an aide in the areas of reading, math, and writing.
3. **Resource room instruction** - Special education students who spend part of the day in a regular education classroom and part of the day in a resource room with a special education teacher.
4. **Self-contained classroom** - Special education students receive all academic instruction in a separate setting with a special education teacher.
5. **Mainstreaming** - Special education students who are placed in a regular education classroom for one or more subjects.
6. **Inclusion** - Special education students are placed in a regular education setting for most or all of the school day for socialization purposes.
7. **General self-concept** - The images or perceptions we hold about ourselves in terms of our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability (Dixon, 1998).
8. **Social self-concept** - This is used to define self-perceptions of social acceptance (Dixon, 1998).
9. **Academic self-concept** - This domain is based on how we feel about ourselves in terms of performance in academic areas such as reading, math, and spelling (Dixon, 1998).
10. **Learning disabilities (LD)** - A classification term in special education for students whose achievement levels do not measure up to their ability levels.

**11. In-class support** - Special education students who receive support from a special education teacher while they are in a regular education classroom.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to compare self-concept of students from four different placement groups. Students who do not feel good about themselves often experience failure in school. Decisions about educational placement are based on increasing academic growth. Students' self-concept also needs to be considered when making placement decisions. If this and other studies show that placement does have an effect on self-concept, then we as educators need to find ways to increase academic achievement without lowering self-concept.

If it is found that some educational placement groups have a lower self-concept, then possible solutions also need to be found. Research shows that students who have academic difficulties possess a lower self-concept than regular education students do. There are some ways that schools can increase academic achievement and self-concept. Increased support in classrooms, counseling, parental involvement, and instructional modifications are just a few. The information from this study should be used to gain insight into which placements lead to the highest self-concept as well as the lowest. If students need to be placed in special education in order to meet their needs then researchers should focus future studies on improving the self-concept of special education students.

This chapter serves to introduce the topic of this study. Current research will be reviewed and compared in Chapter 2. Design and methodology of the research

and the results will be presented in later chapters. Finally, the results from the data analysis and implications of these results also will be discussed.

## **Chapter 2**

This literature review is a compilation of various studies examining self-concept and educational placement. It begins with historical background highlighting legislation that had significant impact on the field of special education. Educational placement options are described including both positive and negative factors surrounding each environment. In addition, the three types of self-concept are defined.

Many studies examining educational placement and students' self-concept are reviewed. Some studies include additional factors such as gender differences, parent influences, and teacher expectations. In these cases, only portions of the study that relate to the topic are included. The review concludes with a summary and critique of existing literature, followed by a discussion of the specific research question and hypotheses examined in this thesis.

Prior to Public Law (PL) 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), most students with learning disabilities (LD) received all of their education within general education classroom settings. Students identified by other special education categories such as mental retardation, received services in specialized settings. Parents and professionals were concerned that LD students were not making significant academic progress, and their needs were not being met in general education classrooms. The result was that students with learning disabilities were pulled out of general education in order to provide specialized services from special education teachers (Vaughn and Klingner, 1998).

The passing of PL 94-142 in 1975, created significant changes in American education. Increasing numbers of parents and educators were concerned about the appropriateness of separating students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers. As special education grew so did the debate over policy issues. Many believed that students with disabilities would be lost in general education classrooms, and teachers would not be trained to meet their needs. Others felt that segregating special education students was wrong. They called for educational reform to allow these children to reenter regular education classrooms (1998).

The call for educational reform, which began with the passing of PL 94-142, was strengthened by federal legislation, PL 99-457 (1986) and PL 101-476 (1990), which mandated that educational experiences for students with disabilities be provided in integrated environments. In 1991, PL 94-142 was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) which required that disabled students be placed in a “least restrictive environment.” The result of federal legislation was increased mainstreaming of students who exhibited the academic and social skills necessary to reenter regular education classrooms (Daniel and King, 1997).

With all these changes in placement of special education students, many educators supported a movement of restructuring our educational system. This movement was titled “Regular Education Initiative” (REI) which questioned the special education system that had evolved as a result of IDEA and other legislation. In particular, criticisms focused on the reliability of identification of students with disabilities, influence of pull-out programs, the inconsistency between regular education and special education curricula, and the cost-effectiveness of maintaining a

dual system, particularly for students with learning disabilities. Between 1976 and 1983 the number of learning disabled students had risen over 1 million. Supporters of REI advocated for consolidation of categorical programs and general education to create a system that recognized and taught to individual differences of all children within the regular classroom. They wanted to reform special education through reform of general education. REI supporters further stated that students labeled with mild disabilities were created by the failure of regular educators to recognize and share responsibility for children having difficulties and also by federal legislation which caused people to believe that students with disabilities could only be handled by specialists (Manset and Semmel, 1997).

According to Willis (1994), approximately 1/10 of all U.S. students receives special education services. State and federal subsidies for these programs total \$20 billion per year. Given this fact, educators and policy makers continue to feel the pressure of creating the most suitable learning environment for students in special education. The reform movement known as inclusion developed from PL 94-142 and later IDEA. Boundaries that once separated regular education and special education were becoming less clear due to inclusive schooling. The term inclusion means placing students with disabilities back into regular education classrooms (Daniel and King, 1997).

The inclusion movement continues to be a hot topic for debate in the research.

Some school districts are choosing to maintain other placement options that have traditionally served students with disabilities. In the past, students with academic, physical, or emotional disabilities were served through “pull-out” programs that

separated special education students from their peers (1997). Students in self-contained classrooms spent most of the school day in a separate class with a special education teacher. This type of placement was usually chosen for students who did not have the academic or social skills necessary to be successful in a regular classroom. Most students with LD were mainstreamed, which involved spending part of the day in a resource room with a special education teacher, and part of the day in a regular education classroom.

According to the research, there are both positive and negative factors for each placement option. Willis (1994) states that models of appropriate social behavior are more readily available in regular education classrooms, and students have the opportunity to form friendships with non-disabled peers. Many studies have shown that students with LD who are placed full-time in general education settings have more positive self-perceptions, are better liked and accepted, and have more friends. Other studies have shown no significant gains or losses in self-concept but have shown that students in inclusive settings are more successful at making friends (Vaughn and Klingner, 1998).

Although students with LD who are placed in regular education classrooms make progress socially, they often do not make significant progress academically. As stated by Vaughn and Klingner (1998) "... the greatest barrier to their [students with LD] success in general education classrooms is the lack of appropriate instruction at a level that yields adequate progress" (p. 79). Some students with LD placed full-time in regular education made minimal progress in reading even when extensive training was provided to the teachers. Pull-out programs seem to be the



answer when considering academic gains; however, these students may pay a high cost socially (1998).

Those involved in the assessment of students' progress and in evaluating the effectiveness of educational practices should consider three main areas: academic achievement, social integration, and personal development. For many years, only academic achievement had been the focus of change. With the movement towards integration in education, the attention has been directed to social acceptance and personal development (Stanovich, et al., 1998).

Much of the research examining learning disabilities and educational placement includes data focusing on self-concept. Three types of self-concept are discussed: general self-concept, social self-concept, and academic self-concept. General self-concept is defined as the images or perceptions we hold about ourselves in terms of our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability. Social self-concept refers to self-perceptions of social acceptance. Students base their academic self-concept on how well they perform in subjects such as reading, math, and spelling. Students usually compare their ability in one subject to their ability in another subject. Encouraging specific talent areas may increase academic self-concept. There is agreement among the researchers that self-concept is part of life-long development and suggests that as the child moves from infancy to adulthood, an increasing number of self-concept domains can be distinguished (Dixon, 1998).

With the amount of research on assessment and the latest attention on standardized test scores, it is not surprising that educational reform has been focused on increasing academic achievement. Based on several studies, researchers now

realize that self-concept is key to academic growth. Over twenty years ago a major study was conducted to identify ten critical educational needs of students. The number one educational need was the development of a positive self-image. Rather than spend their resources to improve self-image, all assistance was put towards the improvement of math and reading (the number two and three needs). Various writers and researchers have given attention to the importance of self-concept (SC) in students. It has been demonstrated that students who possess a positive SC are more likely to be successful in academic endeavors (LoVette, 1997).

The literature indicates a very strong relationship between self-concept and achievement. Most agree that SC and achievement are interactive, one not occurring without the other. Students who do well in school tend to rate themselves higher on tests of self-esteem than those who do not perform well (Morvitz and Motta, 1992). Colangelo, et al. (1987) determines from their results that those students with the greatest academic difficulties have the greatest need for interventions aimed at improving self-concept.

An article by Marsh and Yeung (1998) specifically discusses the positive correlation between academic achievement in particular subjects and academic self-concept. Their study shows that math achievement is substantially correlated with math self-concept, but not English self-concept. Students have specific self-perceptions about each subject area. They also state that academic self-concept is strongly associated with school grades since grades are prominent sources of feedback and serve as motivational factors.

The self-enhancement model states that self-concept is a primary which

determines academic achievement. The skill development model implies that academic self-concept emerges as a consequence of academic achievement. Thus, the best way to enhance academic SC is to develop stronger academic skills. Marsh (1990) argues that prior academic achievement is one determinant of academic SC. The critical issue is whether a student's prior academic SC causes them to have greater academic success. A compromise is reached with the "reciprocal effects" model which states that academic SC affects achievement and prior achievement affects academic SC (Marsh and Yeung, 1998).

Morvitz and Motta (1992) stress that next to the home, school is the most influential place in shaping and maintaining a child's self-concept, and there is evidence that repeated school failures lead to emotional and behavioral problems in children. Students who perform poorly are less likely to seek help from others, causing a greater likelihood of frustration. As students grow older, seeking help is seen as a threatening activity. These students would rather remain confused than risk embarrassment (Kennedy, 1997).

A study by Hay, et al. (1998) examines teachers' perceptions of students with high self-concepts and low self-concepts. Without being informed of SC status, teachers rated students with high SC as being more popular, cooperative, showing greater leadership skills, being less anxious, and having more familial support. The teachers had expressed higher expectation for these students. Teachers observed that students with lower SC were quiet and withdrawn.

Regardless of educational placement, much of the research shows that

students with learning disabilities have a lower SC than students without learning difficulties. One study compared children at risk, children with special needs, and non-disabled children. They found that children with disabilities and children who were at risk displayed opposite results. Although peers accepted them, at-risk students demonstrated low perceptions of their own abilities. Students with disabilities rated higher in academic SC but were less accepted by peers. Both groups had a lower academic SC than the non-disabled students. In examining social SC, the researchers found that the non-disabled students ranked highest and the LD students ranked the lowest (Stanovich, 1998).

Other researchers maintain that although students with LD possess a lower academic SC, they still demonstrate positive feelings of overall self-worth. In contrast, other studies have shown that students with LD rate their academic abilities as strong. These examiners also show that students with LD are more positive in their academic self-ratings when compared with teacher evaluations and standardized achievement tests. When compared with non-disabled peers, these self-ratings are lower. There is an increasing body of literature which supports that students with LD frequently show positive self-concepts and perceive themselves as capable in academic areas (Meltzer, et al., 1998).

Smith and Nagle (1995) also find that students with LD express a positive general SC that does not differ significantly from normally achieving peers. When studying self-concept in a multidimensional fashion, students with LD reveal lower self-perceptions in the area of academics. They further maintain that "... ethnic minorities, women, persons with physical disabilities, and individuals with mental

retardation typically do not express lower self-esteem than non-stigmatized subjects.” (p. 364). The reason for this is that these oppressed groups compare themselves with others in their same group rather than a more dominant outside group. Smith and Nagle hypothesize that if students with LD compare themselves with those similar in ability rather than with higher achieving peers, they would show a more positive self-esteem. Their results are that the subjects’ self-perceptions are not affected by their choice of reference group. It seems as if students with LD have difficulty selectively valuing activities in which they are competent and devaluing activities in which they experience difficulty.

When discussing the self-concept of students in special education, one must also consider the effect of labeling. The literature supports the statement that putting a label, such as learning disabled, on a child has a negative effect on a child’s self-concept. When questioned regarding the use of the label *learning disabled*, students reported that the label told only a small part about who they were. Older children felt that they should not be labeled: “Labeling is bad because it says what we can’t do.” (Albinger, 1995, p. 619).

Teachers often use labels to form groups in their classrooms despite the fact that studies show that most forms of ability grouping do not lead to significant gains in achievement. The article also emphasizes the fact that separating and labeling students impact on self-esteem. In terms of ability grouping, the practice of assigning students to classes based on intelligence has received the most criticism. This practice is called tracking. It is most common in middle schools and high schools. The concept behind ability grouping also applies to special education when students

are labeled and placed in a segregated environment. Robert Slavin, at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, examines more than 50 studies on ability grouping. He concludes by making the following recommendation to elementary school teachers: "Students should be assigned to heterogeneous classes for as much of the day as possible, so that it is the heterogeneous homeroom with which students principally identify" (Hereford, 1993, p. 52).

Due to all the research on the negative effects of labeling, there is a delabeling movement that contends that labels are harmful and should not be used. The problem with trying to understand the effects of labels is that one must separate the label from the placement. Bak, et al. (1987) hypothesize that the two are intertwined and that the placement may actually serve as a de facto label. They conducted their study in a school that did not use labels and contained regular classrooms with mainstreamed children. Their results showed that children were sensitive to peers who attended a different educational placement. Despite the fact that labels such as learning disabled and educable mentally retarded were not used, students perceived that resource room students were less capable than they were. The absence of labels did not prevent students from forming negative images of special education students. The implications of this study were to make teachers aware of children's sensitivity to differences between students in different placements. Teachers should also avoid using the placement to describe the student, for example do not refer to them as resource students (Bak, et al., 1987).

Before discussing the results of individual studies examining the effect of

placement on self-concept, it is important to investigate what information is found regarding how students feel towards being placed in special education settings. Students often worry about being singled out from their peers. They are concerned about how others perceive them, which strongly affects the way they feel about themselves and their abilities.

The Council for Exceptional Children (1993) and the Learning Disabilities Association (1993) contend that students' feelings often are not taken into consideration when parents and professionals make decisions affecting their education. To explore this issue a cross-study analysis of elementary and middle school students was done to determine which type of placement setting students preferred most, inclusion or pull-out. They asked both general education students and special education students. The results of two studies were that the majority of general education students preferred that students received extra help in a pull-out program; however, many also reported that they appreciated the assistance given by the special education teacher in the regular classroom. Two other studies reported that the majority of regular education students preferred an inclusive model (Vaughn and Klingner, 1998).

When students with learning disabilities were asked which model they preferred the majority of them stated that the resource room was their preference. In one study, half of the students who were currently involved in an inclusive model stated that they preferred a pull-out program. In a second study, 76% of students from an inclusive setting and 72% of remedial students preferred a resource room setting (1998).

The students gave several reasons why they preferred pull-out. The most frequently provided reason was that the students learned more in the resource room. Other reasons given were the extra help they received, the fun activities, the easier work, and a quiet environment. Older students also said that attending a resource room was less embarrassing. Primary grade students did not seem as concerned with the social aspect as did older students (1998).

Reasons provided by students for preferring instruction within the regular classroom centered mostly on social benefits. They indicated that it was easier to make friends, students in the regular classroom were nicer, and there was no negative stigma of being singled out. Other reasons given were that the general education teacher knew what was best for them and responded to them favorably (1998).

Another study was conducted on students' feelings regarding resource room instruction. All of the students in the study were currently in a resource room program. Seven of the eight children interviewed had fabricated stories about why they attended the resource room in order to protect themselves from rejection by peers. All students reported being called derogatory names such as "stupid" or "dumb". Many students were concerned about having to make up work that they missed while they were in resource; however, they did not mind leaving the classroom when the class was doing hard work. Despite these negative responses, each was able to name something they did well. Some of these activities were drawing, cheerleading, baseball, Nintendo, and jumping rope. All of the activities mentioned had to do with something other than academics (Albinger, 1995).

Many of the statements made by the children reflected a low self-esteem. It



was unclear whether their low self-esteem was a result of the placement, or if the child constructed a low self-image based on self-critical feelings or of perceived judgements of others. When given two choices – resource room or remaining in the regular class – most students preferred to have the resource teacher come to their classroom. They preferred this choice in order to avoid missing their regular classroom work (1995).

Not all students have the same placement preferences or the same needs. It is important that districts do not limit placement options to one choice. There is no one placement that meets the needs of every child. There are several studies examining the relationship between self-concept and educational placement. An article by Morvitz and Motta (1992) emphasizes that special education placement does not always lead to lowered self-esteem. When students are placed in a special class, their self-esteem improves because they tend to compare themselves to students with similar disabilities. In group reference theory, students choose different reference groups selectively to enhance their self-esteem. Following this theory, mainstreamed students compare themselves academically to other disabled students, but compare themselves to regular education peers in nonacademic areas. This article also maintains that students in regular education who are having academic difficulties and are not receiving adequate support often have the lowest self-esteem (Morvitz and Motta, 1992).

Morvitz and Motta (1992) hypothesize that children in regular class without remedial assistance have a higher self-esteem than those who do require remedial assistance. They also hypothesize that students in a part-time special education

setting (resource room) have a lower self-esteem than full-time educational placement (self-contained). One hundred twenty-six students from four different elementary schools were chosen for their study. Students were categorized into four groups: students with learning disabilities in a self-contained special education class, students with LD in a resource room program, regular class students in the compensatory education remedial program, and regular class students not requiring any academic assistance. Academic achievement was highest for the regular class students, followed by the resource room students, the compensatory education students, and finally the self-contained students. There was a large difference academically between the regular education students and the self-contained students.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers and Harris, 1996), entitled "The Way I Feel About Myself", was used to measure the children's self-concept. This measuring device was selected because it was widely accepted and used in many research studies. Parent letters were sent home asking them to sign consent forms. Children were taken in groups of 5 to 10 to complete the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. The items were read to them (1992).

Their results indicated that there was no significant difference in scores between the resource room students and the self-contained students. A significant difference was found between resource students and regular class students. These findings lend partial support to the hypothesis that students requiring remedial assistance would have a lower self-esteem than those who do not. A significant difference was also found between regular class students and compensatory education

students. Students involved in compensatory education had a lower self-esteem than the regular class students did (1992).

Simple comparisons indicated that self-esteem was significantly greater for regular class students than in either the compensatory education group or the resource room group. No other significant differences were found among the four groups. It was found that the self-esteem of self-contained students was not significantly lower than students in the other three groups, even though they had the greatest academic difficulties and were in the most restrictive environment. A number of studies (e.g., Smith et al., 1997; Strang, Smith, & Rogers, 1978) had found that students in self-contained classes had a higher or equal self-esteem to regular class students who were experiencing academic difficulties. The researchers stated that this was because they compared themselves to other special education students rather than higher functioning peers. This limited comparison was due to having fewer interactions with regular education students. They further disputed the group reference theory since resource room students did not have a higher self-esteem than self-contained students did. Students in pull-out programs were not able to successfully select the reference groups that would enhance their self-esteem. Finally, Morvitz and Motta (1992) concluded that “the child’s perception of self as a function of class placement is another factor that educators must be attuned to in planning educational alternatives” (p. 78).

Butler and Marinov-Glassman (1994) discuss similar findings in an article focusing on education placement and self-perceptions of low achievers and students with learning disabilities. They claim that self-perception depends mainly on to

whom they compare themselves. Children with LD who attend self-contained classes should feel better about themselves since their reference group is comprised of other students with disabilities. They say that it is less clear how self-perceptions are influenced by placements, which divide time between regular class and special class, since they can compare themselves with either group.

As in the previous study, they also consider group reference theory. With mainstreamed children, the general self-esteem of students with LD can be maintained by belonging to a “normal” social group when they are integrated with regular education peers. Their academic self-concept can be maintained by comparing themselves to their special education peers. The question is whether exposing LD students to nondisabled peers will enhance self-esteem by reducing the effects of the LD label and enable them to make selective choice of reference groups, or will their self-esteem be lowered due to the fact that they now have the opportunity to compare themselves with higher functioning peers? (1994).

The subjects consisted of 136 children in special education that were placed in either special schools or special classes. They also included 86 unidentified low-achieving children. Students involved in this study were from Grades 3, 5, and 7. Their findings were consistent with developmental trends in self-perceptions and social comparisons. The self-perceptions of students in Grade 3 were relatively positive and did not differ by educational placement. In Grade 5, perceptions of competence were most favorable among children with LD in special schools, whose reference group consisted entirely of classified students. Perceptions of competence

tended to be least favorable among the low achievers who were the least impaired but had the most exposure to more competent peers (1994).

To summarize, the results supported the hypothesis that after the early elementary school years, increased exposure to more competent peers will lower self-esteem. The researchers agreed with Morvitz and Motta (1992) that exposure to both disabled and nondisabled peers did not enable students with LD to make selective use of multiple comparison groups in ways that increase self-esteem. Rather, once children developed the capacity for social comparison, children with LD tended to compare themselves with nondisabled peers, which negatively affected their self-image.

The effects of special, mainstreamed, or regular classes on the self-esteem of students with LD are due in part, to the amount of exposure with normally achieving peers. The results indicate clearly that no contact (special schools) leads to more favorable self-perceptions than some contact (special classes) or much contact (low achievers). Homogeneous placement seems to be one way to enhance the self-concept of children with learning difficulties (1994).

Smith and Nagle (1995) completed a study comparing self-perceptions of students with LD in a resource room program with a random selection of nondisabled students. They predicted that students with a longer history of resource placement would exhibit a more positive self-concept and are more likely to compare themselves with other LD students. Not surprisingly, they found that students with LD felt less competent regarding their academic, social, and behavioral functioning than their regular education peers. They also found that students with LD expressed lower self-

perceptions of their general ability. Their results supported the research that stated that students with LD tend to compare themselves to regular class peers.

An article written by Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm (1996) in support of inclusion states that pull-out programs contribute to students' lack of membership in the classroom and their overall low social status. The researchers examine the self-concept of students with LD in inclusive settings. They say that when global self-worth or academic ability is the self-concept domain assessed, students with LD report lower scores than their nondisabled peers. Students with LD demonstrate significantly lower academic self-concepts than regular education students. When achievement is controlled, there are no differences in self-concept between resource students and those in self-contained settings. When behavior problems are controlled, there are no differences between LD and non-LD students. Part of their findings indicate that even when students are placed in special education settings, they demonstrate lower self-concepts in academic areas only. Inclusion reduces the isolation of students with disabilities. The students with LD do not demonstrate higher ratings of loneliness. These students also increase the number of reciprocal friends they have from fall to spring. They conclude that inclusive students seem to maintain a positive social self-concept but more research needs to be done to study any long-term effects of placement in inclusive settings (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996).

The central theme among the research seems to be discovering how to better educate all students, particularly those with special needs. There is a continuous debate regarding which placement is better at meeting individual needs. The current

educational movement is how to successfully integrate students with learning disabilities into the regular education environment without damaging their self-concept. Several researchers provide suggestions on improving current programs.

By encouraging achievement in nonacademic areas, teachers can help children with LD maintain a positive self-esteem. Also, teachers and parents must realize that a child may continue to require support and reassurance even after he or she begins to receive assistance in the resource room (Smith and Nagle, 1995). Daniel and King (1997) also stress the importance of having the teacher promote a positive environment in which self-esteem is enhanced. By viewing students in positive ways and maintaining high expectations, teachers can play an important role in the enhancement of self-concept.

Educators also need to be sensitive to different learning styles, especially when the class contains a wide range of ability levels. Rather than focus on weaknesses, teachers should build upon students' strengths. School districts need to modify their curriculum to incorporate multiple intelligences. Most instructional approaches focus only on linguistic and logical-mathematical learning styles. When making decisions regarding placement, involve the child as much as possible. By empowering the student to decide where he or she receives services, educators increase that student's feeling of importance (Albinger, 1995).

Since the current trend in education is to place students with disabilities into the regular education environment, it is beneficial to examine practices, routines, and adaptations that the students find to be most helpful. It is also beneficial to examine what students consider to be unfavorable and most likely to create negativity.

Klingner and Vaughn (1999) completed a cross-study analysis of the opinions of students regarding various classroom practices and outline suggestions of what teachers could do to increase the amount of success and reduce the level of anxiety among their students. They included the following categories: grading practices, homework, assignment routines, helping practices, instructional practices, grouping arrangements, and adaptations. The achievement levels of the students involved in the study included learning disabled, low achieving, average achieving, high achieving, and gifted. It was interesting to read which practices were preferred and which were deemed unfair.

All students, regardless of ability level, rated "grading assignments more easily than the assignments of other students" as one of the least preferable practices. Students with LD at the elementary level indicated that homework should be graded on an individual basis, not the same for everyone. Students with LD at the middle school level thought that homework should be graded based on effort rather than accuracy. All students, with and without disabilities, perceived that grades were a source of feedback. Middle school students with LD emphasized that they wanted to achieve letter grades based on the same criteria as applied to regular education students. Modified grades did not signify success to these students. Students with LD expressed that all classes should be weighted the same towards GPAs, while the majority of students without LD supported the idea of having advanced placement classes weighted more heavily (1999).

Students in every study had much to say about homework and assignment



routines. All students believed that everyone should be assigned the same homework, although students with LD were more likely to report that the homework was boring or too difficult. In two studies, students with LD offered insights on how to make homework easier in their general education classes. Teachers should assign homework in the beginning of class and explain how to complete the homework by providing examples. Teachers should also provide time to begin homework in class in case students need assistance. Homework should be assigned in small amounts and should also relate to the classwork. Students also found it easier when teachers established a routine at the beginning of the year as to how homework would be assigned. According to middle school students with and without LD, high school students with LD, and K-12 students with LD, assignments should have clear directions. Teachers should repeat the directions and inform students ahead of time about the assignment. Teachers should also state the purpose of the assignment and provide ample time for completion (1999).

Opinions on helping practices varied across the studies. In one study, students in Grades 4-6 preferred the teacher to be the one to provide assistance. Elementary students strongly preferred working in cooperative groups rather than individually. In another study, middle school and high school students with and without LD indicated a preference for peer tutoring and working in groups. Students revealed that they preferred mixed-ability groups. The exception to this opinion was students who could not read at all. They preferred same-ability groups (1999).

For instructional practices, students across grade levels expressed it to be most

helpful when teachers explained lessons carefully, helped with math or reading, gave extra time for work, provided student choice, included opportunities for social interaction and creativity, and provided challenge. Students also found it helpful when teachers gave study guides, outlines, projects, and hands-on experiments. Students did not like it when teachers yelled, got mad, or provided unsupportive feedback. They also did not like it when too much time was spent on behavior management. When asked to consider adaptations, eighty-nine percent of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders preferred a teacher who made adaptations to meet the special needs of students (1999).

Klingner and Vaughn (1999) state that “there is little doubt that regardless of the service delivery model implemented by the local school district, students with LD will spend considerable time receiving instruction in general education settings...” (p. 34). One of the most significant findings is that students perceive instructional adaptations and accommodations as necessary to meet the needs of some students and do not see them as problematic. Students do not value modified grading and believe that all students should be given the same homework. Teachers need to recognize that although students have different learning needs, they strive to be treated the same as everyone else. They want to have assignments with the same criteria and grading system. They want to use the same textbooks and receive the same homework. Without achieving these standards, students with LD do not find value or success in their work (1999).

Much of the research included in this literature review was dated within the

last ten years. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were included. At least nine studies included data gathered from standardized measurements. Other studies used questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and observations as methods of collecting data. In most cases, more than one method was used. The ages of the subjects varied from primary grades to high school.

Two articles analyzed the results of several studies done by other researchers. These articles were particularly helpful in providing a comparison of findings. Some of the patterns of the researchers' findings were that students became more aware of their disabilities as they grew older. They also increased the tendency to compare themselves with others. Older students were more sensitive of how others perceived them. Several studies reported that middle school and high school students preferred to receive help in pull-out settings to avoid embarrassment. There were some findings that were consistent among the research. One was that students with disabilities generally had a lower self-concept than students without disabilities. This finding supported my first hypothesis that students in regular education had a higher self-concept in all three areas when compared with the other three groups. Also, students with LD expressed a more positive self-concept when they compared themselves with other disabled peers. This finding contradicted my hypothesis that students in self-contained settings had a lower self-concept than their peers. A few studies found either no significant difference or a higher self-concept than their peers since their exposure to nondisabled peers was limited. Another consistent finding was that there were many factors that influence students' self-concept and that self-concept was multi-dimensional. Finally, the research agreed that placement had a

significant impact on self-concept, although the nature of the impact varied among several studies.

The researchers found conflicting results as to whether resource room placement improved or hindered self-concept. Some researchers stated that pull-out programs increased academic success, which enhanced a child's academic self-concept. Others focused on the fact that students in pull-out programs were stigmatized. I hypothesized that students in the resource room would have a higher social self-concept than academic self-concept since their removal from the classroom was based on academic weakness. The findings regarding low-achieving students or students with LD who remained in inclusive settings were also unclear. Some studies provided examples of improved social self-concept but were more vague regarding academic achievements. Few studies found significant differences in self-concept among LD students and low achieving students. I predicted that resource students would have a higher academic self-concept than basic skills students would because they experienced more academic success and less opportunity to compare themselves with higher ability students.

Because of these inconsistent findings regarding placement, I decided to focus my study on the effect that educational placement has on students' general, academic, and social self-concept. Similar to the studies included in this review, I wanted to compare subjects from different placements. Students from regular education and special education were chosen to participate in this study. The special education students came from a resource program and self-contained classrooms. Since my school did not have an inclusion program implemented, I decided to include

students in our basic skills program to determine what effect the regular classroom environment had on students with low abilities. I used the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale for collecting data since the study was to be completed over a short period of time. Several of the studies used similar instruments in their research to collect data from large groups of students with a wide range of abilities. I interviewed at least two students from each group to give them an opportunity to expand their answers to questions and explain more personal experiences. I found that the studies whose results were based solely on one-word responses from questionnaires appeared to be dry and less informative. The ages of my subjects will be limited to fifth and sixth grade. Studies who included a very large group of students from primary age to high school provided much information but was less organized and broader. I wanted my study to examine students from the specific age groups that I taught.

## Chapter 3

### Subjects

The subjects came from Thomas E. Bowe School, which houses students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. This school is part of the Glassboro School District. Glassboro is a small, suburban community with a population consisting of a wide socioeconomic range. There are five schools in the Glassboro District: one high school (grades 9-12), one intermediate school (grades 7-8), an upper elementary school (grades 4-6), a primary school (grades 1-3), and an early childhood center (pre-school and Kindergarten).

Forty-eight students from the fifth and sixth grades participated in this study. There were 21 from regular education, 9 receiving basic skills instruction, 10 from the resource room, and 8 from self-contained classes. The regular education students were chosen from the two homerooms in which I provided in-class support. These homerooms contained students in regular education, basic skills instruction, and resource room instruction. To be included in the study, the regular education students remained in a regular education class for the entire school day. They did not receive any outside academic services. A few did receive counseling.

The BSI students were chosen from the same two homerooms. These students spent the entire school day in the regular education classroom but received additional support from a basic skills aide. The students received this support in reading, math, and writing. BSI students received support in one, two, or three subject areas.

There were 10 resource students who participated in the study. Of the ten, five attended the resource room for reading, math, and English. Three were pulled out for English and reading, one student was pulled out for math and English, and one was pulled out for reading and math. All of the resource students received in-class support in science and social studies. All subjects had been in the resource room program for over a year.

The self-contained students were chosen from one sixth grade special education class and one fifth grade special education class. Ten students participated in the study. These subjects had been in a self-contained class for over a year. All students received academic instruction in one classroom with a special education teacher and an aide. The students were mainstreamed for art, music, library, gym, and real world math/science.

Regardless of educational placement, all students were permitted and encouraged to participate in school activities, including student government, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade camping trip, band/choir, and drama productions.

Informed consent was obtained through a parent letter, which had to be signed and returned before any student participated. (See Appendix). To encourage students to return the letter, I gave a treat to each student upon receiving the letter signed by the parent. Students received a reward for returning the letter regardless of whether or not their parents gave consent. This fact was explained to students in advance.

## **Design**

I used a self-concept scale and student interviews to collect data. To increase the validity of the data, I used the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale entitled

“The Way I Feel About Myself”. It consisted of eighty questions that were answered by circling either “yes” or “no”. The information was organized using seven subscales: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, happiness and satisfaction, and a total score.

A sample of students from each placement group was chosen to be interviewed. The interviews consisted of questions regarding students’ feelings about their strengths and weaknesses, academic abilities, and preferences in social situations. There were eight standard questions that all interviewees were asked. They were 1) What is something that you do very well? 2) What is something that you wish you could do better? 3) What do you like most about school and why? 4) What do you like least about school and why? 5) What is your best subject in school? 6) What school subject gives you the most trouble? 7) Would you rather play alone, with one child, in a small group, or a large group? 8) If you could change three things about your day, what would you change?

### **Procedure**

After the majority of the consent forms were returned, I scheduled a day and time with each homeroom teacher to have students complete the self-concept scales. At this time I explained my thesis to the teacher. The regular education students, BSI students, and the resource students completed the self-concept scale in their homeroom. I conducted the procedure. The homeroom teacher had the option of leaving the classroom during this procedure. I first explained to the students that they were not to put their names or their teacher’s name on the instrument. I then explained that I was conducting a study on how students felt about themselves and



about being in school. I asked students to answer each question as truthfully as they could because no one would know which paper was theirs. I told students to raise their hand if they did not understand a question. Students also were told to fold their papers in half and raise their hands when finished. The same directions were given to each homeroom. This part of the procedure took about five minutes.

I then gave a paper to each student who had permission to participate in the study. Each paper was given a number so I could identify the student at a later time. No one but myself knew what the numbers meant. Students took about five minutes to complete the questions. Upon completion, I reminded students to fold the papers in half and raise their hands. Students not participating in the study collected the papers and handed them to me. I placed them in a large manila envelope.

After all the papers had been collected I thanked the students and the teacher for their time and effort. The entire procedure of filling out and collecting the self-concept scales took about ten minutes. Students who were absent or out of the classroom during this procedure completed the self-concept scale at a later time.

The self-contained students completed the self-concept scale in the resource room. A day and time was scheduled with each teacher. When it was time, I escorted the students from their classroom to the resource room. I gave the same directions to this group that I gave to the other group. Due the students' reading ability, I read all eighty questions aloud. Students raised their hands if they did not understand a question. After the scale was completed, I gave the students a treat and thanked them for their time and good behavior. I then walked them back to class.

Interviewing took place after all the surveys had been collected and analyzed. I interviewed a sample of students from each group. The interviews took place in the resource room. Only the student and myself were present. Students who were chosen were asked if they had any objection to being interviewed. The interviews took place during the month of April. I scheduled a day and time with the student and the teacher prior to the interview. If the student was ill or having a difficult day, the interview was either rescheduled or another student was chosen.

The same procedure was followed during each interview. On the morning of the interview I reminded the classroom teacher that one of their students would be leaving the classroom for about ten minutes. At the appropriate time, I went to the student's classroom and escorted the child to my classroom. We sat at a table facing each other. I introduced myself to the child and explained that I was doing a research project and would like to ask them a few questions. I then asked them if this was okay. I told the child that I would write down what they said, but I would not use any names. I explained that the information would be shared, but that no one would know the identity. Introductions and an explanation for the purpose of the interview took about 2 or 3 minutes.

I began the interview by asking them some general questions about things they liked to do. When it appeared that the child felt more comfortable, I began asking more specific questions about their abilities, school, and social situations. Some of the questions varied depending on the child's responses. At the end of the interview I thanked the student and walked him/her back to the classroom. The entire procedure took about twelve minutes.

### **Type of Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data, I chose to use a between-subjects approach. I wanted to examine differences in self-concept among the four placement groups. The raw scores from each self-concept scale were recorded onto a Student Profile Form. From this information, I was able to obtain T-scores for all seven subscales. Scores for each individual student was then recorded onto a spreadsheet. After the data was verified for accuracy, I recorded them on the computer. I used a program called StatView to complete the analyses. I labeled the independent and dependent variables and retrieved a printout of raw data with means and standard deviations in order to recheck for accuracy. This information was then used to make comparisons among the four groups. An analysis of variance was conducted. A post hoc analysis yielded statistically significant differences among the groups.

## Chapter 4

The focus of this study was to compare the self-concept of students from four different placement groups. The research question was: Are there differences in academic, social, and general self-concept among students in upper elementary school from the following placement settings: regular education, basic skills instruction, resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classrooms? Two types of methodology were used to collect data. All students who participated completed a self-concept scale. In addition, a sample of students from each placement group was interviewed. The data was then recorded and analyzed to determine the results.

### **Self-Concept Scale Results**

The comparison of self-concept among students in regular education, BSI (basic skills instruction), resource room, and self-contained classroom produced some clear overall results. Regular education students scored higher in all seven areas than students in the other three groups. The resource students scored higher than BSI and self-contained students in all areas except intellectual & school status. The BSI students scored higher than the self-contained students did in all sub-scales except Intellectual & School Status and Anxiety. The self-contained students scored higher than all students except regular education on the Intellectual & School Status sub-scale (See Figure A).

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the four placement groups for each of the seven sub-scales. The Total column shows that the regular education students score much higher than the other three groups with a mean score of 62 and a standard deviation of 8.7. BSI and self-contained students both have a total mean score of 50, which is lower than the resource students who have a mean score of 53. An analysis of variance yield  $F = 4.2$  and  $p < .01$ . A post hoc analysis indicates a statistical significant difference between regular education students and each of the other three groups.

The Behavior sub-scale shows a fourteen-point difference between the highest and lowest mean score. Regular education students have a mean score of 59 and a standard deviation of 7.5. Self-contained students have a mean score of 45 and a standard deviation of 8.8. Analysis of variance yield  $F = 4.7$  and  $p < .01$ . Post hoc analysis shows a statistical significant difference between regular education students and BSI and self-contained students.

There is a fifteen-point difference between the highest and lowest mean score on the Intellectual & School Status sub-scale. The regular education students have a mean score of 60 and a standard deviation of 7.4. The BSI students have a mean score of 45 and a standard deviation of 12.5. An analysis of variance yield  $F = 7.6$  and  $p < .001$ . A post hoc analysis shows a statistically significant difference between regular education students and the other three groups.

In the area of Physical Appearance and Attributions the regular education students have the highest mean score of 58 and a standard deviation of 8.6. The self-contained students have the lowest mean score of 47 and a standard deviation of 15.6.

Due to a high variability in the data there is no statistically significant difference among the four groups.

The Anxiety sub-scale shows that the regular education students have the highest mean score of 57 and a standard deviation of 11.6. The BSI students have the lowest mean score of 44 and a standard deviation of 13.7. An analysis of variance show  $F = 2.8$  and  $p < .05$ . A post hoc analysis indicates a statistically significant difference between regular education and BSI.

The mean scores for the Popularity sub-scale show that regular education students score the highest with a mean score of 55 and a standard deviation of 8.9. Self-contained students score the lowest with a mean score of 44 and a standard deviation of 9.2. An analysis of variance shows  $F = 3.5$  and  $p < .05$ . A post hoc analysis indicates a statistically significant difference between regular education and BSI and self-contained.

The sub-scale Happiness & Satisfaction shows that regular education students score the highest with a mean score of 57 and a standard deviation of 8.8. Self-contained students have the lowest mean score of 47 and a standard deviation of 11.9. An analysis of variance yields  $F = 1.7$ . There is no statistical significance between the four groups.

The comparison of sub-scale scores among each group shows variation. Each group's highest and lowest scores occur in different areas. Regular education students score high in behavior and intellectual & school status. Their lowest score of 55 appears in the area of popularity. The BSI students have their highest score of 51 in the areas of behavior and happiness & satisfaction. Their lowest scores are in the

areas of intellectual & school status, anxiety, and popularity. The resource students score highest with a 55 in happiness & satisfaction. Their lowest scores appear in the areas of intellectual & school status, anxiety, and popularity. The self-contained students score highest with a 51 in the area of intellectual & school status. Their lowest scores appear in the areas of behavior and popularity. (See Table 1).

Mean scores between genders were compared but no statistically significant differences were found.

### **Interview Results**

A sample of students from each placement group was chosen to be interviewed. The interview consisted of questions regarding general likes and dislikes, academic strengths and weaknesses, and preferences in social situations. After the interviews were completed, I compared the answers among the four groups and found that some questions were answered similarly by students from all four groups. For question 1, what is something that you do very well?, only one student mentioned academics. That student was a girl in a self-contained class. She said that reading was something she did well because she received good grades. The other students mentioned extra-curricular activities, such as ice-skating, basketball, baton twirling, hockey, and drawing as examples of things they did well. On question 2, what is something that you wish you could do better?, all but three students indicated an area in academics. The third question in which I received common answers from all the students was on question 7, would you rather play alone, with one child, in a small group, or a large group? All students preferred to play in either a small or a

large group of children. Students who preferred a small group gave reasons such as, it is easier to control, less arguing, and less crowded. Those that preferred a large group said that they enjoyed having more people around and having more choice of games.

Within each group there were some common themes. The regular education students answered quickly and easily when asked what they did well, what they liked about school, and what their best subject was. When asked about things they wanted to improve, most difficult subject, and what they liked the least about school, they took longer to answer and needed some prompting to give a response. Students in regular education gave different subject areas when asked about their best subject; however, the reason for choosing a particular subject was the same – it's easy and I get good grades. On the last question, if you could change three things about your day, what would you change?, the students had no trouble responding. One common answer was they wished for a bigger house.

The common theme among the BSI students centered on academics. When asked what they liked least about school, students named an academic area. The reasons given were difficulty in subject area and nervousness during tests. Students gave spelling as their best subject citing good grades as the reason. When asked which school subject gave them the most trouble, students gave different subject areas but poor grades was the common reason.

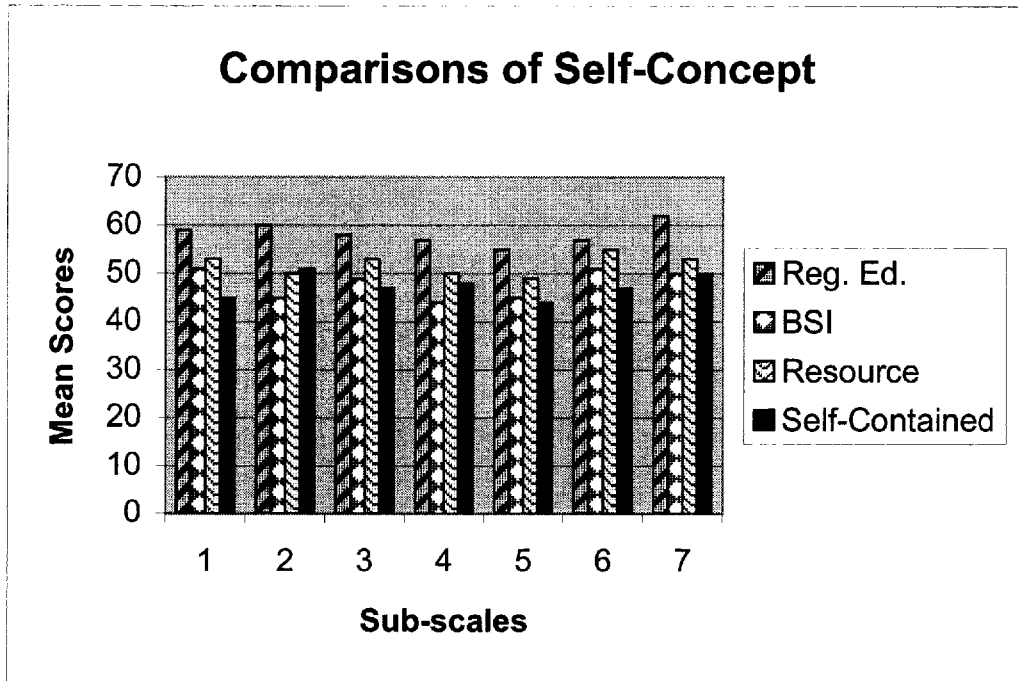
The resource students gave similar responses to many of the questions. When asked what they did well, they each mentioned a nonacademic area. When asked what they wished they could do better, they all responded by naming an academic



area. When asked what they liked least about school, they indicated that schoolwork was their least favorite part of the school day. When asked about their best subject, different areas were given, however; they all said their reason for choosing that subject was because it was easy and they did well. The resource students responded quickly and easily to both positive and negative questions.

The self-contained students had some difficulty in answering the questions. They took longer to respond. A common theme among this group was that they wished they could learn better. One student indicated she wanted to be out of special education. When asked what they liked most about school, they indicated that they enjoyed playing games. Good grades was another common response for choosing a best subject. Math, particularly times tables, was the common answer for most difficult subject in school. They had difficulty with the last question about changing three things about their day. They were able to respond after being told to pretend they were principals. Common answers given to this question was to have a longer recess and no homework.

Figure A.



### Key

1	= Behavior
2	= Intellectual & School Status
3	= Physical Appearance & Attributions
4	= Anxiety
5	= Popularity
6	= Happiness & Satisfaction
7	= TOTAL

**TABLE 1. Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations)  
for the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale**

	Beh.	Int.&Sch.Stat.	Phys.App.& Att.	Anxiety	Pop.	Happ.& Sat.	TOTAL
Reg. Ed.	59 (7.5)	60 (7.4)	58 (8.6)	57 (11.6)	55 (8.9)	57 (8.8)	62 (8.7)
BSI	51 (10.2)	45 (12.5)	49 (13.3)	44 (13.7)	45 (9.5)	51 (17.0)	50 (13.7)
Resource	53 (11.8)	50 (8.3)	53 (13.5)	50 (12.5)	49 (11.1)	55 (7.3)	53 (11.3)
Self-Contained	45 (8.8)	51 (9.1)	47 (15.6)	48 (10.7)	44 (9.2)	47 (11.9)	50 (11.0)
	F = 4.7 p < .01	F = 7.6 p < .001	F = 2.0 p = ns	F = 2.8 p < .05	F = 3.5 p < .05	F = 1.7 p = ns	F = 4.2 p < .01

## Chapter 5

In this study I examined the following research question: Are there differences in academic, social, and general self-concept among students in upper elementary school from the following four placement settings: regular education, basic skills instruction, resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classrooms? I developed four hypotheses to answer this question. The first one stated that students in regular education have a higher self-concept in all three areas when compared with students from the other three groups. Secondly, students in resource room instruction have a higher social self-concept than an academic self-concept. My third hypothesis stated that students in resource room instruction have a higher academic self-concept when compared to students in basic skills instruction. Finally, I hypothesized that students in self-contained special education classrooms have a lower self-concept in all three areas when compared with students from the other three groups.

I used two types of methodology to gather data for this thesis project. The first method was to have each subject complete a self-concept scale, which contained eighty questions with a “yes” or “no” response. To gain additional information, I also interviewed a sample of students from each placement group.

The results definitely supported the first hypothesis. Students in regular education had the highest scores in all areas of self-concept when compared to the other three groups. For the total overall score on the self-concept scale, there was a

statistically significant difference between regular education students and those from the other three placement groups. Regular education students also showed a statistically higher score in academic self-concept when compared to the other three groups. In the domain of social self-concept, there was a statistically significant difference between regular education and BSI and self-contained students. Regular education students who were interviewed showed more confidence in their responses and responded more easily to positive questions than negative ones.

The results did not support the second hypothesis that resource students would have a higher social self-concept than an academic self-concept. They actually scored slightly higher on intelligence & school status than on the popularity category. Based on my results, students placed in resource show consistent scores in all three areas of self-concept. Resource students demonstrated this finding during the interviews when they easily responded to questions dealing with both social and academic issues.

The third hypothesis was supported by the results of this study. Students in resource room instruction had higher scores in all areas of self-concept when compared with students in basic skills instruction. Unlike with the first hypothesis, the differences between resource and BSI were not statistically significant; however, resource students showed a higher score in every area on the self-concept scale.

The fourth hypothesis regarding self-contained students having a lower self-concept in all areas than the other three groups was partially supported by the results. Their scores were significantly lower than those of the regular education students. When compared to resource and BSI students; however, the differences were less

significant. When examining academic self-concept, the self-contained students scored about the same as the resource students and slightly higher than the BSI students. In the area of social self-concept, the self-contained students scored about the same as the BSI students and slightly lower than the resource students. Similar results were found when examining the total scores of the self-concept scale. I concluded that this hypothesis was partially supported since the self-contained students showed a lower self-concept in all three areas than the regular education students. They showed a slightly lower social and general self-concept than the resource students did. The BSI students and self-contained students showed similar scores in all areas of self-concept.

Some overall results were that both regular education students and self-contained students showed their highest score in the academic area. BSI and resource students showed one of their lowest scores in the area of academics. All four groups showed their lowest score on the Popularity sub-scale. After comparing the scores within each individual placement group, I determined that the scores were consistent across all areas of self-concept. None of the groups showed a significant difference between academic, social, and general self-concept. From these findings, I concluded that students who feel good about themselves show higher scores across all areas, and students who feel inferior to others score lower across all areas of self-concept.

The most obvious limitation and the one that had the greatest effect on my results was the small sample size. Having small samples was due to several factors. First, I did not anticipate how difficult it would be to convince students to return the permission letter signed by their parent. I was also surprised that many of the parents

of self-contained students would not allow their children to participate. I attributed this decision to the fact that I did not work with these students and was unknown to their parents. Time constraints and the availability of class time also contributed to a small sample size.

Small sample sizes decreased the chance of finding statistically significant results. The larger regular education sample was a major contributor to the significant differences between regular education and the other three groups. If I had used larger numbers of subjects, I would have found more significant differences among BSI, resource, and self-contained students. The third hypothesis would have been proven with statistically significant results.

Another limitation was the ability of students to answer the eighty questions on the self-concept scale. The reading was difficult for the self-contained students; therefore, they had to focus their attention while I read all eighty questions. Also, some students, particularly the ones in special education, answered inconsistently. For example, on one question they indicated that they were smart, while on another question they responded that they were dumb about most things. Some students even skipped questions, which affected their scores.

On two sub-scales, Physical Appearance & Attributions and Happiness & Satisfaction, there was a high level of variability. If I were to reanalyze the data I would try to remove the highest and lowest scores to determine whether or not significant differences existed.

The fact that my results showed a higher self-concept among regular education students did not come as a surprise. With all the studies done on self-

concept, that was one area in which everyone seemed to agree. A study similar to this one compared the self-concept of children at risk, children with special needs, and non-disabled children. The researchers found that non-disabled students ranked highest in academic and social self-concept (Stanovich, 1998).

Morvitz and Motta (1992) also completed a study using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. In their study, they compared the same four groups. Their results indicated a significant difference between regular class students and BSI students. Students involved in BSI had a lower self-esteem. They also found a significant difference between resource students and regular class students. Their results were very similar to my own. Self-concept of regular education students was significantly greater than BSI or resource students. No other significant differences were found among the groups. My results and the results of Morvitz and Motta differed with the self-contained students. They did not find that self-contained students had a significantly lower self-concept than regular education students did. My results showed this difference for both academic and social self-concept.

Some of the research supported the second hypothesis even though my results did not. I predicted that resource students would have a higher social self-concept than an academic self-concept. Willis (1994) stated that exposure to regular education peers would provide models for appropriate social behavior and give LD students the opportunity to form friendships with non-disabled peers. These friendships would increase positive self-perceptions and acceptance. Vaughn and Klingner (1998) came to similar conclusions. LD students who spent at least part of



the day in regular education made progress socially; however, they did not make significant academic progress due to the lack of appropriate instruction.

Through observations of my resource students, I came to the same conclusions. My students seemed to be socially accepted. They were involved in activities and had formed friendships with both LD and non-LD peers. I did notice a lack of confidence in academics, particularly during lessons in the regular classroom. Although my results did not show a significant difference between social SC and academic SC, I did observe something interesting. In the area of academics the results showed a significantly lower self-concept than that of regular education students. No significant difference existed for social self-concept.

I used group reference theory to develop the third hypothesis. I predicted that resource students would have a higher academic self-concept than the BSI students. In group reference theory, students selectively choose reference groups to enhance their self-esteem. Following this idea, resource students would tend to compare themselves to other LD students in academic areas, but compare themselves to regular education students in nonacademic areas. Since students in basic skills instruction spend their entire school day in a regular education classroom, they would only be exposed to higher functioning peers. They also would not receive as much academic support as the resource students and therefore, experience more academic failure (Morvitz and Motta, 1992).

I could use these same ideas to dispute my own final hypothesis. I predicted that self-contained students would have a lower self-concept in all areas when compared to the other three groups. I assumed the stigma of being placed in a special

education classroom would greatly lower their social self-concept. Similarly, I thought their low level of academic functioning would cause a low academic self-concept. After further examination of the research and completion of my own data analysis, I agree that since self-contained students are exposed primarily to low functioning students, their academic self-concept is not lowered. Morvitz and Motta (1992) emphasize that special education placement does not always lead to lowered self-esteem. A number of other studies (e.g., Smith et al., 1997, Strang, Smith, & Rogers, 1978) find that students in self-contained classes have a higher or equal self-esteem to regular class students who are experiencing academic difficulties. Again, the numbers were not statistically significant, but my results showed a higher academic SC than BSI students. My results also indicated that self-contained students' self-concept was not significantly lower than that of BSI and resource students. Finally, my results expressed a lower social SC than an academic SC among self-contained students. In summary, my results did not match my hypothesis, but they did coincide with the current research.

To refer back to my original question regarding whether or not there are differences in academic, social, and general self-concept among students in different placement settings, I conclude that differences do exist for a variety of reasons. The research tells us that poor academic achievement leads to poor self-esteem and vice versa. LoVette (1997), Morvitz and Motta (1992), and Marsh and Yeung (1998) all discuss a positive correlation between self-concept and academic achievement. Most agree that SC and achievement are interactive, one not occurring without the other.

Students who do well in school tend to rate themselves higher on tests of self-esteem than those who do not perform well (Morvitz and Motta, 1992).

My results and the results of other studies imply that more resources focusing on the improvement of students' self-image are needed. LoVette (1997) discusses a major study in which the number one educational need was the development of a positive self-image. Rather than spend their resources in this area, all money was put towards academics. The research tells us to focus on both. Students will not achieve great academic success no matter how much money is spent if they do not feel good about themselves.

Another implication of the research has to do with the idea of least restrictive environment (LRE). The current trend in education is placing special education students in regular education classrooms. We, as educators, need to find ways of integrating special education and regular education students without lowering self-concept. Studies show that with an increase in exposure to nondisabled peers, the disabilities of special education students become more evident. One way of dealing with this issue is to prepare the students before inclusion or mainstreaming takes place. Discuss openly with students about their strengths and weaknesses. Explain to both disabled and non-disabled students that everyone learns differently. The school counselor can assist in this area. Teachers should be willing to make modifications for any student having difficulty and use heterogeneous grouping so that lower functioning students do not "stand out".

For students who are pulled out to the resource room or placed in special classes, efforts must be made to lessen the stigma. Although studies show that special

education students do not suffer as dramatically in the area of self-concept as people once thought, they still measure lower than their regular education peers. Special education teachers need to create an environment that is academically challenging but one in which students can succeed. Teachers and administrators should use any resources available to promote the involvement of all students in various types of activities. By providing assemblies, clubs, talent shows, and others, schools give opportunities for all students to achieve and most importantly, to “fit in”.

There are some issues surrounding self-concept and educational placement that warrant further research. One issue is whether or not a change in placement increases or decreases a student’s self-concept. Studies using pre and post scores on self-concept scales or self-esteem tests may help answer this question. It would be interesting to determine if self-contained students who change to resource placement or resource students who change from pullout programs to inclusive settings develop a more positive or negative self-concept.

Another issue that merits more extensive research is the comparison of academic growth between students in integrated settings and students in segregated settings. The research has already shown a strong connection between academic achievement and self-concept. More studies are needed to determine which types of placements promote the largest growth in academic areas.

Finally, there need to be more studies that focus on low functioning regular education students, like the BSI students. This group seems to be receiving the least support. They do not qualify for special education; therefore, they do not receive support from special services. They may receive some assistance from an aide, but

this help is often not enough. They quickly become aware that they are below their peers and report card grades often reflect this sentiment. Researchers need to examine this group more closely and discover how to increase academic achievement and ultimately a positive self-image.

The purpose of this study was to examine self-concept of students from different placement settings. Academic, social, and general self-concepts were considered. Subjects were chosen from four placement settings: regular education classroom, basic skills instruction, resource room instruction, and self-contained special education classroom. A sample size of forty-eight students from grades five and six was used. Data was collected through the use of a self-concept scale as well as several student interviews. Data was recorded and analyzed on a computer using the StatView program. Mean scores and standard deviations were compared to determine differences in self-concept scores among the four groups. The results of this study indicated a significantly higher self-concept of regular education students when compared with the other three groups. Although the comparison of scores among the BSI, resource, and self-contained students did not produce statistically significant data, some differences were found. These findings support the notion that a relationship does exist between self-concept and educational placement.

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## **APPENDIX**

## Thomas E. Bowe School

RUTH MANCUSO LANE  
GLASSBORO, NJ 08028  
(856)589-5130

1-31-00

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am a Resource Room teacher at Bowe School. This year I work with sixth grade students. I am also a student at Rowan University in the Master's program in Special Education. One of my requirements in completing the program is to perform a study. My topic focuses on the comparison of self-concept among different groups of students, as well as how students feel about themselves and their personal views on school. Dr. Jay S. Kuder, a Rowan professor, is guiding me through this project.

With your permission, I would like to ask your child to fill out a brief survey. The process will not take more than 10 minutes and will not interrupt class time. All results will be kept confidential.

In addition, I will be choosing several students to do a face to face interview. Each interview will be conducted independent of each other. No names or any information that could be used to identify the students will be used in the project.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at 589-5130. All materials being used for this study will be approved by Dr. Kuder and the proper school administration.

Please check the appropriate statements below and return this letter by Friday, February 4 . Thank you for your cooperation and support in this study.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Karin Pescatore  
Resource Teacher, 6th Grade

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\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for my child to fill out a survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for my child to fill out a survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have no objection to my child being interviewed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish for my child to be interviewed.

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Parent/Guardian Signature