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Are Today's General Education Teachers Prepared to Meet the Needs of Their Inclusive Students?

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An Analysis of the Current Roles and Abilities of Teachers in Relation to University Preparation Programs and Staff Development Training

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Introduction

Although it had seemed that those with disabilities have finally taken steps towards gaining equality, the idea of educating special education students in general education classrooms did not gain support for many decades. In the past, the majority of children with disabilities would have been placed in self-contained classrooms instead of in a general education class. Thus the segregation of special education students was commonplace for the majority of the twentieth century.

As a result of this push towards inclusion in recent years, Brownell et al. (2006) shows how general education teachers "play a primary role in the education of students with disabilities...[but] often they report feeling unprepared to undertake this role," (p. 171). This is true for not only current general education teachers who are experiencing first-hand the changes that are occurring throughout the national education system, but even pre-service teachers who are in the process of completing their masters program still believe that they are not learning the skills needed to successfully teach in today's classroom environment. The success of inclusion can only be made a reality if both university educators and staff development programs share the responsibility in helping to train and continue to educate our future and current general education teachers.

Amendments to Federal Laws Regarding Americans with Disabilities

It was not until recently that public schools began to take significant action in establishing classrooms that follow inclusive or collaborative models. In 1990, EHA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and amendments, included the extension of LRE, mandating that all children with disabilities be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Although the amount of time one spends in the mainstream environment can vary and is dependent on the severity of the individual and his or

her disability, it should always be accepted that instead of focusing "solely on issues of placement...students [should always] be provided with an education that is 'appropriate' for their needs," (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996, p. 780). The 1997 amendment also required that all students have equal access to the general curriculum and that all children be provided with the needed services and accommodations in order to succeed to their fullest potential in their LRE. Following these amendments, increased pressure was put on the general education teacher, who was, and continues to be, presented with new responsibilities that extend well beyond academics. Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm (2007) explain:

> Sitting in general education classrooms is not enough; getting watered-down content area instruction in resources settings or self-contained settings is not enough. Students with disabilities are expected to be full participants, and teachers are expected to make the necessary accommodations to help all students meet standards.
>
> (Vaughn et al., 2007, p. 428)

In 2004 IDEA was amended again which further affected the general education teachers' responsibility in many respects. In addition to often being solely accountable for the education of special needs students who are now educated in the general education classroom, the 2004 revisions also stated that at least one general education teacher be required to participate in the creation and implementation of the IEP. Furthermore, all teachers must equally prepare their special education students for statewide and district-wide assessments. As conveyed by Lipsky and Gartner (1996), one of the purposes of IDEA is thus "...to determine whether the district has provided supplementary aids and support services and modified the education program to meet the needs of students placed in the general education classroom," (p. 774). The authors go on to further emphasize the importance of school districts to meet the requirements mandated by IDEA, stating that "If the district has failed to meet these obligations, then it is in violation of the law." (p. 774). However, these new regulations have led many to question if teachers are being unfairly held up to standards that a lack of training has made almost impossible to meet.

Many Schools Remain Hesitant When Implementing Inclusion Models

Although the reasons for these hesitations may vary and may never be truly known, resistance to inclusion may very much reflect a feeling among teachers that they are unable to take on such responsibilities. Vaughn et al. (2007) maintain that today, the "...teacher's most important role is to establish an academic community and climate that promote the learning and acceptance of all students..." (p. 130). However, this is often easier said than done. Although there are many factors that may contribute to this, I believe a major cause may be teachers' negative views on inclusion that is a direct result of a lack of ability and thus confidence in being able to successfully teach students with disabilities. While IDEA can be extremely helpful to our education system as a whole, more needs to be done regarding the way in which we prepare general education teachers to meet the needs of their inclusive students. Similarly, Lipsky and Gartner (1996) note that "While the courts have been a major force in affirming the rights of individuals with disabilities, the courts have been less successful when they have attempted to (micro) manage the implementation of the prescribed remedy," (p. 775).

Inclusion Impacts General Educators in Variety of Ways

Current studies indicate that while more and more general educators are expected to accommodate students with varying special needs, university and staff development training programs are often doing little to prepare these teachers when compared to those in the special education courses. According to Cameron and Cook (2007), "...general educators reported taking 1.5 courses on average in which inclusion or special education content was a major focus, as opposed to approximately 11 courses for special educators..." (p. 360). In the past, when special educators were the main instructors for students with disabilities, this disparity of courses would have been much more reasonable. However, our education system is going through some fundamental reforms that deeply impact the roles of the general education teachers, who now have taken over many of the responsibilities that were once only held by special education teachers. Not only do general education teachers need to be knowledgeable and confident about

different disabilities, learning needs and instruction strategies, but they also need to understand and be prepared to utilize the different types of adaptations and modifications that will be needed to address both curriculum and behavioral situations. This paper examines the extent to which preservice and current educators are lacking in their ability to assist special needs students and how and why it is imperative that universities and school districts restructure coursework and staff development to provide, at the very least, adequate training for *all* current and future educators.

A New Type of Classroom

General Education Teachers: Responsibilities of Today v. Those of Yesterday

Research shows that the number of inclusive classrooms around the country have increased greatly in the past two decades and will only continue to do so. "Attitudes of Preservice Teachers Enrolled in an Infusion Preparation Program Regarding Planning and Accommodations for Included Students with Mental Retardation," (Cameron & Cook, 2007) provides statistics illustrating the increases that took place at the end of this past century:

> ...the 10 year period from 1990 to 2000 represents an increase from approximately 41,000 to 86,000 children with this disability having spent greater than 79% of the school day in general education settings. During this same period the number of children with mental retardation who spent between 40% and 79% of the day in inclusive settings increased by nearly 43,000 students, (p. 353).

This upward trend continues and Worrell (2008) states that information from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services shows that "around 76.3% of students with disabilities are educated in the regular classroom for some part of the school day," (p.44). Furthermore, "According to the 26th Annual Report to Congress on IDEA, roughly 96% of general education teachers have students with learning disabilities in their classrooms," (Rock et al., 2008, p. 32). These statistics have many effects on the general education teacher and his or her class as a whole. As conveyed by Lipsky & Gartner (1996), "Among these students there are

a wider range of disabilities and levels of severity," (p. 779). Other reports show similar information, and according to "The New York State Report Card Information about Students with Disabilities" (2005-2006), 53.5% of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day inside the regular education classroom and only 6.3% are educated in separate settings, (emsc.nysed.gov). Thus the needs and abilities of students within the general education classroom are more diverse than ever before, making it essential that teachers know and understand the complex differences between each and every student so that all can reach their greatest potential.

A growing number of studies suggest that this shift away from self-contained classrooms and residential school settings toward the inclusion classroom models have, if done correctly, an overall positive effect on the special needs child in a variety of ways. Research has shown that including these students in the general education classroom can be beneficial in increasing not only student achievement, but self confidence and self esteem as well. According to Vaughn et al. (2007), "Active participation [of special needs students] not only helps to maintain students' physical health, but also enhances their image, as peers see them partaking in a meaningful activity," (p. 176).

Classifications of Disabilities Under IDEA

According to federal law, students who are identified as having a disability and thus require special accommodations and services may be classified in one or more of thirteen categories. These include autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, learning disability, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health-impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain-injury, and visual impairment including blindness. In order for these students to receive the best education possible, it is essential that general education teachers understand these various disabilities and become knowledgeable on how these students learn best. However, in an informal and unpublished survey that I conducted, I asked preservice general education teachers to rate how knowledgeable they were on the 13 disabilities as listed under IDEA and found that 7 out of 10 felt they did not

adequately understand the differences between them, (K. Rosenzweig, personal communication, 2008).

High-Incidence Disabilities: ASD, M.R., EBD

According to Vaughn et al. (2007), "ASD is now the sixth most commonly classified disability in the United States... [there has been] a six-fold increase in the number of students diagnosed with autism in the last 10 years," (p. 148). In addition, those diagnosed as being intellectually disabled, (or who suffer from mental retardation), are also being included in the general education classroom on an increasing basis. Statistics also show that approximately 50% of students with emotional and behavior disorders receive all or much of their education in the general education classroom as well, (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b) while students with speech and language impairments make up over 10% of all elementary school students today, (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). According to Vaughn et al. (2007), "20 percent of all children with disabilities receive services for speech or language disorders [and] 88 percent of these students are included in regular classrooms," (p. 106).

Low-incidence Disabilities

Although it may be more common for general education teachers to have students with Autism, EBD, and speech and language impairments in their classrooms, it is becoming more common for students who are among those classified as having one or more of the remaining 13 classified disabilities to spend most of their day in the general education classroom as well. As described by Vaughn et al. (2007), when Gallaudent Research Institute (2003) surveyed 40, 282 children who are deaf or hard of hearing, "45.9 percent received instruction in the general education classroom and 13.2 percent received instruction in a resource setting," (p. 195) and these statistics continue to rise not only for those classified as hearing impaired but for all those classified under IDEA.

New Responsibilities for the General Education Teacher

As the diversity of students in general education classes seems to be widening at a continuous and constant rate, so is the range of accommodations, services, and modifications that are needed to meet the needs of each and every student. As stated by Vaughn et al. (2007), many teachers believe that "With the move toward inclusive schools, the roles of special education and general education teachers are less clearly defined," (p. 172). However, the text goes on further to explain that teachers should instead understand that, "The role of the general education teacher is to be involved in and problem solve adaptations and curriculum modifications for all students," (Vaughn et al., 2007, p. 172). It can thus be inferred that although we expect teachers to be involved in curriculum modifications for all students, somewhere this message is being lost and not reaching teachers accurately.

Response to Intervention

Not only does IDEA mandate that at-risk and disabled students be supplied with appropriate early intervention programs and supports, new advances in research show that specific evidence-based interventions such as Response to Intervention (RTI) are extremely helpful in accommodating students. Additionally, the implementation of such interventions has a considerable impact on the general education teacher. Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, and Murphy (2007) explain:

> RTI requires a shift towards a more "individualized" look at students in the class, and consistent monitoring of instructional progress using empirically validated techniques. It has implications for the general educator's workload and how he/she is prepared...general education teachers will now be required to look more closely at the individual learning needs of their students and develop strategies and skills that can be implemented to address these learning needs, (p.57).

Although teachers will soon be required to comply with specific mandates of RTI as stated by law, when preservice teachers were asked if they would feel comfortable using RTI, 8 out of 10 responded that they felt less than comfortable to do so, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008).

Similarly, when the same teachers were asked if they understood the different strategies and educational interventions that should be used in the instruction of students classified as having one or more of the 13 listed disabilities, 9 out of 10 responded that they did not adequately know the different strategies or feel comfortable implementing them within their own future classrooms, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008).

Curriculum Modifications and Adaptations

There are a number of ways in which the general curriculum may be adapted and/or modified to meet individual needs. Various curriculum adaptations and/or modifications may include reformatting assignments and tests so that they are broken down into more concrete steps. This task-analysis approach is only one of a variety of ways that adaptations and/or modifications may be helpful. Other ways include large print, use of graphic organizers or visual aids, formatting multiple choice and matching tests and assignments differently and limiting choices, providing alternative ways to answer questions such as through oral responses or by using word processors, using methods such as pre-teaching and re-teaching, and a vast array of others. Although many services and accommodations such as time-extension, separate location, scribe, directions read, and others may be listed on the individualized education plans, teachers are expected to be aware of and prepared to utilize other strategies and modes of instruction in order to ensure their students are learning and understanding the information being taught. It is also important for teachers to understand that what may help one student may not help another and all modifications and adaptations must be made on an individualized basis.

Accommodations and services that are required by those who are disabled may range from something as simple as preferred seating arrangements in the classroom to the use of extensive assistive technology. Other required services may include augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, communication boards and PECs, talking word processors, and much more. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2001, 95% of public schools in the U.S. had students with learning disabilities, 67% had students with physical

disabilities, 54% had students with hearing disabilities, and 46% had students with visual disabilities, (nces.ed.gov). Of those schools, 53% have special software to aid those with L.D., 48% have software to help those with physical disabilities, 39% have software to help those with hearing disabilities, and 56% have software to aid those with visual disabilities, (nces.ed.gov). While services such as those may be less common to the majority of situations, it is still extremely important for all teachers to be aware of their existence and use so that they can be properly prepared for all future situations. However, even common services such as speech and language therapy (SLP), occupational therapy, physical therapy, sensory integration therapy, and the role of the paraprofessional and teaching assistant are often not as understood as they should be by the general education teacher. It is essential that all teachers understand the roles and the purposes of the supports and services that are required by law.

The Underutilization of Individualized Instruction by General Educators

The implementation of No Child Left Behind has increased teacher and school accountability though standardization and high-stakes testing while the recent IDEA amendments have pushed the inclusion of all students and created a focus on individualized instruction. Thus, general education teachers are facing an enormous amount of pressure to not only make sure that their general education students achieve academically (as determined by state and district-wide testing), but also ensure the achievement of their special needs students, most of whom will be held to the same high-stakes testing standards as their general education peers.

According to Vaughn et al. (2007), "Research indicates that general education teachers rarely make extensive individualized plans for students (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991; Zigmond, 2003), yet one-on-one instruction is a highly effective practice for students with learning problems," (p. 230).Whatever the reasons may be, research shows that those with special needs who require individualized instruction and various accommodations and/or modifications are suffering as a result. According to Rock et al. (2008), students with IEPs are suffering greatly:

> A report entitled "Failing Our Children" prepared by the National Education Associating found that roughly 26% of all public schools did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2005-2006 school year...in 2003-2004, only about 30% of students with IEPs performed at the proficient level on state- required reading and math assessments. Today, more than 6 million school-aged students have IEPs, which means more than 4 million (or 70% of) school-aged students lack proficiency in reading and math, (p. 31).

Functional Behavior Assessments

With the presence of those diagnosed as having autism, PDD, Aspergers, and PDD-NOS, functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs) are becoming increasingly common modes of behavior management seen in the general education classroom. As stated by Vaughn et al. (2007), "Mandated by the IDEA, all students with disabilities who have significant behavior problems that either interfere with their own learning or the learning of other students must have an FBA," (p. 251). When creating FBAs, general education teachers need to understand how to record data on specific behaviors in a way that could be viewed and analyzed by behavior analysts, school psychologists, and/or special education teachers so that appropriate behavior management plans could be ultimately made. One way in which data are commonly recorded is using the ABC approach, in which the antecedent of the behavior, the actual behavior, and the consequences are recorded (in addition to times and staff). While this method is often used when implementing BIPs as well, many teachers are unaware of the existence of this and how it's used. My survey supports this belief, showing that 100% of the teachers surveyed would not feel comfortable taking and recording ABC data in preparation of a BIP, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008).

Behavior Intervention Plans

While the reasons for an underutilization of behavior management plans may fluctuate, teachers' lack of knowledge on how to implement such plans may play a large role. Similar to King-Sears' (2008) view, 80% of the preservice general education teachers that I surveyed

responded that they would not feel comfortable using BIPs in their own classrooms, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008). These findings may also explain teachers' lack of utilizing specific teaching strategies that students with disabilities often require. In addition to those who are diagnosed with ASD, PDD, Aspergers, or PDD-NOS, others can also benefit from the use of BIPs in the classroom, including those with EBD. Less extensive behavior management approaches have been proven successful in classrooms for years and may not seem new to many teachers, such as those based on positive and negative reinforcement. However, BIPs differ in that they are followed throughout each day and are created for individuals based on specific short and long term reward systems and targeted behaviors. Token economy systems, in which students may earn different types of "tokens" for specific acts of good behavior or displaying good behavior over a period of time, are just one way in which teachers can manage student behavior. If the mainstreamed child suffers from a disability more severely and requires a teaching assistant, the general education teacher may not be responsible for administering the BIP but should be knowledgeable and aware of its provisions and how it works. For students that are less severe and do not require a T.A., teachers may find that simple plans such as these can be easy to administer and use and can show significant results.

Differential Reinforcement of Other Behaviors

Another way that has been proven effective in targeting and changing behavior is the use of differential reinforcement of other behaviors, or DROs. DROs are used when students are rewarded for the absence of negative behavior over a given amount of time that could range from a period of seconds to hours depending on the severity of the child's disability. The type of reinforcements and frequency of giving reinforcements, in addition to the complexity of the plan as a whole, also depends on the individual child and his or her disability. For example, a student who has been diagnosed with autism may be mainstreamed for 90% of the school day. The student's plan may utilize a DRO so that the student is given a ten minute break for remaining quiet and on task for a time period of 45 minutes. The goal is for the student to refrain from

whining and/or protesting and thus this is the targeted behavior. The absence of this behavior over the 45 minute time period is rewarded with a break of the student's choice and thus the positive behavior of quiet working is constantly being reinforced. While using DRO systems can be extremely helpful in managing individual behavior, many teachers are either unaware of its existence or unaware of how to utilize it. When surveying ten pre-service general education teachers 10 out of 10 stated that they would not feel comfortable implementing BIPs that incorporate DROs and/or token economy systems. According to Vaughn et al. (2007), "The procedures and practices for developing an FBA [and BIPs] are not nearly as well defined as those for an IEP, and many school personnel still are unclear about how and when to design and use FBAs ad BIPs," (p. 251). King-Sears (2008) adds; "One reason self-management may be underutilized is if teachers are not sure when to select self-management, how to teach it, and how to monitor its effectiveness," (King-Sears, 2008).

IEP Development and Implementation; Participation of the General Education Teacher

Another way in which future and present teachers are expected to meet higher standards and face a greater amount of responsibilities is a new and essential role in the development and implementation of the IEP. Before the 2004 amendments to IDEA, Lee Tarver, (2006) explained that "Special education personnel were the central players in the process of developing a document that would meet federal and state requirements. Regular education teachers, parents, and the child would have very little input into the product," (Lee-Tarver, 2006). This role has significantly changed, and today, general education teachers find that their active and full participation in the IEP process is crucial. Despite this increase in participation, many future and current teachers feel they are still not adequately prepared to deal with matters concerning IEPs. According to research conducted by Lee-Tarver (2006), "…more training is needed for regular teachers on the purpose, development, and implementation of the IEP," (p. 270). If teachers are going to be expected to properly provide input in the creation of the IEP, they need to fully understand the complexities of the IEP, including its goals and objectives in relation to the child,

in addition to its meaning and the process of development. Thus, university programs and staff development training need to place a greater emphasis on the IEP so that teachers can feel confident in their involvement in its creation and implementation.

Are Preservice Teachers Prepared for These New Responsibilities?

As a result of my research, I believe that teachers are often misunderstanding the meaning of differentiated instruction because they are not being provided with enough information or experience related to its goals and proper use. According to Rock et al. (1996), "The focus of differentiated instruction is on the learner, not the content. In some instances, this may necessitate a shift in emphasis from a content-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom to eliminate a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction," (p. 34). However, many teachers are not actually grasping this concept. While we are taught that children learn differently, we are not instructed on how to teach to these different needs and often because of added stress such as time restraints, school and state standards, and lack of needed support, teachers are not only hesitant to implement individualized instruction, but they do not even know how to do so.

Training General Education Teachers to Work in Inclusion Classrooms

It is imperative that university programs and staff development and training seminars do not assume that future and present teachers know what inclusion entails. Training programs need to focus on both *why* differentiated instruction is important and *how* we can provide it to our students, whether they possess an IEP or not. Additionally, educators can only understand how to differentiate instruction if they are given specific strategies and techniques that can be used for the various types of students that are included in the general education setting.

Why Are Our Special Needs Students Lacking the Academic Skills Needed to Achieve the Same Level of Success as Their Non-Disabled Peers?

Providing Educators with the Foundation of Knowledge Needed for 21st Century Instruction

While it is essential that teachers be able to address the needs of all their students, it is unrealistic to expect our new and current teachers to take on the responsibilities that were once

reserved only to special education teachers. Further emphasized by Worrell (2008), "…a solid foundation of knowledge about the students' disabilities, educational needs, accommodations, modifications, and the laws that affect both the children with disabilities and the teacher," (p. 44). This can only be developed through proper training and experience that only university and staff development programs can provide. It is these programs that play the essential role of informing teachers on the types of students that they will meet in their classrooms in addition to how these students will best learn. Today's educators lack in the ability to properly teach and engage special needs students in the classroom. Although Vaughn et al. (2007) stress that "One of the teacher's most important role is to take ownership of students with disabilities," (p. 172) general education teachers are often finding this to be an extremely difficult task. The success of inclusion is only meaningful and successful when implemented correctly, and Rock et al. (2008) explain:

> To fully engage in and progress through the general classroom, students with disabilities need more than to be to physically present in the classroom. They need group-individualized instruction, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, and modifications to which they are entitled. It is unfortunate that many teachers lack training in ways that ensure students with disabilities cognitive access-an opportunity to actively participate and to profit from instruction linked to the general curriculum, (p. 32).

Preparation for Future and Current General Education Teachers; Who is Responsible?

University Programs

Although it is also the personal responsibility of preservice and current educators, many believe that the responsibility of teacher preparation and knowledge rests greatly on university education programs. More often than not, university courses are failing to keep up with the real changes that are currently being made in our education system. Wasburn-Moses (2008) states that many studies "....indicate that some teacher candidates may not possess the kinds of understandings that align with reform practices," (p. 66) and as noted in similar studies, "...future general and special educators nearing completion of teacher preparation programs that infused

content related to inclusion...do not feel commensurately skilled in using these strategies," (p. 360).

As first referenced in Wasburn-Moses (2008), as of 2002, The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education maintained that " 'the current system of pre-service and in-service education is not sufficient to produce personnel who can ensure students with disabilities achieve satisfactory outcomes' (p 57)," (Wasburn-Moses, 2008, p. 82). Thus, "Researchers and government officials alike are emphasizing the importance of teacher preparation as a means to achieve the goals of [IDEA],' (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002; Thurlow et al., 2003)", (Wasburn-Moses, 2008, p. 66). In contrast to what seems to be an initiative to change university programs, little is actually being done to promote better teacher preparation. Cameron & Cook (2007) state that those who feel they would not be prepared to teach in inclusive settings were the result of "...teacher preparation [that] did not place sufficient emphasis on training in these areas. Indeed, change in teacher education to prepare preservice teachers for the realities of inclusion has been unsatisfactory slow," (p. 354).

Insufficient Coursework and Requirements for Proper Preparation

While university programs may dedicate some coursework and time to addressing the basic and fundamental facts on students with disabilities and the practice of inclusion, many feel that this is insufficient in creating teachers who will be able to successfully meet the needs of their inclusive students. Although 7 out of 10 surveyed pre-service teachers stated that they were required to take a special education course during their preparation program, 100% of these teachers reported that this requirement was satisfied by only 3-6 credit hours out of a total of 39-42 hours, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008). Participants also described these classes as being basic, introductory courses that did little other than briefly introduce the fundamentals of federal law and its relationship to special needs children. Similar to this finding, Cameron & Cook (2007) write:

> ...although instructors were encouraged to relate course content to inclusion whenever possible in the general education preparation program, inclusion was a prominent focus in only one seminar course. It is not surprising, then...that many preservice general education teachers previously enrolled in this same program perceived that the amount of content and time dedicated to inclusion and students with disabilities was insufficient, (p. 359).

Furthermore, this minimal amount of coursework usually did not provide any experience with working with the special needs child. Although some coursework may mandate some observation hours, pre-service teachers need to be exposed to inclusive environments and the teaching strategies that are used on an ongoing basis. Even student teaching experiences were more often than not spent in classes that provided little exposure to the instruction of students with disabilities. Garriott et al. (2003) note that "Most universities offer general education majors only limited coursework in inclusive education," (p. 51) and thus "...teacher preparation in general [may do] a better job of developing beliefs and intentions than producing actual skills...," (Cameron & Cook, 2007, p.361). Additionally, 9 out of 10 preservice general education teachers who are about to finish or who have already finished their preparation program feel that if given a job in an inclusion classroom they would be less than adequately prepared to instruct the student(s) with specific disabilities, (K. Rosenzweig, personal survey, 2008). Cameron & Cook (2007) assert that "...specific coursework devoted to inclusion and linked to high quality field experiences is necessary to generate high levels of inclusive teaching skills such as appropriate planning and instructional adaptations," (Cameron & Cook, 2007). In an age where there is a great demand for and emphasis on highly qualified general education teachers, university programs need to take greater strides in ensuring the production of educators that are *fully* prepared and confident to successfully meet all the challenges that they will ultimately face.

Staff Development and Training

In addition to the need for better university preparation programs, staff development programs also need to provide current teachers with these skills. As provided by research conducted by Lee-Tarver (2006), “Numerous studies have identified the attitudes of teachers and administrators as impediments to the inclusion of children with disabilities into the regular education classroom,” (p. 270). Often, general education teachers who are accustom to their own views and ways of teaching are now forced to meet new standards and teach students that are increasingly diverse on a variety of levels. As stated by Lee-Tarver (2006), "It is essential that teachers are provided training and support that would facilitate the acquisition of skills in order to provide services for children with different categories or types of disabilities," (p. 271) which current teachers can only obtain through staff development opportunities. General education teachers, who in the past were not required to take any special education courses in order to obtain their masters degrees, now hold many responsibilities that were once reserved only for those who were certified in special education. One study indicates that while most are aware of these new responsibilities, "Practicing teachers have...reported a lack of competence and the need for more training in planning and making adaptations for included students with disabilities," (Cameron & Cook, 2007, p. 353). Therefore it is up to school administrators and personnel to develop and provide training that will properly prepare teachers to successfully meet the needs of the 21st century student. However, many principals and administrators are still neglecting to supply sufficient staff development and training for general education teachers who have an inclusive classroom or will in the future. Friend and Bursuck (2002) go as far as to assert that "...some principals appear to take a wait-and-see approach to inclusive schooling, not actively leading their staff toward such [inclusive] practices (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998)," (p.17). If not provided with this training, in addition to administrative support, general education teachers will not only fail their special needs children, but their general view on inclusion as a whole may be negatively impacted as well.

Is There a Relationship Between Teacher Preparation and Their Views on Inclusion?

Low Self-Efficacy of Teachers May be Related to Negative Attitudes of Inclusion

When a group of general education teachers were asked to participate in a study by Garriott, Miller and Snyder (2003), many responses supported the belief that general education teachers often lack the skills needed to teach the special needs student. A response from one general education teacher in particular truly helps to illustrate this feeling:

> The teachers need to be specialized in the special education field to facilitate the learning capabilities in special education students. Teachers with regular education classes don't have the knowledge or experience, so the students with learning disabilities should be in special education classes, (p. 53).

While many teachers in theory seem to support the idea of inclusion, according to Lee-Tarver (2006), "In general, teachers have been found to be unwilling to accept a child with a disability into the regular classroom," and findings suggest that "...teachers attributed a significant increase in stress when asked to cope with a child with a disability and their regular education students," (p. 264).

Many studies suggest that a lack of preparation to teach special needs students, and thus a decreased level of confidence, can have a direct influence on one's overall view of inclusion. Increased stress and levels of anxiety that general education teachers may experience when given the responsibility to instruct students with disabilities may be linked to a low level of understanding of the vast range of disabilities that are now a part of the general education system. Garriott et al. (2003) argue:

> To alleviate the misconceptions about inclusive education and the fears general education teachers have about their ability to teach students with disabilities, preservice teachers should be provided the knowledge and skills that will enable them to feel competent to accommodate the learning needs of a diverse student population. Preservice teachers must be aware of and be able to implement teaching approaches that enhance the success of students with special needs in inclusive settings, (p. 51).

According to Garriott et al. (2003), when a group of preservice general education teachers were presented with various questions regarding the best placement for special needs children, "Forty-five percent of preservice teachers stated that they believed that students with mild disabilities should receive their educational services in special education settings," (p. 50). Silverman (2007) explains that "Teachers' attitudes and beliefs directly affect their behavior with students, thus having tremendous potential to influence classroom climate and student outcomes," (p. 43).

Introducing the Collaboration of Special and General Education Teachers

In addition to a feeling of low-efficacy by many general education teachers, the majority of current and pre-service teachers are used to working alone when teaching their students. Whether it's a result of limited collaboration during university programs or limited contact when working in the school environment in the past, the reality is that teachers are often not used to working together on a frequent basis. Ironically, inclusive and collaborative models are only possible when there is on-going teamwork between special and general education teachers and the professionals such as speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, and others. As described by Cahill and Mitra (2008); "...This sharing of ideas will build on the teacher's existing knowledge of curriculum and typical instructional methods," (p. 150). Little experience in dealing with other teachers in collaborative situations may cause many general education teachers to neglect using special educators as a resource to help them improve their knowledge and skills needed to teach their inclusive classes. Cahill and Mitra (2008) state that general education teachers' lack of preservice special education coursework may cause them to "…feel anxious and resentful when working with special education teachers," and that with forming "…collaborative relationships, as well as the roles of different service providers, may allow general education teachers to maintain good working relationships and, ultimately, better support students with special needs," (p. 150).

To prepare preservice teachers who are enrolled in general education programs, universities need to take steps in allowing students in both the general and special education programs to interact so that they are comfortable to do so when they work in the school system. Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, and Bushrow (2007) describe how most university programs are designed today:

> The special education and general education programs at our institution are stand-alone certification programs. The methods coursework, practica coursework, and field experiences are segregated, providing virtually no opportunity for general and special education teacher candidates to interact within their preparation programs. Additionally, there are few opportunities for general and special education teacher candidates to observe collaboration between their respective faculties, (p. 3).

In contrast, the reality is that current teachers are expected to work together more and more. Therefore, Mayhew (1994) illustrates, that in order "...for a shared responsibility between regular and special education is to become a reality it is essential for all the educational disciplines to work together at the preservice level," (Mayhew, 1994). He goes on to further explain that both general and special education teachers have their "...own unique set of skills and information... [and when] professionals from the different disciplines collaborate they become more effective and, in turn, provide better services for all students," (Mayhew, 1994). Isn't it the ultimate purpose of all teachers to better service their students? Not only do university programs need to promote a relationship between general and special education teachers, but school administrators need to do so as well. As shown by Worrell (2008); “Principals and other administrations must foster staff development activities with both regular and special educators,” while further encouraging the establishment of “…trusting and meaningful relationships among the staff, and provide effective and age appropriate instructional support for students with disabilities,” (p. 46). While all are of equal importance, the success of inclusion can only be made possible if educators

understand its benefits and are willing to help in its implementation. As expressed by Garriott et al. (2003):

> ...general education preservice teachers [should] be given the opportunity to openly dialogue with experienced general educators, special educators, and university faculty who acknowledge the difficulties in implementing inclusion but never lose sight of the ultimate goal--inclusion for all students, (p. 51).

Conclusion

Inclusion is Inevitable

As described by Rock et al. (2008), "Differentiating instruction is not a passing fad; it is a revolution--a fundamentally different way to teach students with diverse learning and behavioral needs," (p. 37). While it is clear that the idea of inclusion classrooms may be turning into a permanent fixture in our education system, it is imperative that all teachers be prepared to meet the needs of all their students and that they are given the support and assistance that is needed for them to do so.

Teachers also need to take personal responsibility in keeping themselves knowledgeable on all federal education laws including those pertaining to special education in addition to knowing about and understanding the extremely diverse list of disabilities and the instructional strategies and services needed to accommodate those who have them. However, general education teachers cannot be expected to meet all these demands on their own. Both university programs and school district administrators and personnel need to make genuine efforts to increase the preparedness of both preservice and current general education teachers to deal with their inclusive students. Just as students cannot reach their fullest potential without the proper supports and instruction, teachers also need support in the form of professional development and university courses that will guarantee a deep understanding of how to best meet the needs of their special needs children. Silverman (2007) proposes that "Because students with disabilities are included in regular classes with increasing frequency, it is especially important that their teachers

hold attitudes and beliefs associated with sensitive, effective inclusive teaching," (p. 50). If teachers are not being given the appropriate information on special education and the opportunity to experience its complexities first hand through university coursework, their level of confidence when teaching inclusive students is likely to remain low. It has been suggested that often when teachers lack confidence, their attitudes towards inclusion may suffer as a result.

The Proper Implementation of Inclusion is Essential for the Success of All Involved

If implemented correctly, inclusive and collaborative models can prove to be beneficial in a variety of ways for not only the special needs student but for our educational system as a whole. Unfortunately, there is much research to support the argument that our society has not yet been able to successfully establish a system of education that is truly equal for all students. According to Funk (1987), as cited in Lipsky and Gartner (1996); “Organized society, its decision makers, and program and policy implementers do not understand the concepts of integration and equal opportunity as it relates to the inclusion and participation of disabled adults and children in the social, political, and economic mainstream,” (p. 774).

In order for us to meet these challenges successfully, we need to not only think of inclusion as an act of providing all students with equal access to the general curriculum, but we also need to make certain that they participate and achieve as much as their non-disabled peers. Thus, teachers need to know how to individualize instruction to the greatest extent possible in order to promise the success of each and every one of their students. Like all professions, staying informed and knowledgeable in the most current research is essential to ensure the success of all involved. Especially in a field such as education, that is constantly evolving and changing, all teachers need to be prepared for all situations that they will meet in the classroom. University programs and school administrators play significant roles in providing teachers with the training and experience needed to make certain that our present and future educators are of the highest possible quality. Without the partnership of all the above factors, all students are sure to suffer. Lipsky and Gartner (1996) conveyed this concept perfectly when they wrote the following:

> ...the failure to educate some students...reflects not the inadequacies of educational practice, but the lack of caring about the schools' failure of these students. By failure of these students we mean their failure to pass, but more fundamentally, the failure of schools to serve them well, (p. 766).

Thus, it is the responsibility of all those involved in the education of our youth, whether directly or indirectly, to make certain that in our quest to establish the best education system for our children, we are not failing our teachers by neglecting to give them the support and preparation they desperately need.

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