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Middle School Inclusion: Case Studies of Three General Education Teachers

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Abstract

Research was conducted in a middle school in the southwest United States. Over 65% of the student population qualified for free and reduced lunch and the enrollment of 36% Hispanic students and 63% white students reflected the overall make-up of the local community. This study examines how three middle school teachers included students with disabilities in their classrooms. Areas explored included preparation, training, and/or support; attitudes and beliefs; learning environment; planning; and types of adaptations. Data revealed that although all participants supported the idea of inclusion, they demonstrated varying levels of characteristics of an inclusive classroom were evident.

Overview

The education landscape has changed dramatically in the past 36+ years. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975 (P.L. 94-142), its reauthorization in 1997, the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (2002), and the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (P.L. 108-446) have carefully outlined the rules and regulations governing education. But, what does that look like in practice?

"Inclusion" is a term that it is used loosely both in the education literature and in professional practice. All too often the physical placement of students in general education classrooms is emphasized with little regard to the development of truly inclusive classrooms. Engagement and active participation on the part of general and special education students in the everyday functioning of the classroom are imperative to inclusive education. This requires significant alterations to many general education classrooms in order to meet the needs of a more diverse population of students possessing broader ranges of skills (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Smith & Tyler, 2011). The goal of inclusive education is to allow all students the opportunity to learn and participate in a class that provides challenges and opportunities for success (Hardin & Hardin, 2002; TASH, 2011).

Often, the claim is made that a classroom teacher is practicing inclusive education if students with disabilities are present in his/her general education class (McGrath, Johns, & Mathur, 2004). Careful examination often reveals little evidence of defining characteristics of inclusive education. In order to determine if inclusive education is truly present, it is imperative that people pay careful attention to the methods and instruction a teacher utilizes within a general education classroom and the supports that are in place for that teacher (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Futernick, 2007; TASH,

2011), instead of merely relying on the physical placement of students with disabilities in the general education (Smith & Tyler, 2011).

Rationale and Research Questions

Inclusion significantly impacts not only students with disabilities, but also their classmates, general and special education teachers, administrators, and parents. Multitudinous studies (e.g., Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Burstein et al., 2004; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Cooper et al., 2008; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Hadadian & Chiang, 2007; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz, 2004; Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005; Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008; Strassburg, 2003; Sze, 2009; Wilkins & Nietfield, 2004) were conducted which examined teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion, academic and social outcomes for students with and without disabilities in inclusion classrooms, and various models of inclusion. The majority of studies (e.g., Burke & Sutherland; Burstein et al.; Cook, et al.; Cooper et al.; Downing & Peckham-Hardin; Hadadian & Chiang; Idol; Leatherman; Otis-Wilborn et al.; Santoli et al.; Strassburg) involved surveys and/or interviews with very little classroom observation. Inclusion research in middle school settings is scant, and middle school case study research is even scarcer.

Inclusion programs are difficult to develop because they require significant changes to the manner in which teachers work. In order for successful inclusion to occur, the general education classroom needs to be a place where a range of student abilities is supported and accepted (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009; Smith & Tyler, 2011). Effective inclusion occurs when wide-ranging abilities are accommodated as a natural part of the school day. Consideration must

be given not only to the physical classroom environment, but also instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques (King, 2003; TASH, 2011). Teachers in inclusive classrooms must possess the ability to informally monitor and assess student skills and needs; set high but alternative and appropriate expectations for each student; modify assignments and activities to meet the needs of all learners; and provide daily success for all students.

The secondary school setting adds a unique wrinkle to inclusive education and presents a considerable challenge. Factors such as a wide range of skill levels, high number of students seen in a day, content specific training, and curriculum demands contribute to teacher difficulties in developing effective inclusion programs in secondary schools (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009). In addition, most secondary school teachers are responsible for teaching five classes and more than 125 students on a daily basis. Limited class and contact time prevent many teachers from developing in-depth understandings of individual student abilities and needs, and therefore, limit the amount of individualized instruction (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000).

There are considerations specific to secondary inclusive classrooms including the pace of the general education curriculum, the emphasis on higher level content knowledge, and the expectation that students will develop independent study skills. As students progress through secondary school, they are expected to develop the ability to organize course materials, listen and take notes, participate in class discussions, complete classroom assignments independently, and study for tests and quizzes. Furthermore, most general education classes in the secondary grades are hierarchical in nature, meaning that students are expected to possess sufficient prerequisite knowledge and skills. Often, this presents a serious challenge to students with disabilities as they may not have adequately learned, retained or generalized the necessary foundational skills or content knowledge (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001).

The purpose of this research was not only to add to the slim knowledge base surrounding the real-life structure and implementation of inclusion within middle school general education classrooms, but also to explore specific strategies middle school general education teachers utilize in order to include students with disabilities in their classrooms. The main research question was: How do three middle school general education teachers include students with disabilities in their classrooms? The specific areas explored were: preparation, training, and/or support of study participants; attitudes and beliefs of study participants; learning environment created by study participants; planning engaged in by study participants, and types of adaptations made by study participants.

Method

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective that drove this case study research was constructivism. The foundational belief of constructivism is that knowledge acquisition occurs through knowledge construction, as opposed to knowledge transmission. Ultimately, learning and meaning making mainly occur through the creation of individual understandings based upon the amalgamation of what a person already knows and believes, and new knowledge and ideas with which a person comes into contact (Richardson, 2003).

Knowledge is further constructed through the intersection of people and the give and take of social interactions. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of social exchanges in order for cognitive growth to occur (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000/2001). Within a given school day, teachers have countless social exchanges with students, teachers, support personnel,

parents, and/or administrators. Each exchange offers opportunities for a teacher to combine new experiences with existing knowledge in order to develop greater understanding.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Nominations for the purposeful sampling evolved from inquiry with experts such as the associate dean of a local university and the Director of Instruction and Special Programs of the local consolidated school district. Nominated middle schools included teachers they had seen apply the following characteristics of inclusive classrooms: 1) Students with disabilities received their educational services in the general education classrooms with appropriate in-class support provided by special education teachers, paraprofessionals, or other support personnel. 2) Cooperative teaching in the form of interactive teaching (or team teaching), alternative teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, one teach, one drift, and/or one teach, one observe was utilized (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). 3) Curriculum and instruction demonstrated strong, clear, and understood learning goals, with differentiated instructional strategies. 4) Assignments and assessments had high, but alternative and appropriate expectations for each student, and teachers monitored and assess students' skills while making modifications as needed. 5) A community of learners was established in the classroom where a philosophy of flexibility and acceptance was evident and all students achieved daily success.

Next, the principals of the three nominated middle schools and nominated teachers in his/her school that s/he believed implemented many of the defining characteristics of inclusion outlined above. Third, a preliminary screening of teachers was conducted to determine if they implemented some of the defining characteristics of an inclusive classroom. Teachers were then

rank-ordered based on the implementation of the defining characteristics of inclusion observed. Final ranking revealed three teachers from one middle school as numbers one, two, and four, and one teacher from another middle school as number three. There were two choices: 1. Use the top three teachers, or 2. Use the three teachers from the same middle school. Choice number one would have allowed research on three teachers who, based on screening, best implemented the defining characteristics of inclusion. It would also have allowed examination of the similarities and differences between teachers and environments in two different middle schools. The disadvantage would be the sacrifice of in-depth analysis of any one middle school.

Choice number two would have allowed research on three teachers in the same school building, thereby lending itself to the exploration and in-depth understanding of a single middle school. Furthermore, it would allow examination of teachers at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade level in three different subject areas. The disadvantage would be that research on the top three teachers would not be conducted, but instead the first, second, and fourth best teachers would be studied. In the end, the three teachers from the same middle school were selected as it allowed in-depth exploration of one middle school.

Research was conducted in a middle school in the southwest United States. Over 65% of the middle school's student population qualified for free and reduced lunch and the enrollment of 36% Hispanic students and 63% white students reflected the overall make-up of the local community. All three of the teachers in the study grew up within five miles of the middle school where they taught. One teacher was a Caucasian female in her late 20s in her fifth year of teaching sixth grade science and her sixth year of teaching overall. She spent one year teaching at an alternative middle school for students expelled from the County School District. Another teacher was a Hispanic man in his early 30s in his sixth year of teaching seventh grade social

studies. He was bilingual in English and Spanish and served as the school's English Language

Learner (ELL) Coordinator. The third teacher was a Caucasian female in her late 30s in her sixth

year of teaching eighth grade mathematics and her seventh year of teaching overall. She spent

one year teaching mathematics at a local high school.

Rationale for Research Method

A case study involves the exploration of a bounded system through detailed, in-depth

data collection involving multiple sources of information. The system is bounded by time and

place, and it is an individual case being studied (Creswell, 1998). For this research, three cases

were investigated, represented in this study by three teachers who had students with and without

disabilities in their general education classrooms (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling was

utilized and the focus was on the manner in which three middle school general education

teachers included students with disabilities in their classroom.

Validating data. To enhance the internal validity of the research, three basic strategies

were utilized: prolonged engagement, member checking, and triangulation of data. Prolonged

engagement, or long-term observation, allowed the researcher to make repeated observations of

the same phenomenon over a period of time (Merriam, 1998).

Transcribed notes for both the pre-observation and post-observation interviews were

distributed to each participant for examination. Each of the participants reviewed the transcript

and none of the participants wanted to add or change any information contained in it.

Observations generated an enormous amount of data in the form of fieldnotes and artifacts, far

too much to ask or expect a participant to sift through. Instead, participants were asked to judge

for accuracy of findings after analysis and development of preliminary interpretations were completed (Creswell, 1998).

Data was triangulated in this study by using four of the most common data collection methods employed in case study research. The vast majority of the data were collected through a pre- and post-observation interview of each of the three teachers, and observations of participants in their classrooms. Information was also gathered through informal conversations and artifact collection. All of the data was then triangulated by comparing what teachers reported, what was observed in the classroom, and what was discovered in collected artifacts.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to determine how general education classroom teachers made sense of, and created, an inclusive general education classroom. Therefore, the primary focus was the manner in which three middle school general education teachers included students with disabilities in their classroom. The case study approach allowed the researcher to investigate complex variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. In order to complete a thorough investigation of each teacher's methods of inclusion, a pre-observation interview, hours of classroom observation, informal conversations, artifacts, and a post-observation interview were utilized.

Pre-observation interview. A pre-observation semi-structured interview was conducted. Questions that were easily understood by the participants were developed and elicited information pertinent to the research. The primary topics that were covered in the pre-observation interviews included background information, special education training, professional development, collaboration, planning for curriculum and instruction, assignments and

assessments, and the classroom community.

Observations. The role of a "complete observer" was utilized for the observations (Murray-Seegert, 1989). The study commenced approximately five weeks into the school year. The observations took place during specific dates and times agreed upon by the researcher and participants and involved class hours in which students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms alongside students without disabilities. Anecdotal notes were recorded during whole class observation, with special consideration given to instructional strategies, assignments and assessments, and classroom community. Participants were observed over the course of nine weeks and saturation of data for the first participant was met after approximately 21 hours on 17 different days, after approximately 30 hours on 20 different days for the second participant, and after approximately 28 hours on 22 different days in the classroom and 5 hours on a class field trip for the third participant.

Informal conversations and gathering of artifacts. The vast majority of the data came from formal interviews and observations, but information also came from additional sources as well. Some conversations with participants provided information pertinent to the research and was recorded in fieldnotes.

Post-observation interview. The post-observation interviews allowed for clarification of understandings and exploration of issues and themes in more depth. The topics that were covered in the post-observation interviews emerged from the data collected in the observations, along with pre-existing questions pertaining to attitudes and beliefs.

Data analysis. All of the information gathered through the pre-observation interview, observation sessions, informal conversations, artifacts, and post-observation interview were combined and analyzed. Fidelity of implementation regarding the inclusion of students with

disabilities in general education classrooms based on the characteristics described above was also analyzed. Analysis was begun as soon as data collection commenced and continued throughout the data collection process.

Results

The purpose of the research was to add to the knowledge base surrounding the real-life structure and implementation of inclusion within middle school general education classrooms. The main research question was, "How do three middle school general education teachers include students with disabilities in their classrooms?" Specific strategies middle school general education teachers utilized to include students with disabilities in their classrooms were examined.

Preparation, Training, and Support

All three teachers in this study felt their undergraduate programs had not adequately prepared them to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classroom, a finding that supported existing research (Burns and Ysseldyke 2009; Cook et al. 2007; Smith & Tyler, 2011). At many colleges and universities, the use of part-time and graduate student instructors leads to inconsistent training and quality in teacher preparation (Smith & Tyler, 2011). Oftentimes, only a single, introductory course about teaching students with disabilities has been required for general education teachers. That was the case in this study as all three teachers noted that they had taken one course that addressed teaching students with disabilities in their undergraduate teaching program.

According to the findings of numerous studies, teachers felt they lacked the in-class supports necessary to implement the practices that characterize inclusion (Burstein et al., 2004; Futernick, 2007; Ross, 2002; Wilkins & Nietfield, 2004). Only the seventh grade social studies teacher echoed these sentiments. Neither a special education teacher nor any paraprofessionals came into his classroom to assist with the instruction of students with disabilities. The other two teachers had paraprofessional support during certain class hours. Neither of these teachers met with the paraprofessionals or the special education teacher to discuss specific classroom expectations or responsibilities. Instead, they allowed the paraprofessionals and the special education teacher to determine their own role in the classroom. Both teachers felt they had adequate support to effectively include students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Observations revealed that the paraprofessional in the eighth grade math classroom offered little in the form of student or teacher support. She typically entered the classroom late and sometimes disrupted the class with a comment or announcement. The paraprofessional usually sat at a desk and did the work that the students did. She rarely offered assistance or support to students with or without disabilities. When the teacher was asked about this, she expressed helplessness about the situation. She noted, "Sometimes I feel like I'm teaching the paras too. They seem to just want to be students." She continued, "I figure that if they learn something here then they are better prepared to help students during resource hour." This teacher acknowledged that she had not attempted to communicate her specific classroom expectations to the paraprofessional, but she wished that the paraprofessional would better assist students in the class.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Teacher attitude is one of the most important determinants of inclusion success (Cook, et al.; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). All three teachers in this study remarked positively about having students with disabilities in their classrooms. All three teachers stated the belief that the inclusion of students with disabilities had a positive impact on the overall classroom environment. The eighth grade math teacher felt that have students with disabilities in her classroom made students more accepting of each other and that ultimately, it made them better people. The sixth grade science teacher thought that students without disabilities developed more empathy and understanding through their interactions with students with disabilities, and that it taught them more about life. The seventh grade social studies teacher felt that students were very accepting of each other. He also thought the inclusion of students with disabilities impacted the learning environment of his classroom in a positive way, because it changed the dynamics of the class and it improved his teaching.

All three teachers were confident in their ability to meet the needs of all learners in the classrooms, including students with disabilities. Each of them also acknowledged having been unsuccessful with some students they had taught, but all three attributed the lack of success in large part to factors that were beyond their control. The eighth grade math teacher felt students that were not successful in her classroom were usually not successful across the board and had a lot of factors that impacted their performance. The sixth grade science teacher offered other potential reasons, such as family concerns or things students were into outside of school as the main reasons why they were not successful. The seventh grade social studies teacher felt that the students he had been unsuccessful with were students diagnosed with severe cognitive disabilities or severe emotional problems. He noted that although they may have had a good

relationship with him, it was difficult getting them to do homework and to be engaged in the class.

Learning Environment

Evidence showed that there was quite a difference in flexibility between the three teachers in the study. There was little evidence of flexibility in eighth grade math or sixth grade science classroom. The eighth grade math teacher's extremely structured lessons did not lend themselves to flexibility or adjustment. She always adhered to her lesson, assignment, and assessment schedule and students were expected to follow suit. Although she was accepting, this teacher noted that the inclusion of students with disabilities impacted the learning. The eighth grade math teacher felt that, at times, the inclusion of students with disabilities made the "learning slower."

Flexibility was not evident in the sixth grade science classroom either. Although her lessons were not as structured as the eighth grade math classroom, this teacher adhered to her lesson, assignment, and assessment schedule and expected all of her students to do the same. In her pre-observation interview, the sixth grade science teacher credited the delivery of food baskets during the past few holiday seasons as a major contributor in her understanding of students' home situations. She noted that sometimes her students could not do what she wanted them to do because they had other things going on at home.

The seventh grade social studies teacher demonstrated flexibility in many areas. He developed a lesson, assignment, and assessment schedule, but each one of these had flexibility built-in. He was flexible in his willingness to allow students to share personal stories, his development of various activities, assignments, and assessments and in many more ways. The

seventh grade social studies teacher was an easy going man and it was evident that his primary

concern was making his students feel welcomed, supported, and appreciated within the

classroom. He treated all of his students with a great deal of respect and his students in turn

treated him, and each other, with respect.

Planning

All three teachers stated the belief that the inclusion of students with disabilities in their

classrooms improved their instructional preparation. The eighth grade math teacher noted that it

forced her to be more methodical, but she felt that having students with disabilities in her

classroom caused her to cover less of the curriculum content. She noted that it was not just

students with classified learning disabilities that "slowed her down," but also students without

disabilities who struggled with the content. Having students with disabilities and other students

who struggled to master the content in her class prevented her from covering the curriculum in as

much depth as she would have liked. She noted that she tried to hit the same level of depth, but

some of the students with disabilities did not reach the same level of depth as other students.

The sixth grade science teacher stated that it made her put more thought into her

preparation. She believed that having students with disabilities in her classroom did not cause

her to cover less of the curriculum content. She noted that the learning needs of the entire class

dictated how much content she covered and she claimed that she did not move on until she felt

students had a good grasp of the material. She felt that having students with disabilities in her

classroom did not negatively impact the depth of content coverage either.

When the seventh grade social studies teacher prepared for classes that contained students

with disabilities, he tried to put himself in his students' shoes to figure out how the lesson needed

to be presented in order to make the knowledge attainable for all. This teacher stated the belief that he covered the same amount of content with students with disabilities in his classroom. He further noted that having students with disabilities in his classroom actually helped him cover content more in-depth. He said that he identified the important pieces of knowledge that he wanted students to acquire and those pieces of knowledge drove his instruction. He decided how he would make those pieces of knowledge accessible to all students and structured his lessons accordingly.

Adaptations

None of the three teachers made adaptations for individual students with disabilities for any of the activities, assignments, or assessments in their classrooms. The eighth grade math teacher stated that over the years she had learned to do a better job in selecting specific problems for students to complete for homework. In her pre-observation interview, the eighth grade math teacher claimed she gave students with disabilities "the same basic assignment, but less problems" for homework; observations revealed no evidence of this. Depending on the number of problems assigned the night before, she modified the scoring for the homework for the entire class.

The sixth grade science teacher stated that she modified instruction and assignments not only for students with disabilities, but for all students so that higher achieving students would get what they needed as well. She claimed that if students with disabilities failed an assignment, she would call them up to her desk, ask them the questions they missed, and allow them to provide a verbal response. During my time in the sixth grade science classroom, observations did not reveal evidence of modified work. All of the work that was assigned and assessed was the same

for both students with and without disabilities. Students were not observed providing any verbal responses to assignments or assessments.

Adapting assignments in order to allow students to successfully attempt and complete them is vital to addressing the needs of all students in the classroom, not just those with diagnosed disabilities. Varying assignments and assessments allows teachers to obtain a complete and accurate picture of individual student progress (Nougaret et al., 2005). The seventh grade social studies teacher looked at assessment in a couple of different ways. It provided him with a measure of how the students were doing, but assessment also helped him gauge how he was doing as a teacher. He noted that if his class average was 60%, then he was doing something wrong. This teacher stated that some teachers were proud of poor performance, because they felt like they had made their class difficult. The seventh grade social studies teacher talked about how some students have said to him that his class was easy. His response to them was, "I'm not trying to make it hard. If you get what I'm teaching you, then we're doing good." This teacher assessed student learning through quizzes, tests, writing, oral presentations, and other project-based assessments.

Conclusions

All three teachers in this study stated the belief that students with disabilities should be included in general education classrooms and their adherence to the use of many of the characteristics of inclusive education reflected that belief. The implementation of the characteristics of inclusive education varied from classroom to classroom. All three teachers developed instructional strategies and classroom environments that they believed were effective in meeting the needs of all learners. One teacher utilized a wide range of strategies and

structures on a daily basis; a second teacher used a small number of varied strategies but

implemented them on a consistent basis; the third teacher utilized a number of different

strategies, but they were not used consistently and did not always seem to have an anchor.

The ultimate goal of examining the quality of program delivery is to assess the extent to

which a teacher approached the theoretical ideal of the practice under examination (Dusenbury,

Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003). Research revealed that two of the teachers established

classroom learning environments that reflected many of the ideals of inclusive education, while

the third fell short in a number of areas. All three teachers initially appeared to be extremely

responsive to the practice of inclusion, but only two of the teachers remained engaged in the

inclusive education process over the course of the entire study. The third teacher's engagement

in the inclusive education process, and education in general, waned over the course of the study.

Research has shown that even within a single district, inclusive education can vary from

building to building and classroom to classroom (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Villa &

Thousand, 2003). This was no different at this school as inclusive education was different in

each classroom. One teacher had the in-class support of both a special education teacher and a

paraprofessional. Another teacher had the in-class support of three paraprofessionals and the

third teacher had no in-class supports. Furthermore, each teacher was left on his/her own to

make sense of inclusive education and therefore, each developed their own unique approach to

the development of an inclusive classroom.

Evidence showed that the three teachers in this study successfully implemented many of

the defining characteristics of inclusive education, but research also revealed that teachers were

largely on their own to implement strategies representative of inclusive education. Success or

failure of inclusive education at this middle school was dependent upon individual teacher effort and commitment.

Implications for Practice

The high standards set forth by IDEA and NCLB place increased demands upon educators as they are held accountable for ensuring that students meet predetermined standards of achievement on local curricular standards and state-mandated assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This research yielded important information pertaining to what middle school teachers, based on their preparation, training, and support, were able to do while facing high standards of accountability from outside agencies and school administration (Darling-Hammond; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Smith & Tyler, 2011). These three teachers faced the task of making mandated curriculum interesting, relevant, and accessible to all students in their general education classroom. With that in mind, teachers designed their lessons to include a mixture of instructional strategies to make the mastery of curriculum content attainable by all learners.

The three teachers in the study were dedicated professionals who want their students to be successful. However, teachers like them and the professionals who support them within the classroom, need opportunities to increase their knowledge, understanding, and implementation of inclusive practices within their classrooms. Inclusion is based upon the notion that changes in general education classrooms are imperative in order to create an optimal learning environment for all students (TASH, 2011). Connecting theory to practice, providing mentors for new or beginning teachers, and getting teachers and staff members to buy-in to the development of collaborative relationships could further enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of the

inclusive practice and improve their ability to enhance the learning environment for students with disabilities (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Smith & Tyler, 2011).

New teachers are faced with the same outside pressures outlined above, but lack the teaching experience to effectively include students with disabilities from the start. Research has revealed that, over time, general education teachers developed a greater knowledge and skill base for teaching students with disabilities (Burstein et al., 2004). In light of this, new teachers should be assigned a mentor teacher who has demonstrated effectiveness in including students with disabilities in his/her classroom. This teacher can lend support, provide concrete strategies, and offer suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the new teacher's inclusion of students with disabilities. Furthermore, they need the support of their administration (Smith & Tyler, 2011).

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. Research was conducted using only three teachers in a single middle school. Therefore, my results are not representative of a general group and cannot be generalized to an entire population. For this study only the three classroom teachers were interviewed about inclusion. Conversations with the principal were limited to discussions about programs, grants, and other items related to the middle school; not items related to inclusion. Other stakeholders in the inclusion process such as the special education teacher, paraprofessionals, students, parents, or other school personnel were not interviewed or observed.

This was a qualitative case study conducted in an uncontrolled environment. Therefore, cause and effect could not be determined; behaviors could be described, but not explained. During the course of the study a lot of evidence and data pertaining to the three teachers and their

classrooms was gathered, but much of that information was omitted from the write up. Furthermore, during data gathering, analysis, and write-up, the researcher made judgments regarding the significance of the data. It would be nearly impossible to make transparent all of the judgments that were made throughout the research process. Finally, it was difficult to present a truly representative picture of all of the complex operations of a classroom in writing.

Call for Further Research

The inclusion of secondary school students with disabilities in general education classrooms presents a considerable challenge. Factors such as a wide range of skill levels, high number of students seen in a day, content specific training, and curriculum demands contribute to teacher difficulties in developing effective inclusion in secondary schools. Further complicating the inclusion process is the fact that secondary school teachers are typically prepared as content-area specialists who emphasize the teaching of specific subject matter (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000).

Over the last several years, there has been a significant increase in secondary inclusion research, but much of that research is survey research. Case studies of inclusive education are limited. Implementing this study on a wider scale to include students, general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, parents, and administrators would provide an in-depth look at the inner workings of schools and would offer significant contributions to the field of special education. It would allow researchers and practitioners alike to more closely examine and understand the complexities of meeting diverse needs in secondary classrooms.

While inclusion research in middle school and secondary settings remains scant, there is extensive research on successful inclusion practices that could be generalized to middle school and secondary settings with little effort. Furthermore, an extensive research base pertaining to effective ways to utilize paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and other in-class support systems already exists. The benefits and barriers to the development of those collaborative relationships between faculty and staff are widely known as well. What could use further research is what school districts need to do in order to get teachers and staff members to exert the time, effort, and energy necessary to develop those collaborative relationships. Furthermore, once teachers have bought-in to the development of those collaborative relationships, there is a need for research pertaining to the sustainability of those collaborative efforts and its resulting impact on the inclusive classroom.

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