



Teaching the Teachers: A Study of Perceived Professional Development Needs of Educators to Enhance Positive Attitudes toward Inclusive Practices

Sandra A. Shady

Perkiomen Valley School District

Vicki L. Luther[†]

Middle Georgia State College

Laila J. Richman

Towson University

In recent years, inclusive practices have been widely promoted in educational settings, and as a result of this movement, a growing number of students with disabilities, particularly those with learning disabilities, are now served in general education classrooms. Yet while inclusion can be extremely beneficial, many students are placed with teachers who have little or no training in inclusive practices. The purpose of this study was to determine educators' perceptions of inclusion and to identify specific professional development needs of both general and special education teachers in one elementary school in the United States.

Introduction

Since the enactment of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the United States has undergone a profound transformation in its efforts to provide a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

[†] Address for correspondence: Dr. Vicki L. Luther, School of Education, Middle Georgia State College, Macon, GA. Email: vicki.luther@maconstate.edu.

In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was legislated. This federal law has been reauthorized a number of times, most recently in 2004. Through the current IDEA (PL 108-446) there are 13 recognized disability categories, and persons who qualify for special education services under these categories are entitled to a wide variety of educational programs and support amenities in public school settings. A principal requirement of the IDEA is that all children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate for meeting the individual needs of each learner (Latham, Latham, and Mandlawitz, 2008). The law, therefore, is very clear on this matter: Children should only be removed from a general educational environment when the disability is such that satisfactory learning could not be achieved in the confines of a regular classroom setting.

Years have passed since the reauthorization of IDEA, yet there is still much debate centered on whether children with disabilities should be taught alongside children who do not receive special education services and just how exclusive the education of children with exceptionalities should be (Osgood, 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) furthered these conversations through new accountability requirements for students with special needs. With the mandates currently stipulated by NCLB (2001), schools must demonstrate that students in third through eighth grades are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at 100% proficiency by the 2013/2014 academic year. In an effort to meet the requirements of both NCLB and IDEA, a large percentage of schools are providing special education instruction in the general education classroom, thus making the inclusion of children with disabilities more and more commonplace.

Inclusive education, by its very definition, implies that those with disabilities are given support and instruction in age-appropriate classrooms and within the framework of the core curriculum while also receiving the specialized instruction allocated in Individualized Education Programs (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001). One fundamental component of inclusive practices is to prepare all students to be productive members of society (The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995).

Inclusive practices allow students to become full members of a classroom community, thus allowing them to develop both academically and socially. According to King (2003), inclusion allows for students to have a sense of “belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff” (p. 152).

Yet while inclusion can be extremely beneficial, many students are placed with teachers who have little or no training in inclusive practices. For any school environment that is trying to implement a process requiring a change from the status quo, such as making a transition toward inclusion, it is critical that staff have an understanding of, and support for, the initiative. According to Nolan (2005), inclusion is more than allowing people with and without disabilities to participate in the same activity. In order for inclusive services to be successful, inclusion must be a value that is shared by all parties involved.

In many instances, the inclusion of students with special learning needs in the classroom is supported through co-teaching arrangements. Co-teaching can be defined as “the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs” (Cook & Friend, 2010, p. 11). Through co-teaching arrangements, the requirements of both NCLB and IDEA can be met while still providing students with disabilities the specially designed instruction and supports to which they are entitled (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Research has found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining co-teaching in schools (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Indubitably, teachers must be adequately trained on effective co-teaching practices in order for inclusion to be successful and for students to receive the best education possible. According to a study by Daane, Beirne-Smith, and Latham (2000), teachers who lacked the training and skills necessary for co-teaching reported significant difficulties implementing the co-teaching model. Teachers who work in

inclusive settings need substantial training in the knowledge and skills required to collaborate effectively. Friend et al. (2010) not only recommend enhanced professional development opportunities to support teachers entering collaborative relationships, but they also posit that these teachers should attend the professional development sessions together for optimal benefit.

Teaching students with disabilities can be daunting to educators who do not feel prepared to do so. The results of a study conducted by Pindiprolu, Peterson, and Bergloff (2007) revealed that general education teachers identified teaching strategies as one of their top three developmental needs when working with students with disabilities. Often, general education teachers are required to take very few special education courses while in college, and even in today's teacher preparation programs, many of the special education courses offered are introductory in nature and provide little in the way of instructional strategies (Maccini & Gagnon, 2006). In a study conducted by Fuchs (2009/2010), general education teachers who participated gave "lack of pre-service preparation" as one of three main reasons that they have difficulty working in inclusive settings. Participants who were interviewed for the study said that they were not taught how to "differentiate instruction, make accommodations in the classroom, or work with special education support staff" while in their respective teacher preparation programs (Fuchs, 2009/2010, p. 34).

While teacher preparation programs cannot always adequately train pre-service teachers for every situation that may occur in the classroom, there are many professional development training programs that can be extremely beneficial for those working in inclusive settings. Professional development is critical for high quality educators, as a lack of in-depth training greatly diminishes teachers' effectiveness in the classroom (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). Dahle (2003) places a strong emphasis on the need for teachers to be properly trained in understanding students' disabilities. Professional development workshops positively impact teachers' abilities to teach students with specific learning disorders; however, according to DeSimone and Parmar (2006), these

professional development opportunities are often not offered on a regular basis. A lack of professional development prospects can result in a continual cycle of teachers feeling frustrated in their abilities to teach in inclusive settings.

Attitude is another important element of successful inclusive practices. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices since the mere acceptance of inclusion is likely to affect the teachers' commitment to its implementation. Educators' attitudes are also pivotal in determining whether or not all students, especially students with special needs, will feel accepted in the classroom. Prior research studies (Berryman, 1989; Bacon & Schulz, 1991; Barton, 1992) have suggested that general education teachers often lack an understanding of disabilities and are frequently not supportive of the placement of students with special needs in the general education setting. In their American attitude studies, which include survey reports conducted throughout a time span of almost four decades (1958-1995), Scruggs and Mastopieri (1996) reported that while 65% of teachers surveyed are in agreement with the basic concept of inclusive practices, only 40% believe that integrating students with disabilities into the general education environment is realistic. One of the most critical findings in Scruggs and Mastopieri's research is that the attitudes of teachers have remained consistent and have remained virtually unchanged through the years (1996).

In another study, Downing and Williams (1997) interviewed elementary school principals, regular education teachers, and special education teachers within one school district to determine their perceptions toward inclusive education. When asked to discuss what barriers existed that prevented full inclusion, the most frequently mentioned barrier was negative attitudes of general education teachers, special education teachers, or parents. These attitudes were directly linked to a fear of how best to incorporate students with disabilities into the regular education environment. Vanderfaeillie, Fever, and Lombaerts (2003) believe that attitudes and beliefs are a critical part of the implementation of inclusion, and that those teachers who believe that inclusion is best for students will do their part to ensure its

success. Those who have negative feelings toward the inclusion of students with disabilities often act negatively in the classroom, thus affecting student learning and overall well-being (Fuchs, 2009/2010).

The Study

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher attitudes toward and perceptions of inclusive education programs. More specifically, this action research project used teacher perceptions about inclusion and their needs for professional development as a basis for more effectively implementing and supporting an inclusive approach to education. The action research framework provided for the engagement and collaboration of teachers in a manner that was open to their suggestions and viewpoints and not critical of their opinions. This study of educators' attitudes and professional development needs took place at a small elementary school in the United States.

For years, students who qualified for special education in this school, which houses kindergarten through fifth grade, were instructed either through a pull-out program or an inclusive setting. School officials determined that all students would best benefit from the general classroom environment instead of a more restrictive pull out program and began the move toward full inclusion. Special education teachers, as well as reading and math support teachers, were expected to supply their services within the general education classroom rather than taking their students to a separate location. Many teachers were extremely concerned with this, since they were unaccustomed to co-teaching and knew very little about inclusion. If inclusive practices were to be successful at this school, collecting data regarding the perceived professional development needs of those responsible for making inclusion work for both regular and special education students was essential.

Method

This study used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods in an action research design to assess teacher perceptions of inclusive educational programming prior to, during, and at the

completion of the first year inclusion implementation. Mixed methods not only expand the research, but also provide the opportunity for synthesis of research traditions and give the investigator additional perspectives and insights that are beyond the scope of any single technique (Börkan, 2010). Action research was used to improve the conditions of the school while helping teachers to detect problems and gauge their own teaching methods.

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used for questionnaire items that employed numerical scales. Thematic analysis was used to code and analyze the open-ended responses from the questionnaires. The written teacher responses to each question on the survey were compared and analyzed for central themes that in turn were used to determine the types of trainings offered during the school year.

Twenty-one general education teachers, six special education teachers, and seven specialty area teachers who worked in this small elementary school participated in the surveys ($N=34$). The seven specialty area teachers who participated included three reading support teachers, one math support teacher, one librarian, one counselor, and one art teacher. Table 1 provides further details on the participants in the study ($n = 34$). At each of the first and second grades, there was one general and special education inclusive classroom; at each of the third to fifth grades, there were two.

Although only one-half of the teaching staff, including support teachers, worked in inclusive classroom settings during the school year, it was very important that all teachers had the opportunity to be involved in this study; capturing teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward working in inclusive environments was paramount in determining the beneficial professional development sessions.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Participants*

Grade Level	% Total	Gender % of Grade Level		Mean Yrs. of Experience By Grade Level
		Female	Male	
Kindergarten (n=1)	3%	100		3.0
First Grade (n=5)	15%	80	20	12.7
Second Grade (n=5)	15%	60	40	11.4
Third Grade (n=5)	15%	80	20	13.0
Fourth Grade (n=6)	18%	100		7.0
Fifth Grade (n=5)	15%	80	20	7.6
Support Staff (n=7)	21%	86	14	15.4

*The numbers for grade levels include both general education and special education teachers.

Survey Instruments

Two survey instruments were developed to gather data for this study; one was given prior to the beginning of the school year to determine teacher attitudes and needs regarding the provision of educational services for both general and special education students within the same classroom, while another survey was given at the end of the school year. Topics on the survey instruments included teacher attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion, whether or not staff felt they had the time to properly implement an inclusion program, and the impact inclusion would have on instructional methods and content. All data collection was done anonymously with the intent of obtaining honest and reflective responses, and was presented to school administrators and the focus group only in aggregate form. As a result of the anonymity the inclusion surveys afforded, teachers had the opportunity to be truly candid on their viewpoints toward inclusion.

Items on the pre-implementation survey were similar to those used by York, Tundifor, and Orcutt (1992), who administered a survey to staff and community members when the St. Paul, Minnesota, Public School System was implementing an inclusive approach to education. The initial survey consisted of questions based on a five-point Likert scale as well as open-ended response questions; through these questions, participants were asked to expound on

their personal understanding of inclusion, to give suggestions for how to effectively make time to communicate and collaborate with one another, and to give insight into which components of inclusion or special education they wanted to learn more about.

Pre-Implementation Focus Group

Following the analysis of initial survey results, 12 teachers, representing both general and special education, volunteered to participate in a focus group session to help shape a professional development program based on the obtained survey results. This step was taken to give the instructional staff a sense of ownership in the planning of professional development. The focus group included ten females and two males. Eight were regular education teachers and four were special education teachers, and of these, seven had prior inclusion experience while five had no previous inclusion experience. An interview protocol was developed to guide the focus group session. This interview process, which allowed group members to talk freely, assisted in determining how best to present professional development training activities.

Professional Development Training

Training was based upon identified needs from the initial surveys and input from the focus group. Professional development sessions began at the start of the school year. At several points in the school year, the teaching staff was able to participate in workshops and training sessions. The benefits of inclusion, characteristics of what inclusive practices entail, different instructional methods, and various co-teaching methods were all focal topics during these trainings. Teachers were also afforded the opportunity to have in-classroom experiential learning opportunities. Most of these visits involved discussions with staff members on what they felt was and was not working within their inclusive classrooms. In addition, each grade level met during the school year to discuss which instructional strategies they felt were working and in which areas they felt more support and information was needed.

Following the professional development training sessions, another survey was administered to assess the effectiveness of the training and to document further professional needs related to successful inclusive practices. This second survey, given at the end of the school year, was similar, though not identical, to the initial survey, and also included open ended response questions which allowed teachers more of an opportunity to share their suggestions and opinions in regard to their experiences with inclusive educational programming. Data from the survey were used to determine if the training provided was helpful and to identify any further professional development needs so that additional trainings could be implemented during the following academic year. This post-implementation survey was also modeled after one used in the study of St. Paul Public Schools (York, Tundifor, & Orcutt, 1992).

Results and Discussion

Teachers who participated in the survey process had the opportunity to discuss the various types of professional development experiences they felt would be beneficial to their inclusion efforts. On the survey given prior to the beginning of the school year (the “pre-inclusion” survey), only 19% of teachers said that they felt prepared to implement inclusion. Most felt they needed more information about inclusion; only 26% of the teachers did not feel a need for professional development. And while 55% of the teachers felt that it would not be difficult to modify their teaching styles to accommodate students with special needs, only 15% of the teachers felt that they had the necessary resources to successfully implement inclusion in their own classrooms.

Because both general and special education teachers were not aware of how to successfully implement inclusive practices in classroom settings, over half of the participants (52%) were skeptical about whether students with special needs would receive a better education through inclusion, and one-third felt that these students would lose vital services by not being “pulled out” to a separate and more restrictive environment. However, most teachers (74%) believed that students with disabilities would be exposed to positive role models as a result of inclusion. Table 2

shows results from the pre-assessment of teacher attitudes toward inclusion and perceptions of professional development needs ($n = 34$).

Open-Ended Questions

Study participants were also given the opportunity to give insight into what components of inclusion they wished to know more about. The results of the open-ended questions for the “pre-inclusion” survey fell into three categories. The first category involved the logistical aspects of the inclusive educational programming. Teachers wanted information on how best to grade students, how to plan for ability levels, and how to handle the instructional responsibilities of each professional within the room.

The second category dealt specifically with special education; teachers wanted to know more about reading and writing IEPs, instructional teaching strategies for specific disabilities, learning styles, and how to differentiate instruction so that all students were challenged and successful. The third category dealt with the proper pacing of curriculum. Teachers wanted to know how to motivate the students while also delivering instruction in a slower, more thorough manner. Teachers reflected a need for training on various types of inclusion models and how to tailor a model to meet the teaching and learning styles within the inclusive classrooms of the school.

Pre-Implementation Focus Group Results

A pre-implementation focus group was held to discuss the survey results and to give feedback. The focus group interview was conducted in one face-to-face session. Participants were asked a series of questions and were given the time and opportunity to respond and discuss with one another, and the focus group responses yielded the following qualitative evidence.

Table 2. *Pre-Assessment of Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion and Perceptions of Professional Development Needs*

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>Md.</i>	% Disagree	<i>Mid.</i> <i>Pt.</i>	% Agree
I feel that inclusion will lead to positive changes in the educational system.	3.18	4.00	22.22	33.33	44.44
I feel inclusion benefits students without disabilities.	2.96	2.00	40.74	25.92	33.33
I feel inclusion benefits students with disabilities.	3.37	4.00	14.81	37.03	48.14
I feel that students with disabilities would receive a better education in a special education classroom.	3.33	3.00	11.11	54.85	33.33
I feel that I have the training to implement inclusion successfully.	2.59	3.00	44.44	37.03	18.51
I feel that I will cover less of the curriculum because of inclusion.	3.07	3.00	40.74	14.81	44.44
I feel that students with special needs will lose the specialized services they need as a result of inclusion.	3.11	3.00	22.22	48.14	29.62
I feel that it is difficult to modify instruction and my teaching style to meet the needs of students with disabilities.	2.48	2.00	55.55	33.33	18.51
I feel that inclusion provides students with disabilities positive role models.	3.96	4.00	11.11	14.81	74.07
I feel that inclusion is working/can work in my class.	3.33	3.00	11.11	51.85	37.03
I feel I have the time to implement inclusion effectively.	2.77	3.00	44.44	33.33	22.22
I feel that I receive the necessary support from administration to implement inclusion effectively.	3.40	3.00	18.51	40.74	40.74
I feel that I receive the necessary support and assistance from other teachers to implement inclusion successfully.	3.00	3.00	25.92	48.14	25.92
I feel that I have the resources to implement inclusion successfully.	2.81	3.00	44.44	40.74	14.81
I feel that I have been sufficiently involved in the inclusion process in my school.	2.74	3.00	40.74	48.14	11.11
I feel that I do not have enough time to communicate and collaborate with others.	3.33	3.00	29.62	11.11	59.25
I feel like I need more information about inclusion.	3.59	4.00	25.92	14.81	48.14

Is an inclusive approach to education a good idea? Responses to this question highlighted both positive and negative aspects of inclusion. The general consensus in regard to this question was that to make a broad statement that an inclusive approach to education is a good idea would be misleading. Participants felt that when it came to inclusive educational practices, it really should be a case-by-case scenario and criteria should be developed in order to determine which students are best suited for inclusive educational programs.

An overwhelming number of focus group members held the belief that inclusion does not fit all students. Interestingly, most of the participants (10 out of the 12) felt not every student with special needs would benefit from inclusion. Focus group members also felt that inclusive practices would vary from grade to grade. Participants did highlight the fact that students, especially low-achieving and special needs students, benefit greatly from having two professionals in the room to help individualize and differentiate instruction.

What challenges do you think you will encounter when working with other adults in the classroom? The general consensus emerging in the responses to this question revolved around both professionals trusting one another to be honest and understanding. Focus group members discussed the importance of professionalism on the part of both the general and special education teacher. If the classroom environment between the two professionals does not yield a trusting relationship, no matter how effective both teachers may be, the situation will not be successful. Another challenge highlighted by the participants dealt with the concern that teachers tend to be individuals and that individuality can be stifled or suppressed by other professionals in the classroom.

Teacher flexibility was also highlighted as a possible challenge. Some members believed teachers must be aware that each individual educator has his or her own style and technique, strengths, and weaknesses, and he or she should never be asked to

compromise their individuality to conform to his or her partner's approach to instruction.

When asked to discuss how to best create classroom teams and to develop trust among co-teachers, focus group members believed that the administrative team needed to allow time in the schedule for team members to collaborate with one another. They also felt that a friendship between the two teaching partners needed to be fostered. When it came to discussing how to develop trust, the focus group thought that it was vital for each team member to be afforded the opportunity of observing their inclusive partner. This could help each team member recognize how teaching styles and techniques might be combined. However, each inclusion team member must be open to this type of observation. Focus group members also suggested that trust could be fostered if each team member had the opportunity to go and observe other inclusion classes so that as a team, they could determine what inclusive methods would work best in their shared classroom.

What benefits do you think will occur for both general education and special education students as a result of an inclusive approach to education? While discussing this question, participants highlighted how inclusive classrooms can offer extra support to both special education and general education students. With this support, lower achieving students who are not necessarily identified with special education needs may find comfort knowing that there are others who struggle with various elements of learning.

Focus group participants also discussed the fact that students in special education have the opportunity to identify and socialize with their general education peers in an inclusive setting. Too often students with special needs have difficulty associating with general education students when they are pulled from their regular classroom environment to a smaller, more restrictive classroom. Inclusive education provides an opportunity for all students to coexist. Also mentioned was the benefit that inclusion provides a greater understanding of learning styles for the members within a particular classroom.

Teaching the teachers

However, some negative factors also were discussed. Those included the realization that with inclusion there is more of an opportunity for students to be ridiculed or teased based on their learning differences. Many focus group participants said that they do not believe that the benefits of inclusion are worth the anguish or frustration that students with special needs may endure.

What affect will inclusion have on attention to the various groups (general education students, students with special needs) within the classroom? The majority of participants felt this question dealt with how both teachers within the classroom need to be proactive and prepared to establish an environment that enables all students to be successful. When teachers work together within an inclusive classroom and establish an environment that addresses the needs of both disabled and non-disabled students, this should yield positive results. The focus group felt strongly that the special education teacher should not always be the one working with the students receiving special education services. Time should be shared between teachers and various student groups so that students learn to respect and recognize each adult as one of their instructors.

The concern that students with special needs might not receive the necessary individualized instruction was also discussed. Too often inclusive classrooms focus on getting through the curriculum quickly rather than providing an opportunity for students to relearn a skill or strategy. There was the concern that this would negatively impact special education students.

Will students have the opportunity to grow academically, socially and emotionally in an inclusive setting? As in any classroom, inclusive or not, the majority of the focus group felt that in order for any type of growth to occur, a classroom environment which fostered and supported such growth must be established. If that environment did not accept individuality or learning differences but favored conformity, students would not have the opportunities to grow academically, socially, or emotionally.

Post-Inclusion Survey

On the post-inclusion survey, teachers were asked to determine their comfort levels with inclusion. These survey results reveal that the teachers at this elementary school felt they had the necessary training to teach in inclusive settings but had less positive feelings toward inclusion. In general, they were less enthusiastic about the positive benefits of inclusion despite the fact that they felt better prepared to teach in an inclusion setting. Notable is the change in the percent of teachers who felt inclusion would lead to positive changes in the educational systems (44% prior to the implementation year and 12% following the year of implementation). Sadly, the vast majority of teachers (84%) disagreed with the notion that inclusion provides students with disabilities with positive role models. This is a sharp contrast to the 74% of teachers who, on the pre-assessment survey, agreed that students with disabilities would be exposed to positive role models as a result of inclusion. While many teachers (64%) felt they had the training necessary to implement inclusion successfully, only 28% felt inclusion worked well in their classroom. Table 3 shows the post-assessment of teacher attitudes toward inclusion and perceptions of professional development needs, while Table 4 includes a comparison of pre and post survey means (both with $ns = 34$).

Open-Ended Questions

According to the responses of the open-ended questions, professional development training was beneficial but many teachers specified that it should be ongoing. When asked to determine topics dealing with inclusion they still would like more information about, staff members overwhelmingly stated that they feel that they still need training on how to effectively differentiate instruction and provide accommodations to all students. This represents the need for continued professional development for the staff.

Teaching the teachers

Table 3. *Post-Assessment of Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion and Perceptions of Professional Development Needs*

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>Md.</i>	% Disagree	<i>Mid.</i> <i>Pt.</i>	% Agree
I feel that inclusion will lead to positive changes in the educational system.	2.37	2.00	64.00	24.00	12.00
I feel that inclusion benefits students without disabilities.	2.82	3.00	48.00	24.00	28.00
I feel that I had the training to implement inclusion successfully.	3.55	4.00	24.00	12.00	64.00
I feel that inclusion provides students with disabilities with positive role models.	2.00	2.00	84.00	8.00	8.00
I feel that inclusion is working/can work well in my class.	2.72	3.00	36.00	36.00	28.00
I feel that I have the time to implement inclusion effectively.	3.41	3.00	16.00	32.00	52.00
I feel that I receive the necessary support and assistance from administrative personnel to implement inclusion successfully.	3.10	3.00	28.00	16.00	56.00
I feel that I have the resources to implement inclusion successfully.	3.17	3.00	32.00	20.00	48.00
I feel that I have been sufficiently involved in the inclusion process in my school.	2.79	3.00	44.00	20.00	36.00
I feel that I have the necessary support and assistance from other teachers to implement inclusion successfully.	3.10	3.00	36.00	32.00	32.00
I feel that I do not have enough time to communicate and collaborate with others.	2.68	2.00	52.00	20.00	28.00
I feel like I need more information about inclusion.	2.69	3.00	44.00	40.00	16.00

Table 4. *Comparison Chart of Pre and Post Survey Means*

Question	Pre Survey <i>M</i>	Post Survey <i>M</i>
I feel that inclusion will lead to positive changes in the educational system.	3.18	2.37
I feel that inclusion benefits students without disabilities.	2.96	2.82
I feel that inclusion provides students with disabilities positive role models.	3.96	2.00
I feel that I have the training to implement inclusion successfully.	2.59	3.55
I feel that inclusion is working/can work in my class.	3.33	2.72
I feel that I have the time to implement inclusion effectively.	2.77	3.41
I feel that I have the resources to implement inclusion successfully.	2.81	3.17
I feel that I have been sufficiently involved in the inclusion process in my school.	2.74	2.79
I feel that I receive the necessary support and assistance from other teachers to implement inclusion successfully.	3.00	3.10
I feel that I do not have enough time to communicate and collaborate with others.	3.33	2.68
I feel like I need more information about inclusion.	3.59	2.69

Although there were fewer teachers at the end of the year who felt the need for information on inclusion (3.59 on the pre-inclusion survey; 2.69 on the post-inclusion survey), the responses acknowledge that professional development is essential if inclusive practices are to improve. Some teachers expressed a desire to annually receive updates on current trends in inclusion, and others felt that they need more support in knowing how to effectively instruct in small-group settings. Overall, responses from the teaching staff showed that many felt the need for further training and resources on how to effectively differentiate instruction and provide accommodations to all students in the inclusive classroom.

Summary

The information from the pre and post surveys indicates that the teaching staff in this elementary school is a bit undecided about the benefits of inclusion and whether they themselves want to teach in inclusive settings. A greater number of teachers did specify on the post-inclusion survey that they now have the training and resources to implement inclusion successfully, yet certain mean scores indicate that some teachers are still quite hesitant to proceed with inclusive programming and that some members of the teaching staff are willing to implement future inclusive programs while others are not. Some teachers had very positive comments about inclusion, while others were much more negative in their remarks. Several of the participants commented on how difficult it was for them to “marry” general education and special education into one classroom, stating that they did not realize how difficult it would be and that frustration levels rose throughout the school year. Even with these factors, however, it is important to recognize that the outcomes of this study prove that teachers cannot simply be told to teach in inclusive settings without support and guidance; instead, they must be shown best inclusive practices through carefully orchestrated developmental seminars, workshops, and informative sessions. Teachers must learn how to co-teach and work together with other educators in one classroom.

Many students with disabilities, particularly those with learning disabilities, are being served in general education classrooms with teachers who have little or no training in inclusive education. Special education teachers are not immune; while colleges and universities teach the characteristics of disabilities and federal laws, many do not address the idea of how to teach effectively in inclusive settings with much depth or opportunities for practice. Educators frequently have negative perceptions to new initiatives, and these attitudes can often be attributed to a lack of understanding and a fear of what is unknown. If educators and future educators learn more about inclusive practices early in their careers or in pre-service learning environments, perhaps the attitudes toward inclusion will be more positive in nature.

The results of this study indicate that a greater percentage of the participants did feel more knowledgeable about inclusive practices due to the professional development opportunities they were given, but had a less favorable opinion of inclusive practices. Research findings of Scruggs and Mastopieri (1996) found that while teachers may agree with inclusion in general, they often do not feel that it will work in their own classrooms. This is similar to the responses of some of the teachers represented in this study. The results of this study indicate that, as with any new initiative, more work is yet to be done if inclusion is to be a successful practice in this elementary school.

It is important to note that while useful information was taken from these results, there were some limitations to this study. Due to the fact that the study lasted only one year, it is impossible to determine whether or not the teachers in inclusive settings were able to take the information presented during professional development workshops to improve in their co-teaching endeavors. Similarly, it is unclear as to whether the participants of the study actively sought out professional development opportunities once this study was completed. It is also difficult to determine if teachers were simply tired from a long school year, causing some of the post-inclusion responses to be less positive in nature.

It is unfair and unrealistic to expect teachers to have positive attitudes toward any initiative, especially inclusive practices, without first giving them proper training and guidance. In order for inclusion to work, teachers need to be constantly informed on inclusion programming and on trends and best practices in both general and special education. Active, informative, and engaging professional development opportunities will be extremely beneficial to educators, and, most importantly, to the students in the inclusive settings in which they teach.

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