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Survey of Educator Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education within a Southern Arizona School District

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Inclusive Education for students with special educational needs is a global phenomenon, a major event of momentous proportions affecting directly and indirectly a significant percentage of the world's population. In response to international and national mandates requiring its implementation, educators everywhere are engaged in the daily task of providing educational services within inclusive general education classroom settings. It is expected that inclusion in the United States will become more prevalent in classrooms across the nation over the next ten years due to progressively more stringent federal and state mandates. In order for inclusion to result in adequate yearly progress for all student subgroups, it is imperative that it be properly implemented. Research has established that a critical component for proper implementation is an understanding of baseline attitudes in regard to inclusive education held by educators. The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes of pre-K-12 general and special education teachers, school site administrators, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, certified non-teaching, school office staff and special education office staff in a medium sized school district in southern Arizona. This study examines the attitudes held by educators, their foundations of knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions that shape their attitudes, and potential recommendations for implementation strategies that are predicted to be successful by these educators.

Many nations around the world have adopted national and/or international mandates calling for inclusive education (IE) for students with special educational needs (SEN; Taneja Johansson, 2014; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014; Yong-Wook, 2014). There remains some question as to how the process of alignment and reorganization is being received by professional educators responsible for the operationalization of these policies (Mitchell, 2005; Tenorio Eitel, 2005). Research suggests that educational reform is complicated due to the fact that in many nations it has taken the form of a top down process with little input from key stakeholders (Fletcher & Artiles, 2005). It is

not certain the degree to which these mandated reforms filtered down to school districts, schools and classrooms while transforming the practices of educators engaged in the day-to-day education of students with SEN.

All over the world, arguments abound surrounding the nature and importance of IE juxtaposing those in favor and those in opposition; those arguments against it are inclined to be practical ones, while those supporting IE tend to be philosophical ones. These claims are influenced not only by the ideals that the individual writers bring to their research, but also by the motivations and orientations that envelop the issue of social change in their own societies.

Inclusion or Inclusive Education

Inclusion and IE are terms often used synonymously and are frequently applied when referring to educational programs for students with disabilities included in the general education classroom setting. Both terms came into common usage resulting from worldwide discussions which sought to reduce segregation within mainstream schooling (Communication for Social Change [CFRSC], 2010). In recent years, the terms inclusion and IE have been utilized by the Education for All (EFA) movement to refer to all children who are excluded and marginalized from basic mainstream schooling, not only in relation to right of entry to schooling, but also with respect to access to rights within the schooling process. Once centered on the *special needs* of learners, the term IE has evolved to include a whole process, which speaks to the diversity of all (Shaeffer, 2010). UNESCO has characterized inclusive education as a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centers of learning. The inclusive school would provide inclusive educational practices that respond to the various needs of all learners. This would include boys and girls, students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, rural communities, those with HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and other learning challenges (UNESCO, 2009).

Theoretical Background and Justification for Inclusive Education

Social scientists, researchers and educational practitioners among others are time and time again making claims, explicitly and implicitly, about the nature and the *endpoints* of the changes that are needed and wanted. These endpoints would include classroom design, curricular adaptations, fully accessible physical environments, optimization of resources to support teaching staff, development of professional learning communities sustained by ongoing continuous professional development, inclusive school related inclusive pedagogy and collaborative inquiry (Carrington, Deppeler, & Moss, 2010). These claims are influenced not only by the ideals that the individual writers bring to their research, but also by the motivations and orientations that envelop the issue of social change in their own societies, regardless of the political makeup or level of development characterizing those societies. The theoretical background and justification for IE as a social phenomenon is to a large extent dependent on the motivations and orientations that surround the subject of social change in a given society. In fact, the emergence of a biased viewpoint can only be thwarted if it is made explicit and is met head-on with analyses predicated on alternative perspectives. That having been said any purported justification for IE clearly must rest within the sphere of diversity appreciation and social justice.

Importance of Identifying Educators' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education

The issue of identifying educators' perceptions of and attitudes toward inclusive education is important because of the assumption that successful implementation of IE programs depends on educators being positive. Educators' perceptions and attitudes have informed many studies over the past twenty years and have advanced our ever-increasing scope of understanding regarding educational issues (Norwich, 2008; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

An impressive array of researchers, has sought to inform and enlighten the question of inclusion with respect to educators' impressions, attitudes and recommendations (Devecchi, Dettori, Doveston, Sedgwick, & Jament, 2012; DiNuovo, 2012; Ferri, 2008; Kanter, Damiani, & Ferri, 2014; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). General and special education teachers have completed various surveys and questionnaires expressing their opinions and attitudes toward several basic assumptions about inclusion of students with disabilities including the following: perceptions of self-efficacy, professional competence, teaching satisfaction and judgments of the appropriateness of classroom adaptations (Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). It appears that a significant condition for successful IE of students with SEN in the general education classroom is a shift from negative to positive attitudes on the part of the general education teachers toward students with SEN. Another important condition for the successful implementation of IE seems to be the on-going support and assistance to teachers by other educators such as school counselors, administrators, special education teachers, school psychologists, paraprofessionals and others. Frequently, teachers will take their attitudes from the principal and other administrators at their schools. In a study conducted in the US involving principals and teachers concerning inclusion, principals were often more supportive of inclusive programs than the general education teachers they supervised (Cook, 2001). When supported by a proactive administrator, general and special education teachers making the commitment to collaborate, plan and teach together can produce impressive achievement results for their school by including students with SEN in the general education classrooms (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008).

In the Minke et al. study (1996), general education teachers in U.S. mainstream classrooms and general and special education teachers who team-taught students in the inclusive classrooms, responded to a survey of attitudes toward several basic assumptions regarding inclusion of students with mild disabilities; perceptions of self-efficacy, competence and teaching, and satisfaction and judgments of the suitability of classroom adaptations were all considered (Lopes, Monteiro, & Sil, 2004; Ross-Hill, 2009; Ryan, 2009). Special education teachers expressed the most positive perceptions of IE, as well as the highest perception of self-efficacy, competency and satisfaction. General education teachers in the IE classrooms showed a tendency to report opinions comparable to those of their special education counterparts and general classroom teachers in traditional classrooms held the least positive perception in these areas. Other investigators have focused their research efforts on examining the sociopolitical environment and issues confronting elementary school administrators (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001) as they work with public school students and their families toward the goal of inclusion. Interestingly, attitude studies in the US and other

countries have suggested that general educators have not developed an empathetic understanding of disabilities, nor do they appear to be in favor of the placement of students with special educational needs into the general education classroom setting (Fletcher et al., 2010; Loreman, 2007; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008).

Social Implications of Inclusive Education

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research methodologies have been employed to explore this question having to do with educators' perceptions of and attitudes toward inclusion while collecting, organizing, analyzing and interpreting the related data. Considering the international experiences of educational practitioners, many of whom work within Vygotsky's paradigm of special education (Gindis, 1999), it would appear that the social and cultural, developmentally oriented scientific legacy of Vygotsky, which offered the potential to unify, restructure and to promote special and remedial education as a science has also brought to the forefront numerous questions with respect to IE. According to Gindis, Vygotsky alluded to the notion that from the social perspective, the primary problem of a disability is not the sensory or neurological impairment itself, but rather its social implications. Other studies examining international trends in IE have yielded informative data concerning the pros and cons of IE along with its numerous challenges in teaching under the umbrella of integration for all students (Fergusion, 2008; Savich, 2008). In an investigation conducted by Savich the results of the study clearly suggest that students with SEN, even those with severe and multiple disabilities, if given appropriate interventions, can be both integrated and included into general education classes and achieve a measure of academic success.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to identify educators' attitudes regarding inclusive education within a medium sized southern Arizona school district. This study was conducted during the 2011-2012 school year and examined educators' attitudes in Arizona toward the inclusion of students with various disabilities into general education classroom settings and elicits their recommendations for enhancing inclusive education. Inspired by a desire to explore the transnational implications of inclusive education in a U.S. educational context, the authors used a study conducted earlier in Chile (Fletcher et al., 2010) to inform the design of the current study.

Below we specify the research questions guiding our study. In addition, we provide background on the Chilean study and specify the components that were adapted for the exploration in Arizona described in this article. After that, the methods of the current study are detailed.

Research Questions

The central questions of the study are:

1. What are these educators' general attitudes and opinions about the implementation of IE and what are their general recommendations for the implementation of IE in view of recent policy changes in their local school district?

2. Has the implementation process worked or not, as a result of these recent policy changes in their local school district?

3. What recommendations for improvement does this particular cadre of educators suggest for themselves, their colleagues, administrative authorities, district authorities, and governmental jurisdictional authorities?

4. Has inclusive education been a positive experience socially and academically for students with and without disabilities?

Chilean Focus Group Interview Study

In the Latin American country of Chile policymakers on the national level embraced the spirit of the international mandate of IE and put into effect a policy intended to assimilate students with SEN into the general education system, ultimately providing curricular modifications to those students based on their SEN (Ministry of Education, 2005). The authors of this article were part of a team of researchers who conducted a study in Chile to explore educators' perceptions and attitudes of IE in Chilean public schools (Fletcher et al., 2010). This earlier study was conducted within three public educational jurisdictions making up three specific regions of Chile: Vicuña and La Serena, Santiago and Lampa, and Punta Arenas; this approach allowed for broad geographic coverage of the country from north to south. The Chilean educators who participated in the study were comprised of general education teachers, special education teachers, school administrators, physical and occupational therapists and school psychologists representing five educational jurisdictional authorities in three different geographic regions of Chile (Fletcher et al., 2010).

We decided to collect data using educators' focus groups in Arizona, similar to what was done in Chile. The Chilean study also provided an initial framework of themes and definitions (Table 1) and Themes and Categories Matrix (Table 3) used in the current study to examine, code, and quantify the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey and the focus groups. In addition, the earlier study was used to inform the formulation of the survey and focus group interview questions (Appendices A to D).

Table 1

Themes and Definitions from Chilean Focus Group Interview Study

Theme	Definition
General attitudes	What are general attitudes about recent changes in special education laws related to inclusion? Were intentions good? Is inclusion in theory a "good thing"?
Implementation	How has the implementation process been as a result of recent changes in special education laws related to inclusion? Have there been positives/negatives? Does it appear to be working? Why or why not?
Recommendations	What would you recommend for your (i) school; (ii) yourself; (iii) your colleagues and your administrative authority; (iv) your school authority; (v) your local authorities; and (vi) governmental authorities?

Method

Study Site

The study was conducted at the Nopal Unified School District. At the time of the study this southern Arizona district had an enrollment of more than 17,000 students, with over 14% of students qualifying for special education services. Southern Arizona was selected as the geographical setting of this study owing to the absence of similar research in the area. This southern Arizona district takes in an area of 93.6 square miles and is located in the southern part of the city of Tucson as well as areas adjacent including the northern two miles of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Consequently, the district can be considered as both a rural and an urban school district. The district was established in 1921 and is the second largest school district in southern Arizona. At the time of the study, the percentage of students in the district who were identified as minority was 94.4%. Specifically, the ethnic composition of the student body was 87.7% Hispanic, 5.6% Anglo, 4.1% Native American, 2.1% African American, and 0.5% Asian American. Moreover, 86% of the district's students were eligible for free or reduced meals and about one-third of the students were classified as English Language Learners (ELL).

Participants

An invitation was extended to the entire cadre of educators employed by this southern Arizona school district, which included personnel from the preschool level through high school. The term *educator* in this study included the following: general and special education teachers, school site administrators, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech language therapists, certified non-teaching, school office staff, and special education office staff. A total of 432 of the 1,000 educators in the district agreed to participate in the study and complete the online survey. The breakdown for number of participants from each role group is as follows: 211 general education teachers; 71 special education teachers; 15 site administrators; 135 school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech language therapists, certified non-teaching, school

office staff, and special education office staff. A total of 62 participants representing all educator role groups took place in the follow-up focus group interviews.

Instruments

The questions in the *Educators' Attitudes Regarding Inclusive Education Online Survey*, (Appendices A and B) the instrument developed for this study, were informed by the focus group questions from the Chilean study (Appendix D). Additionally, the questions used in the focus group interviews (Appendix C) were derived from the Chilean study that examined attitudes and perspectives of educators implementing inclusive education. The online survey questions consisted of 16 Likert scale close-ended statement questions and 5 open-ended questions, all of which served as the basic measure of educator attitudes.

The 11 focus group interview discussion questions which followed the online survey were developed based on participants' responses from the online survey and sought to elicit responses which might provide more profound information with respect to educator attitude and specific recommendations that educators might suggest with regard to inclusion for SEN students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Triangulated Data Sources

Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D
Educator Role Groups	Likert Scale Survey Close-Ended Question Responses	Open-Ended Survey Question Written Responses	Focus Group Interview Open-Ended Discussion Question Responses
All Participants: General Education Special Education Site Administrators School Psychologists Paraprofessionals Physical Occupational Therapists Speech Language Therapists Certified Non-Teaching School Office Staff Special Education Office Staff			

Researchers

The investigators and authors of this article are two educational researchers. One of the researchers is from the College of Education at the University of Arizona. He specializes in the education of diverse learners with special needs and inclusive education. The other has a doctoral degree from the University of Arizona and has extensive experience working in special education in multiple roles in public and private schools as a teacher, administrator and consultant.

Procedure

A letter requesting permission to carry out the study was sent to the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services for the district. The Research Review Board for the district approved our request to conduct the study which included the use of the district listserv for district personnel to complete the online survey. In conjunction with the letter requesting permission, a brief proposal delineating the purpose, procedure of the study and a statement about the benefit of the study for the students as well as for the district was sent by email to all district personnel. A total of 432 district personnel comprising all educator role groups accepted the invitation and completed the Educators' Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education Survey. Upon completion of the online survey an invitation was extended to participants inviting them to take part in one of three focus group interview sessions. Following the completion of the online survey, we analyzed the responses from the survey and formulated the discussion questions that guided the focus group interviews that followed. The three focus group interview sessions were then conducted approximately one month after the online survey was completed. The focus group interview sessions provided an opportunity for the participants to clarify and expand on their opinions and attitudes.

Eleven questions were used to facilitate the focus group discussions (see Appendix C). The questions, which guided the focus group session conversations, were also provided to the participants in written form one week prior to their participation. The participants were asked to respond to all questions in written form before their focus group session. One researcher served as the primary facilitator for all three focus group sessions. Participants responded to the discussion questions during the focus group sessions and their comments were recorded. The sessions were one to two hours in length. At the conclusion of the focus group interviews, the written responses were collected. Written responses and focus group transcripts were then coded by theme and category using the Themes and Categories Matrix from the Chilean study (see Table 3). It must be noted that researchers in the Chilean study did not interview educators serving in any other role other than administrator, general education teacher, and special education teacher.

Table 3

Themes and Categories Matrix – Chilean Focus Group Interview Study

Topic Area/ Theme	Categories
Role	Administrator, General Education Teacher, Special Education Teacher
General Attitudes	Agreement with Inclusion (+1/-1), Anti-Discrimination (+1/-1), Right to Equal Education (+1/-1), Conducive to Collaboration (+1/-1), Effect on Special Education Kids – Social (+1/-1), Effect on Special Education Kids – Academic (+1/-1), Effect on Regular Education Kids – Social (+1/-1), Effect on Regular Education Kids – Academic (+1/-1), Microcosm of Society (+1/-1)
Implementation	Top-Down Effect (+1/-1), Compliance with the Law (+1/-1), Training – Quantity for Inclusion (+1/-1), Training – Quality for Inclusion (+1/-1), Resources (+1/-1), Demands on Regular Education Teachers (+1/-1), Collaboration, Planning, and Communication (+1/-1), Transition from Old to New, Availability of Specialists – Quantity (+1/-1), Effectiveness of Specialists – Quality (+1/-1), Inclusion vs. Integration (+1/-1), Differentiation of Services, Evaluation of Teachers (+1/-1), Evaluation of Student Progress (+1/-1), Special Education Kids – Evaluation/Diagnosis (+1/-1), Parent Participation (+1/-1)
Recommendations	More/Better Resources, More/Better Trainings, More/Better Availability of Specialists, More/Fair Teacher Evaluations, More/Fair Evaluations of Student Progress, More/Better Special Education Kids Evaluation/Diagnosis, More/Better Parent Participation, Government Planning for Implementation, School to Work/Vocational

We then printed hard-copies of the open-ended question responses from Survey Monkey in order to enter, screen and score the data; this was accomplished by using colored markers to color code the written responses in order to determine their applicability and relevance to the Themes and Categories Matrix (see Table 3). For Part D, we examined the qualitative Focus Group Interview open-ended discussion questions and corresponding written responses in order to determine their applicability and relevance to specific themes and definitions (see Table 1), and then entered, scored and screened the responses on the Themes and Categories Matrix (see Table 3), relating to the key points of discussion during the focus group interviews.

Data Analysis

A mixed-method research design was utilized to investigate educators' attitudes regarding IE practices in their school district. This methodology is compatible with two-phase studies in which a qualitative phase follows a quantitative phase (Creswell, 2009). Survey Monkey served as the online instrument to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Survey Monkey was used to analyze the frequencies and correlations of the quantitative close-ended Likert scale question responses from the online survey (Appendix A). It also provided a rating count and rating average for each Likert scale response item. Both the responses to the qualitative open-ended survey questions (Appendix B) and the qualitative responses from the focus group interview questions

(Appendix C) were quantified using a variation of the Themes and Categories Matrix (see Table 3) for data analysis. This approach to data gathering incorporated the use of an online survey consisting of quantitative Likert scale close-ended questions and qualitative open-ended questions to which participants were asked to write their responses.

The data were gathered from the online survey and were entered into four sections (see Table 2). Part A identified the educator role of participants. Part B was comprised of appropriate Likert scale responses (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Undecided, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree) based on individual responses and educator group responses from online survey as follows: All Participants, General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Site Administrator and School Psychologists, Paraprofessionals, Physical and Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Specialists, Certified Non-Teaching, School Office Staff, and Special Education Office Staff. Part C consisted of the written answers to the five open-ended online survey questions based on individual responses for all participants. Part D comprised the 11 focus group interview discussion question responses for those participants who agreed to participate based on their positive responses to the invitation embedded within the online survey. For Part B, Survey Monkey calculated and scored the close-ended question responses in percentages of agreement, disagreement or being undecided on the Likert scale and screened the data grouped by educator role group as follows: (a) All Participants, (b) General Education Teachers, (c) Special Education Teachers, (d) Site Administrators, (e) School Psychologists, Paraprofessionals, Physical and Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Certified Non-Teaching, School Office Staff and Special Education Office Staff. Frequencies of responses for each individual Likert Scale close-ended statement question were entered and screened for each educator role group. For Part C, we read through and evaluated the individual open-ended question responses to acquire an overall impression of the prevalent tendencies and their applicability to the Themes and Categories Matrix from the Chilean Focus Group Interview Study (see Table 3).

Survey Monkey utilized a spread of the overall range to tabulate the number of responses under each response group of the Likert Rating Scale (Strongly Agree-1, Agree-2, Undecided-3, Disagree-4, and Strongly Disagree-5). Survey Monkey disaggregated the online Likert scale statement responses based on the following educator role groups: (a) All Participants, (b) General Education Teachers, (c) Special Education Teachers, (d) Site Administrators, and (e) School Psychologists, Physical and Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Certified Non-Teaching, School Office Support Staff and Special Education Support Staff. Each response was given a numerical value based on the response rating group and a percentage value was assigned based on the number of responses under a particular response rating group based on the total number of participants responding to a particular Likert scale statement. The typed written responses to the follow-up questions on the on-line survey questionnaire were classified by category and then entered, screened and scored for data analysis. Survey Monkey reported the number of responses for each statement on the Likert scale, as well as the total of responses for each of the educator role groups. The percentage and degree of agreement or disagreement for each item

on the Likert scale questionnaire was also reported. Tables were created to display responses for each educator role group.

We evaluated and summarized the typed responses from the open-ended questions from the online survey; they were then quantified, classified, and coded by category using the Themes and Category Matrix from the Chilean study (see Table 3). Categorized responses were then screened and analyzed by the researchers so some conclusions and correlations could be inferred from the data. The generated categories and themes form the open ended questions were used to generate the questions for the follow up focus group interview. The questions for the focus group interviews were generated based upon the written responses completed in the follow-up questions from the online survey.

Approximately one month after the online survey was concluded we conducted three focus group interview sessions. We also screened and analyzed the categorized responses and comments in order to determine conclusions, correlations and any specific recommendations with respect to the implementation of inclusive education in the district using the Themes and Categories Matrix from the Chilean study (see Table 3).

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in line with the 16 Likert scale online survey questions, the 5 open-ended online survey questions and the 11 focus group interview discussion questions.

General Attitudes

Interestingly, the findings suggest that there is agreement in opinion among educator role groups in relation to their attitudes regarding IE. However, the range of percentages based on educator role group, regarding the question of IE as a positive experience for students with disabilities, ranged from a high of 60.8% as reported by site school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech language therapists, certified non-teaching, school office staff, and special education office staff, to a low of 45.0% as reported by special education teachers. Conversely, the range of percentages of agreement based on educator role group, regarding the question of IE as a positive experience for students without disabilities, ranged from a high of 60% as reported by site school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, certified non-teaching, school office staff and special education office staff, to a low of 46.4% as reported by special education teachers. The range of percentages based on educator role group, regarding the question of IE as socially advantageous for students with disabilities ranged from a high of 93.3% as reported by site administrators to a low of 66.2% as reported by special education teachers. Additionally, the range of percentages of agreement based on educator role groups regarding the question of IE as academically advantageous for students with disabilities ranged from a high of 73.3% as reported by site administrators to a low of 43.6% as reported by special education teachers. Special education teachers as a role group expressed the least supportive attitude toward IE of all other educator role groups surveyed.

One similarity was noticed with the Chilean study. The open-ended question responses from the current study expressed agreement with the overall concept of inclusion. However, these same participants expressed concerns about the implementation of inclusive education having to do with such categories as adequate training for teachers and paraprofessionals, differentiation of instruction, time resources and supports, and planning collaboration and communication.

Implementation

With respect to effective implementation of IE for students with various disabilities, 72.1% of general education teachers and 87.3% of special education teachers agreed with the statement that IE is effective for students with specific learning disabilities. Concerning students with speech or language impairments, 79.0% of general education teachers and 91.2% of special education teachers agreed with the statement that IE is effective for these students. By contrast, 58.3% of general education teachers and 57.8% of special education teachers disagreed with the statement that IE is effective for students with autism. In reference to students with emotional disturbance, 77.9% of general education teachers and 69.2% of special education teachers disagreed with the statement that IE is effective for these students.

Challenges

Challenges with IE were reported by participants. These challenges were ranked by number of responses identifying each challenge. The rankings of challenges are as follows:

1. Need for more and better training, (117) of 432 participants or 27%;

2. Need for more time, more resources and supports, (76) of 432 participants or 17.5%;

3. Large class size (56) of 432 participants or 13% ; and

4. Differentiation of instruction, (56) out of 432 or 13(%).

The following quotations were provided by participants supporting the findings focusing on challenges with IE:

● A special education teacher said: *"time, money, resources/staff, differentiation of instruction and documentation/paperwork are major challenges."*

● A general education teacher expressed the following: *"The class sizes are already too large. Teachers simply cannot handle more students, let alone students with special needs."*

● Another general education teacher said: *"Class size is also an issue. It is challenging enough to differentiate in a classroom with 29 or more students."*

● Similarly yet another general education teacher lamented: *'Teachers are not given specific goals or training to deal with specific disabilities.*

● A school psychologist asserted: *"The problem is lack of experts to support the teachers with a plan to manage and improve the specific disability. The problem can be very severe and require intense clinical level interventions."*

Resources

The general education teachers were asked to consider the adequacy of their preparation as teachers and if they had been provided with enough training, experiences and supports in order to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The range of percentages of agreement based on educator role groups, ranged from a high of 20% as reported by school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech language therapists, school office staff and special education office staff to a low of 6.7% as reported by site administrators. Similarly, educational paraprofessionals were asked if they had been adequately prepared and provided with enough training, experiences, and supports in order to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The range of these percentages of agreement based on educator role group, ranged from a high of 26.5% as reported by school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech language therapists, school office staff and special education office staff to a low of 13.4% as reported by site administrators.

A majority of participants, 251 out of 432 or 58% reported human resources as virtually the only resource available to general education teachers. Specifically, participants defined human resources as their colleagues on their school campuses.

Virtually no other resources were mentioned. Of these, 91 of 432 participants or 21% reported that they did not know, were not aware of, or were not sure of any other resources available at their sites. The following quotes from the educators, who participated in the focus groups, support this finding.

- One general education teacher shared: "*I don't know of any educational resources other than the trainings that the district provides periodically.*"

- *A second general education teacher stated: "If teachers/support staffs are considered a "resource" then we need more of them to help out with our emotionally disabled and mild-severe learning disabled students, especially if they are being mainstreamed.*

- A third general education teacher expressed: "*There is very little support, one resource teacher, and one part time psychologist. Prevention specialist deals with the discipline problems. Counselor follows up with (behavioral) support groups. The principal always deals with their problems and is always highly involved.*

- A forth general education teacher when referring to resources said: "*Aside from speaking with trained professionals, there aren't any.*"

- A fifth general education teacher identifies available resources and remarked: "*Small group tutoring but this is so sporadic and unreliable that I can't really count this as resource. We do have an LD teacher and School Psychologist and Speech teacher who briefly come to our school and work with students.*"

- A paraprofessional speaks to equating available resources to human resources and commented: *"We have some phenomenal sped teachers that are full of resources. Behaviorally, I think we've got support from counselors and academic behavior specialists."*

Out of the 432 participants responding to the question regarding money and available resources including paraprofessionals being adequate in order to carry out inclusive education, a significant 335 (77.5%) of participants responded that these resources are inadequate. It was found that 70 (16.20%) participants indicated that they were not sure, and only 27 (6.25%) stated that money and available resources are adequate.

Some responses from focus group participants to this question reveal some of the reasons for this finding:

- One special education teacher responded: "*A resounding NO! If the inclusion model is truly inclusion and teachers/paraprofessionals push into the classrooms and team teach with the regular education classes, then we just don't have the manpower to make it work and happen flawlessly*"

- A second special education teacher retorted: *"No and money is the biggest issue here. I am aware that costs associated with teaching one "Group B" weighted student can be tremendous depending on their disability."*

- One general education teacher firmly declared: *"NO! I have four special education students in my classroom as well as one autistic student and there is not enough of me to go around. This site only has 3 paraprofessionals for 19 classrooms."*
- One principal observed: *"There aren't enough teachers or support staff to meet the individual needs of many of our students with IEP's. This is not a district problem; it's a state funding problem."*
- Another principal emphasized the point: "*No, I feel that with expanding classroom sizes, due to the state's lack of funding for education, this leads to the need for more paraprofessionals in the classroom to meet the needs for special education students."*

Collaboration

Of the 432 participants responding to the question about special education and general education teachers collaborating and working together, 197 or 45.6% indicated that they do while 139 or 32.2% indicated that they do not and 96 or 22.2% said they were not sure.

The following quotations were provided by general and special education teachers with respect to the question of general and special education teachers working together and are indicative of the variation of responses.

- One general education teacher mentioned: "*Yes, that's what we do best. Collaborative decisions are made between sped teachers and ref. ed. teachers that are in the best interest of every student."*
- A second general education teacher answers the question about collaboration and pronounced: *"No, not at this time. There is very minimal time to collaborate with teachers that teach the same grade level that it would be difficult to collaborate with special education teachers as well."*
- A third general education teacher shared: *"Decisions about individual students with IEP's are made that almost always require the work load of every teacher here to increase. Individual student's needs are targeted during collaboration and then we educate and evaluate their individual achievement progress.*
- A fourth general education teacher declared: *"Its mind boggling, how much we have to do as educators for just one reg. ed. student, let alone for a student that has learning, or other disabilities. SPED works separately, we don't collaborate."*
- One special education teacher stated: *"If there was more collaboration between special education and general education, we could figure out what we could do to help students with disabilities be more successful in the general education classroom."*

Inclusive Education Policy

The range of the close-ended Likert scale question asking if educators are aware of their district's policy on inclusive education yielded a range of agreement

percentages from a high of 86.8% as expressed by site administrators to a low of 59.8% as expressed by general education teachers.

The following positive perceptions illustrate comments from participants of focus groups:

- The first one stated: *"It's hard and doubles the work, but if done properly…it can be such a blessing/learning experience for all involved.*

- The second one said: "*…I enjoy having different students in my classroom. Although, I am presented with challenges, I believe that the effort to overcome these challenges can be incredibly rewarding.*

- The third one had the following to say: "*I feel inclusion should be tried whenever possible, but if it is not working for either the student OR the teacher, those students need to be removed immediately.*

- The fourth person remarked: "*I am not entirely convinced that this is the best for everyone. They cannot be serviced."*

Although participants in the focus groups expressed a substantial overall agreement with IE as a general policy, a few indicated disagreement expressing the following comments:

- One general education teacher expressed her opinion that IE is: *"not advantageous for the severely impaired."*

- One special education teacher put it this way: *"It depends entirely on the disability…depending upon the disability, some students need the least restrictive environment that self-contained classrooms can offer."*

- Another special education teacher remarked: "*If a student is labeled as emotionally disabled then the severity of the emotional problem needs to be considered before mainstreaming them in a regular ed. classroom."*

- A site administrator commented: *"Constant disruptive behavior from a severe disturbed student can greatly hinder teaching and student learning."*

- A school psychologist put it this way: "*Physical disabilities are much easier to manage than mental or emotional ones and are less taxing on the general population."*

Professional Development Needs for Implementation of IE

When focus group interview participants were asked about ways the district could provide training, experiences, and supports for teachers and paraprofessionals to enable them to implement inclusion in the general education classroom, they indicated a need for on-site professional development and systematic coaching. More collaboration with paraprofessionals and with general and special education teachers was also called for as well as a recommendation for more specialized training aimed at the needs of preschool aged children. Participants seemed to express the attitude that integrative classroom projects and team teaching would be conducive to collaboration.

Focus group interview participants also suggested that training on differentiation of instruction would help with the implementation process along with

more and better parent education. Allowing more time for professional development was also a concern. Participants discussed effective means of implementing inclusion and suggested more and better training and supports in the form of collaboration, planning and communication. The need for greater availability of specialists which may be accomplished by having better trained teachers and paraprofessionals was identified. Under the category of government planning for implementation, participants stated that more money allocated to education would be helpful while working for smaller class sizes. Parent education surfaced as an issue contributing to the effective implementation of inclusion.

The discussion regarding the question of college programs having prepared participants to implement inclusion in the general education classroom brought forth the recommendation to institute a dual-major and dual-certification program to better prepare teachers to implement inclusion. There were just a few participants who did possess dual major degrees and certification for both general education and special education; these individuals did say that they felt their college programs had prepared them to implement inclusion.

- As one general education teacher explained: *"There are many misconceptions about inclusive education at our school. This is why general education practitioners need the education, knowledge and training about how it can work effectively."*

In general the participants agreed that order is more difficult to maintain in an inclusive general education classroom because of the intensity and level of differentiation of instruction necessary and the fact that more time must be allowed for students to process their thinking. Larger class sizes coupled with large numbers of students with disabilities and students with severe disabilities contribute to the challenge of a more difficult situation in which to maintain order. In fact, the range of percentages of agreement based on educator role groups out of the 432 participants, regarding the question of maintaining order in a general education classroom that includes students with disabilities, being more difficult to maintain than in a general education classroom that does not include students with disabilities, ranged from a high of 58.5% as reported by general education teachers to a low of 40.9% as reported by special education teachers.

Recommendations

Participants in this study representing all educator role groups recommended greater allocation of time and money for training and human resources in the form of paraprofessionals and special education specialists in order to better facilitate the implementation of IE in their schools. With respect to training, participants recommended they be provided more opportunities to observe effective instruction in inclusive classroom settings, especially for paraprofessionals and general education teachers. Specifically, participants called for training which focused on individual disabilities and effective differentiation of instruction. Participants also recommended more and better collaboration, planning and communication, all of which require greater allocations of time and money. The recommendation was also made for smaller class sizes and more differentiation of instruction in inclusive classroom settings. In addition, one special education teacher made the following point regarding her recommendation for implementing IE: *"There is a need to discover what works best to meet the needs of all, students and teachers alike…we need more research based programs that have proven to be effective."*

Participants' recommendations from both the survey and focus group interview sessions were collected and compiled for convenient reference:

1. More money allocation for supports and resources including paraprofessionals
2. More time allotted for training, collaboration, planning and communication
3. More opportunities to observe effective instruction in inclusive classrooms
4. Training opportunities focusing on specific disability categories
5. Training opportunities focusing on differentiation of instruction
6. More and better opportunities for collaboration, planning and communication
7. More availability of special education specialists
8. Smaller class size
9. *More and better parent communication*

Discussion

Baseline attitude of IE as a critical component for its successful implementation has been a subject of major interest in the US as well as in other countries. Educators' attitude of inclusion, consisting of their impressions, opinions and recommendations for implementation of IE has been well documented in recent years (Devecchi, Dettori, Doveston, Sedgwick, & Jament, 2012; DiNuovo, 2012; Ferri, 2008; Kanter, Damiani, & Ferri, 2014; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). While some researchers examined general and special education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with mild disabilities, perceptions of self-efficacy, competence and teaching, and satisfaction and judgments of the suitability of classroom adaptations (Lopes, Monteiro, & Sil, 2004; Ross-Hill, 2009; Ryan, 2009), others investigated the need to understand the *endpoints*, of IE such as classroom design, curricular adaptations, fully accessible physical environments, optimization of resources to support teaching staff, development of professional learning communities sustained by ongoing continuous professional development,

inclusive school pedagogy and collaborative inquiry (Carrington, Deppeler, & Moss, 2010).

The need to investigate the attitudes of preK-12 educators concerning IE in southern Arizona and specifically, the question as to whether differences in attitudes among these educators regarding IE are to be found based on differences in educator role group, has for the most part not been considered in the scholarly literature. The existing research suggests that teachers, overall, are not entirely adverse to the concept of inclusion (Bargerhuff & Wheatley, 2004; Cook, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). However, few studies have focused on collecting data related to educators' attitude of IE based on educator role group while at the same time eliciting specific recommendations for its implementation.

The present study sought to investigate the attitudes of preK-12 educators in a southern Arizona school district toward IE. Congruently, we focused on the question as to whether differences in attitudes regarding inclusion are to be found based on specific educator role group while exploring concerns which emerged during the Chilean Focus Group Interview Study (Fletcher et al, 2010), such as inadequate training for teachers and paraprofessionals, time and resources, supports, planning, collaboration and communication. Additionally, the present study sought to formulate specific recommendations suggested by educator participants for the implementation of IE. The central research questions which guided the present study are as follows:

1. What are these educators' general attitudes and opinions about the implementation of IE and what are their general recommendations for implementation of IE in view of recent policy changes in their local school district?

2. Has the implementation process worked or not, as a result of these recent policy changes in their local school district?

3. What recommendations for improvement does this particular cadre of educators suggest for themselves, their colleagues, administrative authorities, district authorities, and governmental jurisdictional authorities?

4. Has IE been as positive experience socially and academically for students with and without disabilities?

All educators participating in this study were consistent in expressing their general agreement with the concept of inclusion. Study findings are consistent with respect to general agreement with the concept of inclusion as reported in the literature. Participants from all educator role groups agreed with the overall concept of inclusion and, with the exception of site administrators, agreed that students with disabilities develop a better self-concept in general education classrooms. Interestingly, the findings of the study suggest significant difference in opinion between educator role groups in relation to their attitudes regarding IE. Special education teachers as a role group did express the least supportive attitude toward IE of all other role groups surveyed. Perhaps this attitude is partly attributable to their training which emphasizes the legal perspective of special education which is based on the least restrictive environment (LRE) and focuses on the unique needs of the individual student with SEN

rather than on any collective social or academic benefit for the group at large. Paradoxically, the study found that special education teachers were the least likely of all educator role groups to agree with the statement that students with disabilities can best be served in special education classrooms. Nonetheless, special education teachers, as well general education teachers were in agreement that students with mild disabilities (e.g., speech/language impairments, specific learning disability) should be educated within the general education classroom setting. However, both groups of teachers indicated that students who exhibit more severe difficulties (e.g., autism, emotional disturbance) should be educated within the special education classroom setting.

Broad disagreement was expressed by all educator role groups, with the statement that general education teachers have been adequately prepared and are provided with enough training and supports in order to include students with disabilities into the general education classroom. The results are consistent with the existing research. Mastropieri and Scruggs (1996) found that general education teachers obtain limited preparation in order to meet the academic needs of students with special educational needs. When we asked what specific kinds of training they think would be helpful to teachers and paraprofessionals in order to implement inclusion, participants from all role groups recommended more opportunities to observe effective inclusive classroom instruction, IE trainings tailored for paraprofessionals and trainings tailored for general education teachers regarding specific learning disabilities and child development. With respect to resources, when we asked what are some specific resources available to general education teachers at their schools to support the inclusion of students with disabilities over half of the 432 participants responding cited their colleagues or human resources as the only resources available to them.

Participants from all educator role groups indicated that some of the biggest challenges with inclusion for students with disabilities are a lack of more and better training and a lack of time, resources and supports. Differentiation of instruction was also identified as a challenge for implementing inclusion and as a particular reason as to why it is difficult to maintain order in an inclusive education classroom. These findings taken from the quantitative data are consistent with the literature in that educators claim that the training they do receive is inadequate and that they do not have sufficient opportunities for collaboration (Hammond & Ingalls 2003).

Participants taking part in the focus group interviews in this study representing all educator role groups, recommended greater allocation of time and money for training and human resources in the form of paraprofessionals and special education specialists in order to better facilitate the implementation of IE in their schools. With respect to training, participants recommended they be provided more opportunities to observe effective instruction in inclusive classroom settings, especially for paraprofessionals and general education teachers. Specifically, participants called for training which would focus on individual disabilities and effective differentiation of instruction. In addition, participants recommended more and better collaboration, planning and communication, all of which require greater allowances of time and money. The recommendation was also made for smaller class sizes, and for more

differentiation of instruction in inclusive classroom settings; more parent participation was also recommended. Educators participating in this study indicated that they are aware of their district's policy toward IE.

Conclusion and Implications

Given that inclusion will probably become more common in general education classrooms, in part as a consequence of numerous acts of legislation mandating that special education students be removed from more restrictive classrooms and placed into classrooms with their non-disabled peers. It is therefore essential to determine educator attitude regarding IE. Recognizing that general education teachers are the main service providers for teaching students with SEN in the inclusive setting, their attitude regarding IE contributes to its failure or success.

There appears to be a normative shift in the attitudes and perceptions of both general education and special education teachers with respect to their attitudes regarding just how they view inclusive education for both students with and without disabilities. However, there is a lack of evidence as to just how beneficial IE is for general and special education students. As a result, we are inclined to be of the opinion that more research needs to be done with respect to educator attitude regarding IE.

One research implication derived from this study points to the importance of surveying overall job satisfaction with educators' jobs, prior to surveying educators' attitude regarding IE; these two dynamic aspects could then be compared and commonalities could be identified.

Another major implication taken from this study points to the vital role that administrators enact in molding teachers' attitude with respect to IE; surveying administrators' attitudes regarding IE may well be a worthwhile effort. Parents represent another influential stakeholder group wielding authority in relation to their children's educational experience; it may be of value to survey parental attitude regarding IE. Additional investigation into the correlation between administrative support and peer support in molding positive educator attitudes toward IE may result in useful information as well.

In view of the probability that the practice of IE will become more widespread in the future, and in view of the study results which indicate that educators do not believe that general education teachers and paraprofessionals have been adequately prepared and provided with enough training, experiences and supports in order to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom, it may be practical to investigate how professional development programs in school districts are being implemented and carried out for these two educator role groups. Finally, in view of the study finding that special education teachers are the least supportive of IE compared to all other educator role groups, this warrants additional research.

More mixed-method research studies yielding triangulated data sources could be conducted among educational jurisdictions in other North and South American countries, so that researchers may capitalize on the interrelational features of quantitative and qualitative research designs in terms of convergence and divergence of the data, including their interpretation and generalizability. Even if the results of

future exploratory mixed-method studies prove contradictory, it may be useful to present the findings in parallel form with the recommendation that more studies be conducted. Additional data could be gathered in this case to resolve any inconsistencies of the findings or these contradictions may be regarded as catalysts for future investigation and study.

Limitations

The participants in the research survey were a sample of educators including general education teachers, special education teachers, site administrators, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, physical and occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, certified non-teaching, school office staff, and special education office staff employed by a southern Arizona school district, which may have limited the ability to generalize results to educators working in other districts, states, or other national or educational jurisdictions.

Another significant limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. In all likelihood there would have been a larger sample size and more information resulting in more significant findings, had there been more than one southern Arizona school district utilized in this study.

Given the fact that the district was in the process of refining its policy toward inclusive education, it is possible that only those educators experiencing a sense of feeling secure in the knowledge that they knew the current policy on inclusive education, participated in the survey and/or focus group interviews. Consequently, this particular sample may not have been representative of all educators in the district.

Attitude toward education in general is a contributory factor of educator attitude regarding inclusive education regardless of the role of the educator. Taken as a whole, fulfillment with their jobs as educators may influence their opinions and perceptions of inclusive education. Since attitude regarding contentment with their jobs as educators was not independently determined it is possible that the issue of job satisfaction may have influenced their opinions, perceptions and overall attitude toward inclusive education.

It may be useful to mention, that shortly before, during and directly after the survey was conducted, the district was in the process of refining its policy on inclusion and considering the implementation of a co-teaching model which would have compelled many content area designated special education classroom teachers to surrender their classrooms and co-teach in general education inclusive classrooms in partnership with general education teachers. This anticipated transition to a dual teaching model may have precipitated anxiety, consequently influencing the perceptions of special education teachers in terms of their attitude toward how students with SEN can best be served.

Finally, the instrument employed was designed exclusively for this study. Although, it was evaluated and approved by a peer group prior to its utilization, it has not been empirically tested, nor has it been approved as being a valid and reliable instrument. An empirically supported instrument may have resulted in more identifiable results.

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APPENDIX A

Educators' Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education Online Survey
Likert Scale Questions

1. Inclusive education at my school has been a positive experience for students with disabilities.
2. Inclusive education at my school has been a positive experience for students without disabilities.
3. Inclusive education at my school is socially advantageous for students with disabilities.
4. Inclusive education at my school is socially advantageous for student without disabilities.
5. Inclusive education at my school is academically advantageous for students with disabilities.
6. Inclusive education at my school is academically advantageous for students without disabilities.
7. General education teachers at my school have been adequately prepared and are provided with enough training, experiences and supports in order to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
8. Paraprofessionals at my school have been adequately prepared and are provided with enough training, experiences and supports in order to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
9. Students with disabilities in the general education classroom develop a better self-concept than those in the self-contained special education classroom.
10. Students with disabilities do not monopolize teachers' time in the general education classroom.
11. Most students with disabilities do not demonstrate behavior problems in the general education classroom.
12. Students with disabilities can be best served in the special education classroom.
13. Students with disabilities included in the general education classroom, require additional time and attention which can be a disadvantage to students without disabilities.
14. Maintaining order in the general education classroom that includes students with disabilities is more difficult than in a general education classroom that does not include students with disabilities.
15. I am aware of my district's policy toward inclusive education.
16. Among students with disabilities, inclusion seems to be successful for students with:
    1. Autism
    2. Deafness

3. Deaf-Blindness
4. Emotional Disturbance
5. Hearing Impairment
6. Mental Retardation
7. Multiple Disabilities
8. Orthopedic Impairment
9. Other Health Impairment
10. Specific Learning Disability
11. Speech or Language Impairment
12. Traumatic Brain Injury
13. Visual Impairment Blindness

APPENDIX B

Educators' Attitudes Regarding Inclusive Education Online Survey
Open-Ended Questions

1. What do you think is the biggest challenge with the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom at your school?

2. What are your overall feelings or concerns about the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms at your school?

3. What are some resources available to general education teachers at your school to support the inclusion of students with disabilities?

4. Do you think that the money and available resources (including paraprofessionals) currently provided by your district to the general education classrooms at your school are adequate to carry out inclusive education?

5. Do you think that special education and general education teachers at your school collaborate and work together in order to support students with disabilities who are in the general education classroom?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What is the District's current policy on inclusion?

2. What would be some effective ways for the District to provide training, experiences and supports for teachers and paraprofessionals in order to enable them to implement inclusion in the general education classroom? (coaching model, college courses, etc.)

3. What would you consider some pedagogical practices that would promote inclusive practices in your school?

4. What do you feel would be some effective means of implementing inclusion in your school?

5. Do you think that your college level educational program prepared you to implement inclusion in the general education classroom?

6. What are some things that you have seen at your school that indicate that inclusion has been a positive experience for students with disabilities?

7. What are some things you have seen at your school that indicate that inclusion has been a positive experience for students without disabilities?

8. Why is order more difficult to maintain in a general education classroom which includes students with disabilities?

9. Give some specific examples of how special education and general education teachers at your school collaborate together with respect to inclusion of students with disabilities?

10. What specific kinds of training do you think might be helpful to teachers and paraprofessionals to better prepare them to implement inclusion in the general education classroom?

11. What specific kinds of resources do you think might be helpful for teachers and paraprofessionals in the efforts to implement inclusion in the general education classroom?

APPENDIX D

Chilean Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What impact does the Law of Integration have in transforming the practices of the school community on education and integration of students with special needs?

2. In your opinion what does integration imply? And how does it differ from inclusion?

3. What are the objectives of integration?

4. Do you feel that inclusion will work in your country?

5. In your opinion, what is the motivating factor or factors that account for the successful adoption of inclusion/integration in some countries, but not in others?

6. How to insure that the school community, including parents, is involved in inclusion?

7. What national methods of integration in education or inclusion in action do you know?

8. Do you feel adequately trained to work with special needs students?

9. What are the minimum objectives that you hope to master with students who are integrated?

10. Professionally speaking, do special education teachers have a new role with respect to integration in education?

11. What is the benefit of this new method of attention of special education students?

12. How has integration in education affected you personally?

13. Professionally speaking, how have you changed as a result of this new initiative to integrate students with disabilities into regular education schools?

14. With which obstacles and challenges have you been confronted?

15. What suggestions do you have to improve this model?