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Karly Sokolowski

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Teacher Attitudes Toward Students with Disabilities in their Classroom

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By

Karly J. Sokolowski

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for the Degree of

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Approved:  ________________________________
           Brian Barry                              committee chair
           ________________________________
           Paul Culabe                               committee member
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Abstract

This study surveyed attitudes of general elementary classroom teachers toward students with disabilities who were educated in the general education classroom. The Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) scale, revised by Antonak and Larrivee (1995), was used to assess teacher attitudes. The 6-point Likert-like rating scale was administered to 48 educators in a large, suburban school district in New York State. A Cronbach coefficient alpha, conducted from teacher responses, indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.92. The proposed four factor multidimensional structure of the ORI was supported in this study. The four subscales included: (a) Benefits of Integration, (b) Integrated Classroom Management, (c) Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, and (d) Special versus Integrated General Education.
Introduction

The primary purpose of this study is to survey attitudes of general elementary classroom teachers toward students with disabilities who are educated in the general education classroom. With the emergence of inclusion as a practice and not just an idea, educators now have the responsibility of accepting students with disabilities into their classrooms. Public Law 94-142 mandates that each student be given a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting. The goal of this law is to keep students in the mainstream of public education whenever possible. It requires teachers to maintain students in regular programs to the maximum extent possible in view of their disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

The provision of special education services to students with disabilities has been a topic of intense controversy and speculation since the passage of Public Law 94-142. Questions concerning the needs of students with disabilities, and the type of class setting most able to fill these needs have been addressed, but continue unanswered. There has been growing awareness that the climate within which mainstreaming is to be implemented is probably one of the most important determinants of its outcomes. That is, while the goal of mainstreaming is to integrate students with disabilities into the regular class, the attitudes of the regular education teachers must not be overlooked. These attitudes can mean the difference between the success or failure of the students placed in the regular class (Antonak & Livneh, 1988; Bender & Ukeje, 1989; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Jordan & McLaughlin, 1986; Larrivee, 1982; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996; Pugach & Lilly, 1984). Since the teacher is expected to be the primary agent in the implementation of mainstreaming efforts, research on teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming is necessary (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995; Bender et al., 1995; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Larrivee, 1982; Waldron, 1997).
**Importance of the Study**

It is the goal of this thesis to contribute to the existing body of knowledge to elucidate (1) the importance of teacher attitudes in the acceptance of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and (2) the need to examine attitudes of general education teachers prior to the placement of students with disabilities in their classes.

The results of this study may possibly provide university-based instructors and public school administrators with information that will enable them to structure the format, content and delivery of in-service training programs and workshops designed to change attitudes of general education teachers instructing students with disabilities. The possibility also exists that the information resulting from this study will have some impact upon designers of pre-service training for prospective teachers.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the definitions of terms used are as follows:

Many different terms have been used to describe the types of least restrictive environments possible for students with disabilities. None of these terms actually appear in the federal law but all have been used to express varying beliefs about what the law means. The following terms will illustrate how a least restrictive environment has been defined in this literature review:

**Mainstreaming.** This term has generally been used to refer to the selective placement of special education students in one or more "regular" education classes, with some time spent in a separate resource room placement (Bender et al., 1995). The students must earn their opportunity to be mainstreamed through the ability to keep up with the work assigned by the teacher to the other students in the class (Rogers, 1993).

**Inclusion.** Inclusion can be defined as the practice of serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with
appropriate in-class support. An inclusive program is structured so that the support services are brought into the regular classroom and this form of delivery requires only that the student will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with the other students) (Rogers, 1993).

**General Education Teacher.** Employee of the selected school system who have met requirements for teacher certification and who, for the most part work, with students who have not been labeled or identified as having a disability.

**Special Education Teacher.** Employee of the selected school system who have met requirements for special education certification and who individualize instructional programs for students who have been labeled or identified as having a disability.

**Students with a Disability.** As in current usage in New York State (Regulations of the Commission of Education), the term disability refers to students who have been referred and evaluated, and who, because of mental, physical or emotional reasons have been identified as having a disability and can receive appropriate educational opportunities from specifically designed instruction or special services or programs. This study will focus on those students referred to as emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, mentally retarded, and/or speech impaired who receive resource room services. Resource room services consist of special supplemental instruction in an individual or small group setting, for a portion of the school day for students, who spend the rest of the day in a general education classroom.

**Attitudes/Teacher Attitudes/Teacher Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming.** There is no single, all encompassing definition of an attitude. Underlying all the definitions is the recognition that attitude is an internal, mental, cognitive state which can never be seen or measured directly, and must be conceptualized through other, external, behavioral responses. In this study, teacher attitude toward mainstreaming will be operationalized by teachers’ responses to the Opinions
Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) scale (Antonak and Larrivee, 1995).

Review of the Literature

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that schools educate students with disabilities in the most appropriate least restrictive environment (Prasse, 1995). Recent publications have been flooded with commentaries, reflections, and pronouncements which have often served to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of educating students in the least restrictive environment. Though many valid reasons exist to support both sides of the argument, data has indicated that teachers are favorable to the philosophy of least restrictive placement up to the point of placement in the general education classroom (Jordan & McLaughlin, 1986). Recent research has indicated that there a multidimensionality of attitudes that affect the mainstreaming of students with disabilities in the classroom. Surveying teacher attitudes about serving students with disabilities will provide a better understanding of what is really occurring in the classroom and indicate where changes need to occur so that strategies and interventions will be more effective.

Larrivee and Cook (1979) originally developed a 30 item Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming (ORM) scale. The scale included items which focused on hypothesized dimensions of attitudes toward mainstreaming. Factor analysis of the responses from the 941 participants in the sample indicated the emergence of five factors: (1) general philosophy of mainstreaming, (2) classroom behavior of special needs children, (3) perceived ability to teach special needs children, (4) classroom management of special needs children, and (5) academic and social growth of special needs children (Larrivee, 1982). The ORM scale consisted of acceptable psychometric characteristics and Antonak and Livneh (1988) recommended that it be revised to provide applied researchers with a contemporary, easy-to-use, and psychometrically sound instrument. The discriminate validity of the ORM scale was proved reliable in a subsequent investigation conducted by
Larrivee (1981). The 25 item revised scale, Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI), suggested a four factor multidimensional structure of the scale: (1) benefits of integration, (2) integrated classroom management, (3) perceived ability to teach students with disabilities, and (4) special versus integrated general education (Antonak and Larrivee, 1995).

The plenitude of definitions used to describe a least restrictive environment can also be seen when defining general and special education systems. The many variations that exist are all relevant; however, these definitions will serve as a global overview of the systems. Lilly (1988) described the most salient distinguishing features of both systems. General education is the set of educational experiences which a student would receive and proceed through school without being labeled "disabled" or in need of special services. Special education is a broad and undifferentiated set of identification, placement, service delivery and curriculum options for students. This system includes the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document used to determine the most appropriate placement based upon a student's academic and social needs (Lilly, 1988).

The reported achievement outcomes of students with disabilities are varied in the professional literature. Many studies concluded that achievement gains made by these students are comparable to or greater than gains made by students in traditional, special education pull-out programs (Waldron, 1997). Trusdell and Abramson (1992) conducted a study at the elementary school level that found significant differences between standardized reading test scores of mainstreamed and regular education students. Another study used the running record procedure to measure reading performance of elementary students (Banerji & Dailey, 1995). The results of this study indicated that nine out of the ten mainstreamed students made a reading gain of one year. Statistical information, gathered through individual and group standardized achievement measures and
curriculum-based measures, indicated that academic gains were demonstrated by mainstreamed students (Waldron, 1997).

Benefits of Integration

An emerging area of interest is the effect of inclusion on students within the classroom who have no identified disabilities. Research investigating the progress of nondisabled students is limited, but available studies indicate that inclusion does not decelerate the progress for nondisabled students enrolled in inclusive classrooms (Staub & Peck, 1995). Jenkins, Jewell, Leicester, O’Connor, Jenkins, & Troutner (1994) studied the effects of a program which included students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms. These investigators found that students without disabilities demonstrated gains in vocabulary, reading, and language which were greater than gains made by a control group of nondisabled students in noninclusive settings. Bear and Proctor (1990) found that students without disabilities in inclusive classes outperformed students in noninclusive classes in reading, math, and language.

Sharpe, York, and Knight (1994) conducted an experiment to examine performance differences between an inclusive group and a comparison group of nondisabled students. An inclusive environment was considered a general education classroom whose membership included one special education student who was previously educated in a self-contained special education classroom. Results failed to show statistically significant performance differences for the two groups in the basic skills areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics.

The academic progress of students without disabilities is not negatively influenced by the inclusion of a student with a substantial disability in the general education classroom (Staub & Peck, 1995). Investigators reported social and interpersonal gains such as reduced fears of individual differences; increased tolerance of others; increased
self-esteem, and reinforcement of values such as caring, belonging, community, and acceptance (Staub & Peck, 1995).

Bear and Proctor (1990) compared students with disabilities in inclusive classes and others in resource classes and found that equivalent gains existed in reading and language, but greater gains were noted for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms occurred in math. A study conducted by Banerji and Dailey (1995) compared the reading progress of fifth grade students with disabilities to that of nondisabled students in a general education classroom. Results indicated that students with disabilities developed at a pace comparable to that of their nondisabled peers.

Overall, different outcomes reported in the research are likely to be influenced by the differences which exist across programs described as inclusive. For example, inclusive programs vary with respect to organization (i.e., some use team teaching, others use consultative support and instructional assistants), instruction (some spend time on language arts and mathematics only, while others emphasize all academic subjects), and curriculum (some use ability grouping, others expose students to the general curriculum) (Waldron, 1997).

**Integrated Classroom Management**

The second factor of the ORI scale consisted of items that were concerned with the behavior of the students in an integrated classroom and classroom management procedures that integration may require (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995). Studies which have reviewed peer ratings indicated students with disabilities in an inclusive setting have been shown to make modest gains in social status when compared to students with disabilities in special education programs (Madge, Affleck, & Lowenbraun, 1990).

Teacher ratings of classroom behaviors for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms indicated perceived improvements in self-esteem and acceptance, while concurrently reporting less positive overall perceptions of these students when compared with nondisabled students. These results indicate that teachers perceive significant
improvement in general social competence and classroom behavior when students with disabilities are educated in inclusive school programs (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Jenkins et al., 1994). It should be noted that teacher perceptions may vary if their attitudes were assessed by specific classifications (i.e., Emotionally Disturbed vs Learning Disabled).

Along with the diverse instructional needs students with disabilities bring to an inclusive classroom, they also display diverse behavioral characteristics. Carpenter and McKee-Higgins (1996) viewed undesirable student behavior as problems within classrooms and schools and stated that behavior management programs are effective when they are proactive in nature. It is important that all students have an understanding of what behaviors are desirable and how to perform these expected behaviors within a classroom. Another important component is positive class climate. Teachers can help create this climate by reinforcing the desirable aspects of students' behaviors, and engaging in positive interpersonal interactions with all students. Overall, teachers can play a role in developing desirable or expected student behaviors. However, behavior interventions should also foster students' ability to engage in self-management of their own behaviors. The ultimate goal to a self-management program is to transfer ownership of behavior interactions from teacher to student. Finally, collaboration with colleges is also important when developing and implementing a proactive behavior management system. Coordinating collaboration with colleges provides support for changes in teacher behaviors and programming consistency. In conclusion, proactive behavior "management programs need to be systematically and thoughtfully implemented to provide structure and reinforcement that is beneficial for the class as well as the individual student" (Carpenter & McKee-Higgins, 1996, p. 203).

**Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities**

Another variable that contributes to the success or failure of inclusion programs is teachers perceived ability to teach students with disabilities. Research findings conducted on teachers' self-efficacy attitudes vary depending on many variables. Examples of
variables include: actual experience with students with disabilities, sufficient collaborative and resource support, and use of effective instructional strategies (Bender & Ukeje, 1989; Minke et al., 1996; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Waldron, 1997).

Bender and Ukeje (1989) measured teacher effectiveness of 50 mainstreamed teachers from 14 different school districts in New Jersey. The instrument used was the Teacher Effectiveness Scale (TES), developed by Gibson and Dembo (1984). This scale is divided into two subscales: (1) Personal Teaching Efficacy, which measures perceived effectiveness in initiating positive change in a student’s life (e.g., “When I try, I can get through to most difficult students”); (2) and Limited Teaching Efficacy, which measures the degree to which the teacher believes that teaching effectiveness is limited by external factors such as socioeconomic status or home environment (e.g., “The amount that a student can learn is primarily related to family background”). Results indicated that teachers’ attitudes concerning teaching efficacy may affect the selection of effective instructional strategies within the classroom. Teachers who rated themselves as high teaching efficacy do engage in more effective teaching behaviors than the teachers who rated themselves lower in teaching efficacy. More studies would need to be conducted to determine if selection of instructional strategies determines attitudes toward teaching effectiveness in mainstream classes rather than the other way around.

Minke et al. (1996) surveyed suburban school district teachers in the mid-Atlantic region. The experiment compared teacher attitudes of classes who were team taught by a special education and general education teacher with the availability of paraprofessionals part time throughout the day, to general education teachers in traditional classrooms. Students with disabilities were placed in the integrated setting for only one year before being placed in a traditional class the following year. As expected, teachers in the integrated setting reported higher levels of personal efficacy than general education teachers in traditional classrooms. However, it should also be noted that general education teachers who had some experience teaching in an integrated classroom indicated
a higher level of personal efficacy. The authors do caution the reader that the positive views held by the general education teachers could have been attributed to the protected resource of two teachers and often an aide in the same classroom.

Bender et al. (1995) utilized Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Effectiveness Scale to measure teacher attitudes toward their own efficacy and toward mainstreaming. These results demonstrated that teachers who are favorably disposed toward mainstreaming reported more consistent utilization of effective mainstreaming strategies than do teachers with less positive attitudes.

Overall, research suggests that teachers' less positive views about mainstreaming may harbor negative implications for the implementation of inclusive placement for students with disabilities (Bender et al., 1995). Teachers less favorable views may be attributed to some weaknesses identified (i.e., lack of resources) when educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Podell & Soodak, 1993). A study conducted by Minke et al. (1996) highlighted an expressed concern which has been repeatedly emphasized in the literature. Allocation of resources was cited as a critical factor for effective inclusion. Another study conducted by Houck and Rogers (1994) also concluded that the limited amount of collaborative and resource supports correlated with negative teacher attitudes toward inclusion.

Special versus Integrated General Education

Both advocates and opponents of inclusion share admirable intentions and a desire to create successful environments for all students (Roberts & Mather, 1995). Successful integration of students with learning problems into regular classrooms requires careful planning. Federal legislation mandates that students be educated in the least restrictive environment. However, specific definitions were not provided to determine how this was to occur or how services should be provided (Prasse, 1995; Waldron, 1997).

Proponents of special education placement emphasize that the general education classroom may not be the appropriate placement for a number of students with disabilities
Teacher preparation to instruct the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom is a variable that is continually discussed in the research literature (D’Alonzo, Giordano, & Cross, 1995; Roberts & Mather, 1995). Many general education teachers are not trained to provide diversified instructional methods to learners who require individualized instruction to be successful in the general education classroom (Gerrard, 1994; Roberts & Mather, 1995; Westby et al., 1994). Even when classroom teachers are cognizant of the importance of using different instructional methods, time restrictions do not allow them to provide such strategies (Mather & Roberts, 1995). Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, and Lesar (1991) found that general education teachers agreed that students with disabilities had a basic right to be educated in the regular classroom; however, students instructional needs could not be successfully met in this setting.

Lack of individualized instruction leads to a legal question. If teachers are unwilling or unable to make specific accommodations within the general education classroom, is the student receiving the special education to which he was entitled by law (Mather & Roberts, 1995)? Though a student receives a very good general education, he may not have received anything close to the level of service that he would need to academically thrive (Semmel et al., 1991).

Many examples exist of students with disabilities thriving in supportive environments away from the general education classroom, as appropriate programs cannot always be provided in this setting (Roberts & Mather, 1995). Instructional methods and curriculum provided within a special education setting are tailored to a student’s current competencies, while those in the general education classroom may not be (D’Alonzo et al., 1995). For example, Mather and Roberts (1995) provided a typical example of what may occur in the general education classroom. A second grade teacher uses a whole language approach to teach reading. Tim, a student with a disability in this second grade classroom, needs a highly structured phonics approach. The special educator assigned to teach
phonics to Tim helps all the children in need, not just Tim. Though more students will profit from the special educators assistance, Tim, a student entitled to special services, is denied the intensity of instruction required because of the time constraints placed on his special education teacher.

Another variable to consider regarding student outcomes is the social progress and competence of students with disabilities. Research in this area is still limited and no conclusive evidence can be made in regards to social acceptance (Waldron, 1997). For example, Cullinan, Sabornie, and Crossland (1992) found that the social acceptance of students with disabilities is not a given. They found that students with disabilities are “socially rejected, unpopular, and not wanted as classmates, workmates, or playmates” (p.340). These students are “more likely to feel lonely, express a feeling of nonintegration into the social life during late elementary school grades” (p.340). However, the study did not indicate whether the intrinsic feelings felt by students were the result of being educated in a separate setting vs internal factors.

As stated previously, federal legislation states that all special education students have a right to be educated in the least restrictive environment. It further entitles special education students to supports necessary to meet their individual needs (Gerrard, 1994). Many benefits students with disabilities experience when in an inclusive setting have already been discussed.

Advocates of inclusion cite any number of criticisms when discussing the role of special education. Some examples include the following: When students are pulled out of the general education classroom for more individualized instruction it absolves the general education teacher of responsibility for instructing low-performing students (Pugach & Lilly, 1984); disrupts classroom instruction and fails to coordinate special education instruction with that of the classroom (Johnston, Allington, & Afflerbach, 1985; Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Loenbraun, 1988); attaches stigmas to the students (Jenkins & Heinen,
1989); fails to increase academic learning time and fails to produce expected transfers to regular education classrooms (Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; Anderson-Inman, 1986).

Increased time on task leads to greater academic achievement. Reynolds (1988) reported observations that students in special education programs often get less direct instruction from teachers than they would have received in their general education classes. Further studies found that students with disabilities preferred to receive additional help from the general education teacher because they viewed it as less stigmatizing (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). It was not unusual to see their classroom teacher helping a classmate or themselves (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989).

The curriculum offered to students with disabilities in a special education setting is not often coordinated with or supportive of the curriculum in the general education classroom (Biklen & Zollers, 1986). Separate materials may be used, different instructional approaches coexist, different behaviors are tolerated, and different objectives are reinforced. The result is teaching styles that do not complement one another, instead, they confuse students (Biklen & Zollers, 1986).

Methods

Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to determine if the four factors that compose the Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities survey were reliable indicators of favorable attitudes of education professionals.

Subjects

Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers from a large suburban school district located in New York State participated in this study. The population of teachers included the following categories: general education teachers, general education teacher assistants, special education teachers, and other specialists. The general education teacher assistants that responded to the survey were assigned to work with a specific general education teacher.
The revised ORI was originally administered to students who were enrolled in four sections of an introductory, undergraduate-level special education course required of all prospective education professiona at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Antonak & Larrivée, 1995).

The school districts Director of Elementary Education selected a representative sample of three elementary schools to be used in the study. A total of 31 general education teachers, one general education teacher assistant, 12 special education teachers, one school psychologist, one art and one music teacher, and one English as a Second Language (ESL) tutor. Overall, out of a total of 72 distributed surveys, sixty-seven percent (48 educators) agreed to participate in this study. The mean number of years teaching experience was 17 years.

At the time the survey was conducted, integration of students with disabilities into general education classrooms was taking place. All general education teachers had special needs students in their classes. The ratio of special needs students to regular students was not established with the instrument used.

Instrumentation

The Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities was the survey instrument administered (see Appendix A; Antonak & Larrivée, 1995). The instrument consisted of 25 items, in which the respondents rated each statement on a 6-point Likert-like rating from disagree to agree. Twelve items were worded negatively and 13 items were worded positively to prevent an acquiescent-response-style threat (Antonak & Larrivée, 1995).

Antonak and Larrivée (1995) reported that preliminary research data from 376 respondents suggested that there may be four orthogonal factors that account for the variation in the ORI item responses. The use of factor scores as subscale scores for differential prediction of attitudes has not been investigated. The computation of ORI subscale scores cannot be defended until these factors can be shown to be homogeneous,
reliable, and specific, and until they consistently predict valid indicators of favorable attitudes of education professionals.

Procedure

Surveys were distributed to teachers via school mailboxes. The survey contained a cover letter which specified the purpose of the survey, completion of the survey was voluntary, and assured that all responses would remain anonymous. As a way of maintaining anonymity, teachers were asked to return the completed surveys to a box that was left in the teachers' mailroom within one week.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The results of iterative item, scale and factor analyses led to a decision to delete four of the 25 ORI items. The deleted items (#8, 9, 15, and 25) manifested one or more of these unacceptable psychometric characteristics: (a) correlation with the total score below 0.395, (b) failing to load on any factor above 0.365, (c) loading on more than one factor above 0.365, and (d) improvement of the scale's homogeneity coefficient alpha index when the item was removed. Respondents' scores on the final 21 item version of the ORI were recalculated and the iterative item, scale, and factor analyses were repeated. A plot of eigenvalues demonstrated a four factor structure. To improve estimates of communality, an orthogonal transformation procedure was used. The results of these analyses are reported in the remainder of this article.

Item and Scale Analyses

Inspection of the item analysis results shown in Table 1 revealed satisfactory item characteristics in all cases. The mean of the item-to-total score correlations corrected for redundancy was 0.56 (range 0.40 to 0.73).

The mean ORI score for the sample was .66, SD = 1.23. The value of Cronbach's coefficient alpha homogeneity coefficient was 0.92.

Factor Analyses
The first factor, Benefits of Integration, accounted for 5% of the variance. Factor one included nine items. All eight items in the original ORI scale Benefits of Integration factor were recovered and one of the four items in the factor labeled Special Versus Integrated General Education. All the items loaded positively, and factor loading ranged from 0.48 to 0.81, with a mean loading of 0.62. Computation of internal consistency reliability for this factor resulted in an internal consistency reliability of 0.87.

The second factor, Integrated Classroom Management, accounted for 2% of the variance and included three items. This factor recovered three out of the ten items in the original ORI Integrated Classroom Management factor. Three out of the ten items were deleted in the preliminary analyses due to unacceptable psychometric characteristics. All the items loaded positively, and factor loadings ranged from 0.55 to 0.65, with a mean loading of 0.61. The internal consistency reliability of this factor was 0.81.

The third factor, Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, accounted for 3% of the variance. A total of four items were included. This factor recovered all three items from the original ORI Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities factor and one out of the ten items in the original ORI Integrated Classroom Management factor. All the items loaded positively, and factor loadings ranged from 0.53 to 0.83, with a mean loading of 0.71. The internal consistency reliability of this factor was 0.83.

The fourth factor, Special Versus Integrated General Education, accounted for 2% of the variance, and included five items. This factor recovered two out of the four items in the original ORI Special Versus Integrated General Education factor, and two out of the ten items in the original ORI Integrated Classroom Management factor. One out of the four items in the original ORI Special Versus Integrated General Education factor was deleted in the preliminary analyses due to unacceptable psychometric characteristics. All the items loaded positively, and factor loadings ranged from 0.40 to 0.74, with a mean loading of 0.76. The internal consistency reliability of this factor was 0.75.
Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the four factors on the ORI scale. An inspection of the means reveals that Benefits of Integration had the highest means, followed by the Integrated Classroom Management factor. The fourth factor, Special Versus Integrated General Education, had the third highest mean. Teachers’ Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, the third factor, had the lowest overall mean.

**Discussion**

**Discussion of Results**

The present investigation sought to examine teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities. Items on a self-report instrument, ORI, were clustered into the following four factors: (1) Benefits of Integration, (2) Integrated Classroom Management, (3) Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, and (4) Special Versus Integrated General Education. These four factors appear to be similar, in part, to factor analyses conducted by Antonak and Larrivee (1995).

Results of this procedure must be regarded as tentative at best, as the sample size is not large enough for the researcher to confidently support these analyses. However, in spite of this caution, the researcher felt it was wiser to identify potential clusters of items using factor analysis, rather than merely use subjective researcher judgment.

While the reliability of the dependent measure was established, the validity of the ORI is still in question due to the experimental nature of the instrument. Validity studies have not been conducted on the ORI scale, although the face validity of the indicators demonstrates the appropriateness of this measure.

Among the four factors, teachers indicated the most positive attitude on factor one, Benefits of Integration. This suggested that the respondents were cognizant of the perceived benefits for both students with and without disabilities.

The least favorable attitude, as indicated by mean ratings, was toward factor three, Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities. This could suggest that although teachers may profess a positive, accepting attitude toward students with disabilities in their
classroom, they may not believe they have the knowledge or skill to be able to teach students with disabilities effectively. Teacher efficacy studies have frequently indicated that teachers who were less favorable toward mainstreaming tended not to utilize effective mainstream instructional strategies (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995). Other studies conducted have suggested that teachers rated themselves as less effective instructors for students with disabilities due to the lack of time to provide classroom accommodations and lack of resources (i.e., special educator and administrative support) (Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). Investigating the attribution theory of teachers (i.e., internal versus external locus of control) needs to be an area of future research.

Descriptive results also demonstrated that some teachers indicated that the benefits students with disabilities may receive in a special, separate educational setting may be more advantageous than in a general education classroom.

The researcher understands that no educational setting will meet the needs of all students with disabilities. If general education classroom teachers and classrooms are to be transformed to support the philosophy and practice of inclusion, those changes will take time (McLeskey & Pugach, 1995).

Limitations of Study

The sample size (N=48) is small and the study is limited to the elementary grades of a public school system in suburban Central New York. The results of the study must be restricted to the sample school.

A major limitation in any study involving attitudes lies in the essential nature of an attitude: It is an internal state which is not directly observable nor measurable, and which is responsive to a variety of factors. The "trueness" of a person's written response to any attitude question in relationship to his "real" attitude always remains unknown. The expectation is that the instrument selected (Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities [ORI]) is one which attempts to provide a more complex picture of the complexity of teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming.
An additional factor involving the sample is that these teachers are those who have expressed a willingness to participate in the study, and may have a participation bias. It is assumed, though, that this wouldn’t indicate which attitude position a teacher holds, because s/he may be interested in having an anonymous way to indicate that mainstreaming is effective or not.

Implications of the Study

All teachers should have a positive feeling about students with disabilities if mainstreaming is to succeed. One avenue for providing support to general education teaches could be accomplished through in-service training programs. In-service programs could be designed to increase the acknowledgment of differences among students need to be developed, as well as programs exploring various teaching and management methodologies. These programs can be designed to enhance successful experiences by structuring positive experiences between teachers and students with disabilities, as well as between nondisabled students and students with disabilities. Further, the in-service training programs should be ongoing and not a one time offering as the student and teaching populations continue to change.

Secondly, if feasible, school systems should examine the attitude of teachers before placing any student with a disability in classes. If the attitude is positive and accepting--placement should proceed. On the other hand, because federal law mandates that students be educated in the least restrictive environment, general education teachers are forced to educate students with disabilities in their classrooms. However, successful implementation may not occur if teachers attitudes are negative or questionable. Great efforts should be made to help teachers view mainstreaming more positively. Overall, general and special education classroom teachers and school placement teams should ensure that factors that mediate between the success or failure of a mainstream placement are assessed.

Implications for Future Research
During the process of completing the study, this researcher came to realize that questions and issues surfaced that had not been addressed in formulating the questionnaire. It is important for those concerns to be presented for consideration in future research.

It may be useful to look at teacher attitudes toward students without disabilities as well as the students with disabilities, to determine if attitudes are different. Further, assessing teacher attitudes at the beginning of the school year and then again at the end may yield important data on the attitude change processes and its relationship to students with disabilities.

Another area of research might consist of identifying different types of students with disabilities, perhaps categorized by their difficulties in academic, social, or behavior management arenas to determine if the type of disability differentially affects teacher attitudes toward mainstreaming.
Teacher Attitudes

References


Appendix A

OPINIONS RELATIVE TO INTEGRATION
OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Section I: Teacher Opinions

Please circle the number that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. There are no correct answers; the best answers are those that honestly reflect your feelings.

Please indicate your response to the following items:

1. Most students with disabilities will make an adequate attempt to complete their assignments.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

2. Integration of students with disabilities will necessitate extensive retraining of general classroom teachers.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

3. Integration offers mixed group interaction that will foster understanding and acceptance of differences among students.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

4. It is likely that the student with a disability will exhibit behavior problems in a general classroom.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

5. Students with disabilities can be best served in general classrooms.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

6. The extra attention students with disabilities require will be to the detriment of the other students.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

7. The challenge of being in a general classroom will promote the academic growth of the student with a disability.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

8. Integration of students with disabilities will require significant changes in general classroom procedures.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

9. Increased freedom in the general classroom creates too much confusion for the students with a disability.
   Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree
10. General-classroom teachers have the ability necessary to work with students with disabilities.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

11. The presence of students with disabilities will not promote acceptance of differences on the part of students without disabilities.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

12. The behavior of students with disabilities will set a bad example for students without disabilities.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

13. The student with a disability will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a general classroom than in a special classroom.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

14. Integration of the student with a disability will not promote his or her social independence.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

15. It is not more difficult to maintain order in a general classroom that contains a student with a disability than in one that does not contain a student with a disability.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

16. Students with disabilities will not monopolize the general-classroom teacher's time.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

17. The integration of students with disabilities can be beneficial for students without disabilities.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

18. Students with disabilities are likely to create confusion in the general classroom.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

19. General-classroom teachers have sufficient training to teach students with disabilities.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

20. Integration will likely to have a negative effect on the emotional development of the student with a disability.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

21. Students with disabilities should be given every opportunity to function in the general classroom where possible.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree
22. The classroom behavior of the student with a disability generally does not require more patience from the teacher than does the classroom behavior of the student without a disability.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

23. Teaching students with disabilities is better done by special rather than general classroom teachers.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

24. Isolation in a special classroom has beneficial effect on the social and emotional development of the student with a disability.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

25. The student with a disability will not be socially isolated in the general classroom.

Disagree-3  -2  -1  +1  +2  +3  Agree

Section II: Background Information

Please indicate your response to the following items:

Grade level taught: __________________________ Number of years teaching experience: ___

Total number of students in your class: _____ Number of students with disabilities: ______

Title: ___ Regular Educator               Gender _____________________________
       ___ Teacher Assistant
       ___ Special Educator
       ___ Other  Specify: _______________

I have had the following types of disabilities in my classroom (check all that apply):

___ Autistic  ___ Mentally Retarded  ___ Speech Impaired  ___ Emotionally Disturbed  ___ Learning Disable
___ Other Health Impaired                      ___ Multiply Disabled

This investigator would like to thank you for your participation in this survey.
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Table 1

Teacher Attitudes
### Table 1

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**Note:** ORI = Opinion Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities
**Table 2.** Means and Standard Deviations for Factors of the ORI

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