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Perceptions of parents and teachers regarding preschool inclusion

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS REGARDING PRESCHOOL
INCLUSION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Special Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Melissa M. Sandlin

May 2006

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS REGARDING PRESCHOOL INCLUSION

By Melissa M. Sandlin

In 1990, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, the rationale for inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education classes was formed. There is much debate over the extent children with disabilities should be included in general education. Parents of children with disabilities are challenged with the decision of whether to put their child to into an inclusive environment. Finding a preschool that willingly accepts and can adequately accommodate children with disabilities may be difficult. The purpose of this study is to determine possible barriers to inclusion at the preschool level by evaluating the perceptions of parents of typically developing children and preschool teachers toward inclusion. Through assessing perceptions of these groups, this study aims to determine possible barriers to successful inclusion for young children with disabilities.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Historically, children with disabilities have been regarded as unteachable or embarrassing, and consequently may have been isolated from society or institutionalized by their families. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This act mandated that every child with a disability had the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), which could allow children with disabilities to be included in the general education classroom with their typically developing peers. In the 1980's, parents of children with disabilities became concerned that school districts were not providing the most appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

In 1990 Congress amended the EAHCA as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The rationale for inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms was formed with the passing of IDEA. Since the passing of IDEA there has been ongoing debate over the extent children with disabilities should be included in general education classes.

Statement of the Problem

IDEA requires education of children with disabilities in the LRE, or inclusive environments, which in practice, means children are educated with their peers without disabilities whenever possible. Inclusive education may be more accessible for elementary aged children than it is for preschool aged children, even though IDEA applies to individuals from birth through adulthood. One of the challenges to finding

inclusive placements for preschool aged children with disabilities is that most school districts do not offer preschool programs for children without disabilities (Lieber, Hanson, Beckman, Odom, Sandall, Schwartz et al., 2000). The result is district funded preschool classrooms consisting solely of children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities are faced with difficulties if they want their child to participate in the LRE and may also be challenged with the difficult task of finding a preschool that will accommodate their child while also persuading the school district to provide support services in a setting other than a district funded special education program.

One of the possible barriers to finding inclusive placements for children with disabilities in private preschool programs is that teachers and parents may have negative perceptions about, or be unsupportive of inclusion (Palmer, Fuller, Arora & Nelson, 2001; Peck, Staub, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 2004; Hewitt, 1999). Opponents to the idea of inclusion may argue that general education teachers are not trained to handle the special needs of children with disabilities, and therefore, will not be able to provide an appropriate education for those children (Seery, Davis, & Johnson, 2000). They may also argue that children with disabilities will not receive the special attention and services they need in a regular education classroom and that the child with disabilities may not be treated equally by faculty, parents or other students, resulting in low self esteem (Hewitt, 1999; Garrick & Salend, 2000).

Parents of typically developing children may worry that their child will begin imitating the behaviors of children with disabilities (especially in cases of aggressive behavior). They may also be concerned that their child will not receive enough attention

and supervision due to the amount of time that the child with disabilities requires, or that the class instruction and expectations may need to be lowered to accommodate that child (Peck et al., 2004). Parents of children with disabilities may also have concerns about inclusion placements for their child. These parents may worry that their child will not be able to keep up with the pace of the class, that the teachers are not prepared to deal with their child's needs or that their child will not receive the appropriate special services. In addition these parents may be concerned about what the other parents will think about their child and that their child will be teased or bullied (Garrick & Salend, 2000).

General education teachers may have negative attitudes toward inclusion because dealing with children with disabilities adds challenges to their already difficult job. They may worry that they are unprepared for dealing with the added challenges and that they will not have enough time to appropriately handle children with disabilities (Dybvik, 2004). If parents and teachers are resistant to inclusion, administrators of preschool programs may find it very difficult to implement inclusion, resulting in a lack of inclusive placement possibilities for children with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine barriers to inclusion at the preschool level by evaluating the perceptions of parents of typically developing children, as well as the perceptions of general education preschool teachers regarding inclusion. This study focused on one private preschool that serves 2 to 5 year old children in Redwood City, California. Through assessment of the perceptions of participants, this study aimed to

identify effective inclusion strategies for children with disabilities in general education preschool settings.

Research Questions

The questions of this research are as follows: (a) What are the perceptions of parents of preschool children without disabilities regarding inclusion? (b) What are the perceptions of regular education preschool teachers regarding inclusion?

Definition of Terms

1. *Child with disabilities*: A child who has been formally diagnosed and found to have developmental delays in one or more of the areas of cognitive development, physical development, communication, social or emotional development, or adaptive development (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 1997).
2. *Continuum of alternative placements or services*: A model of placement for children with disabilities that includes options ranging from hospital-based facilities, special day classes, special schools, resource centers, and other segregated environments to full inclusion in regular school settings (Cole, 1999).
3. *Inclusion*: Including children with disabilities in the same activities as non-disabled peers (Howard, Williams & Lepper, 2005).
4. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)/ natural environments*: An environment that, to the greatest extent possible, satisfactorily educates children with disabilities together with children who are not disabled (Douvani & Hulse, 2002).

5. *Mainstreaming/Integration*: Refers to a child with disabilities joining the general education class for certain activities and spending the rest of the school day in special education settings (Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996).

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

For the past two decades, inclusion has been one of the hottest topics in special education and has been the source of ongoing debate between educators, professionals, parents, and government officials. Inclusion is implied and required by a few key laws, but it remains relatively open to interpretation. Court decisions have helped to define inclusion however, each child's placement must be considered individually and as a separate case. Research indicates that for inclusion to be successful, all participants must be supportive and actively participate in the process (Grove & Fisher, 1999).

Unfortunately, parents and teachers are not always positive about inclusion. Negative perceptions and concerns can act as a barrier to success for children with disabilities in general education classrooms (Campbell, 1997; Palmer et al., 2001). This study seeks to explore the best practices of inclusion and the barriers to its success, through gathering information about perceptions of inclusion from the people directly affected including parents of preschool children and preschool teachers. This chapter will present research about the laws related to inclusion, past litigation, and information about the perceptions of parents and teachers.

Definitions of Inclusion

Empirical research on inclusion is extensive. One of the biggest challenges involved in this debate is that there is no universally accepted definition of inclusion (Mulvihill, Shearer, & Van Horn, 2002). According to Odom (2000), inclusion can be viewed as only occurring when there is a ratio of typically developing children to

children with disabilities, which reflects the natural population. That is, some may view inclusion as only occurring in classes where up to one third of the children have some type of disability. One fact is consistent; to be inclusive, children with disabilities must spend the same number of hours in the general education classroom, as do children without disabilities (Odom, 2000). True inclusive views hold that special education is not a place, but a set of services that should follow a child into the neighborhood school (Grove & Fisher, 1999). Possibly the clearest definition of inclusion comes from the National Association of School Psychologists (Havey, 1998) which states that inclusion programs are those in which students, regardless of the severity of their disability, receive appropriate specialized instruction and related services in an age appropriate, general education class in the school they would attend if they did not have disabilities.

There are many terms used in conjunction with, or in place of, inclusion such as: (a) LRE, (b) natural environments, (c) mainstreaming, (d) continuum of alternative placements, and (e) integration. The concepts of LRE and natural environments come from IDEA and suggest that children receive education in environments that are, as much as possible, like those environments they would be in if they did not have disabilities (Howard et al., 2005). The terms “mainstreaming” and “integration” refer to a child with disabilities joining the general education class for certain activities and spending the remainder of the school day in the special education classroom (Martin et al., 1996). Mainstreaming is an older term that came under attack when it began to be interpreted to mean that children with disabilities would be allowed to participate in the activities of the children without disabilities (the mainstream group), but would need to earn their right to

be in these groups and activities (Mulvihill et al., 2002). Offering a continuum of alternative placements means school districts have a variety of placement alternatives available to children with disabilities and children are not limited to special education placements only (Cole, 1999). The disagreement regarding inclusion and the variety of terms related to the subject make it difficult for parents and professionals to determine what is appropriate and what the law dictates in regards to educational placement for children with disabilities.

History

Until 1975, when the EAHCA was passed, school districts in most states were allowed to refuse to enroll any student considered “uneducable”, which was defined by local administrators (Martin et al., 1996). In 1958, President Eisenhower made the first move toward educating children with disabilities by signing Public Law (P.L.) 85-926. P.L. 85-926 provided financial support to colleges and universities offering training in the area of teaching children with developmental delays. In 1963, Congress expanded this law to include grants to train college teachers and researchers in a wider range of disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the first major federal effort to fund services to specific populations in public elementary and secondary schools. The ESEA remains the primary vehicle of support for public schools (Martin). The next year, P.L. 89-313 passed and stated that children in state operated or supported schools for children with disabilities could be eligible for special funding. Even with these small steps toward improvement of education for children with disabilities, by 1960 and early 1970, no state served all of its children with disabilities

and many states still turned children away (Martin). Often, children that were being served did not receive appropriate services. For example, children with normal cognitive abilities who had physical disabilities were placed in classes with children who were developmentally delayed. Between 1971 and 1973 the courts decided schools owed students the same protection against discrimination on the basis of disability as they did on the basis of race. The due process clause of the 14th Amendment was interpreted to give parents the right to prior notice and discussion about their child's education plan before any changes were made, as well as the right to appeal any decisions made by the district. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, stated that any recipient of federal financial assistance must not discriminate against people with disabilities. Section 504 included no monitoring or funding and was consequentially ignored by most school districts for 20 years (Martin).

Due to the ongoing refusal to provide equal opportunities to students with disabilities, cases began to make it to the courts. In the case of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) versus Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1971, courts ruled school districts would provide full access to free public education for children who were developmentally disabled, up to the age of 21. This case established that each child must be offered an education that is appropriate to his or her learning capacities and established a preference for education in the LRE. In 1972, Mill versus Board of Education resulted in prohibiting schools from refusing to serve children with disabilities on the basis of inadequate resources. These occurrences marked the beginning of a movement toward improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

There are three main laws forming the basis for justification of educating children with disabilities in general education classrooms. The first law was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975. EAHCA provided funding to help with the costs of offering special education programs and granted all children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education. The second law was the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which prohibited discrimination practices against people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. In 1990 EAHCA was amended and renamed IDEA. This is the third law. The amendments included six goals: (a) all children with disabilities have a right to a FAPE in the LRE, (b) each child's ability to develop to his or her full potential will be enhanced, (c) each child will be provided an education that is unique to his or her strengths and weaknesses, (d) every child will be given the opportunity to become aware of individual differences, (e) each child has the right to associate with his or her non-disabled peers, and (f) the social status of the child with disabilities will be enhanced by decreasing stigma related to labeling and placement (Petch-Hogan & Haggard, 1999). The ADA and IDEA are currently the main pieces of legislation enforcing inclusion and general rights for children with disabilities.

IDEA

Part C of IDEA pertains to infants and toddlers ages birth to 3 years old. This section emphasizes provision of early intervention services in natural environments, which include home and community settings where children without disabilities participate in age appropriate activities. Under IDEA, service in an environment which is

not natural should only occur when the goals for the child cannot be achieved in natural settings. Part C requires use of an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) which is completed by a team of professionals and used to assess the child and family's strengths and needs. If a natural environment is not being used, there must be a justification in the IFSP. The implementation of these regulations and related practices and procedures are state specific.

Part B of IDEA pertains to individuals with disabilities 3 to 21 years old. The terms used in this section are more educationally based and include LRE and general curriculum. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is mandated by this section and requires an explanation as to how the child's disability affects his or her involvement in the general curriculum and/or appropriate activities. Part B states that any supplementary aides and services that may be needed for success in the general class should be provided, even if children without disabilities benefit from such services. Under IDEA, placement decisions cannot be made by the district alone, but must be made by a team that includes the parents and any other individuals that are familiar with the child. According to Part B, placements must be reviewed annually and be located as close as possible to the child's home (in the school they would normally attend if possible). A child may not be removed from a regular class solely due to modifications that are needed in the general curriculum.

The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA added language to Part C further emphasizing the intent to serve children with disabilities in natural environments. The amendments contained many provisions intended to ensure access to the general curriculum for

children ages 3 to 21 years. The amendments reflected a clear preference for children to be educated with their typically developing peers in typical early childhood settings. These amendments took the concept of LRE further and pushed for more inclusive environments for children with disabilities. Many of the provisions were a direct response to the challenges of inclusion. For instance, districts could no longer rule out inclusion by solely funding services within a special education class. IEP provisions required the team to consider placement in the general education environment and required that general education teachers participate in the IEP process. IDEA has changed the way that services are delivered to children with disabilities, but has not provided a solution to many of the related issues.

Although laws related to special education and the rights of people with disabilities have come a long way to offer increased benefits and better treatment, they do not specifically define many of the requirements. This lack of specifics has opened the door to much debate over the appropriateness of services for children with disabilities. The law is left up to individual interpretation and the courts when an agreement between schools and families cannot be found. Summaries of the major court cases related to this issue are in articles by Havey (1998) and Douvanis and Hulsey (2002).

Litigation and Inclusion

The first special education case that went to the Supreme Court was Hendrick Hudson Central School District versus Rowley in 1982. The Supreme Court ruled that schools are not mandated to give the best possible education for students with disabilities, only an adequate one. Districts are only required to offer access to educational

opportunities and an appropriate education that provides basic opportunity. In *Roncker versus Walter*, 1983, the following two part testing guide for appropriate placement was set: (a) Can the services that make the special education setting successful for the child be provided in the general education setting, and (b) Is the student being mainstreamed to the maximum possible extent? An inquiry system for determining placements was also created in the case of *Daniel R.R. versus State Board of Education*, 1989. In this case the courts decided that the following questions must be answered when considering placements: (a) Has the school taken steps to provide supplementary aids and services to modify the regular education classroom in order to make it successful for the child, (b) Can the child receive educational benefit in the regular class with modifications, (c) Will the placement result in any detriment to the child, and (d) What effect will the child's presence have on the class environment and the education of the other students? In 1991, the case of *Greer versus Rome*, reinforced the concept of a continuum of placements by ruling that before moving to more restrictive placements, the IEP team must place children in a general education class. In *Oberti versus Clementon*, 1993, the court held that inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few, and schools must consider general education first and bear the burden of proof for placement choices. In 1994, the case of *Light versus Parkway* resulted in the decision that a child who is violent, disruptive, or dangerous is never appropriately placed in the general education classroom.

What is known as the Holland Test was a result of the case of *Sacramento versus Rachel H.* in 1994. In this case the courts ruled that there are three factors to be considered in the placement of a child with special needs. First, the educational benefits

of the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services must be compared to the benefits of the special education classroom. Second, the non-academic benefits of interaction with students without disabilities must be considered. Third, the effects on the teacher and other students must be taken into account. Finally, in the case of *Hartmann versus Loudoun*, 1997, the courts decided mainstreaming was not required if the student did not receive educational benefits. Additionally, any marginal benefits of inclusive placements could be outweighed by the benefits of a separate special education setting. It was also decided that consideration as to whether the student was disruptive was legitimate as social benefits are subordinate to educational ones.

The above cases have helped to clarify the requirements of educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom and have outlined the responsibilities of school districts. In summary, school districts do not have to offer every available service that could benefit the child, just enough to provide reasonable educational benefit and progress. However, districts must provide any related services needed to allow the child to benefit from his or her education. These services may include physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychological and health services, assistive technology, extended school year, and transportation.

Using the Federal Acts IDEA and ADA, the courts have defined the standard for appropriate educational programs as those that are related to the child's learning capacity, designed for the child's unique needs, and result in reasonable educational benefit. Districts are not allowed to provide more or better services to children in segregated placements in order to discourage more inclusive ones. The outcomes of the previously

mentioned cases could pose a threat to IDEA if inappropriately interpreted because, in a few of the cases, consideration of the effect on the other children and teachers is allowed. Generally, children who have mild disabilities are more readily included in regular education settings than those who pose a threat or have severe behavioral problems (Hanson, Horn, Sandall, Beckman, Morgan, Marquart et al., 2001; Odom, 2000; Olson, Chalmers & Hoover, 1997; Stoiber, Gettinger & Goetz, 1998). This decision appears to be upheld by past court rulings. A one-size fits all approach to inclusion is not recommended or enforced by the courts. Children must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, inclusion may look very different when comparing programs and delivery models.

Current Models of Inclusion

The concept of inclusion is left open for individual interpretation and looks different from district to district. There are a variety of service models that can be found in schools. Children in kindergarten and above are primarily served in a public school setting (Hanson et al., 2001), but for children ages birth through pre-kindergarten, the models come in many varieties. According to Odom (2000), infant/toddler and preschool inclusion classrooms may be located in private preschools, community based preschools, Head Start programs, or public schools. The teaching model may follow a typical preschool approach to instruction or a special education theory of teaching. Preschool special education programs tend to be very clinical and focus on meeting specific, rather than general, child needs such as increasing social skills and self esteem. There is often one professional working with a single child at a time (Odom).

Conventional preschool models are generally set up to teach through adult-child and child-child interactions using a play based, child-initiated approach. This early childhood approach may be more appropriate for children with disabilities, as children are allowed to acquire skills at their own pace (Mahoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992). Delivery models vary within these programs and may include: (a) itinerant teaching where a professional consults with the teachers or serves the child directly, (b) team teaching with special education and general education teachers working together, (c) early childhood approach where an early childhood teacher works alone, (d) early childhood special education with just an early childhood special education teacher, and (e) integrated approach where general education and special education classes come together for specific activities (Odom, Hanson, Lieber, Marquart, Sandall, Wolery et al., 2001). Given the variety of programs and delivery models, there is clearly not one way to implement inclusion. Based on family systems theory (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990), districts and parents must choose the best fit for each child and family.

As of 2000, 47% of children with disabilities were spending at least 80% of their school day in general education classrooms (Dybvik, 2004). Although this may not seem like an overwhelming number, it is a substantial increase from prior years. Research indicates some groups of children are more likely to be placed in inclusive environments than others. For example, Hanson et al. (2001) found preschool age children with disabilities were most likely to be in inclusive environments. As children moved into kindergarten, full inclusion dropped from 64% to 60%. During the move to first grade, the number of children in segregated programs doubled from 16% to 32% and full

inclusion dropped to 14%. Elkins, van Kraayenoord and Jobling (2003) found in secondary schools, children with physical disabilities were more likely to be included than children with developmental or behavioral disabilities. In the same study it was discovered that children with autism or severe disabilities were over-represented in primary schools, but not in preschools or secondary settings. Looking at these facts, it is obvious that the widespread system change to inclusion that IDEA and many parents and professionals had hoped for is not occurring. Determining the reasons for this is the basis for this study. In order to understand the problems with the current process of inclusion, it is important to understand what is essential in making inclusion work.

Success Factors for Inclusion

There are multiple factors that contribute to the success of inclusive placements for children with disabilities. Individualized instruction is necessary for inclusion to be successful (Odom, 2000). Adaptations may naturally evolve or may need to be specialized to be effective for each child. Each child's abilities and needs should be assessed and individual adaptations should be made as needed (Odom). Standards of success need to be determined for each child and family and should not be globally defined. Teachers, parents, and other team members should assess current levels of development in order to set appropriate and individualized goals. Communication and planning between all professionals and parents needs to be well organized in order to effectively serve the child (Campbell, 1997). A family centered approach is one of the most effective and desirable approaches meaning services are guided by the family's priorities and goals, and family members are allowed to determine the level at which they

will be involved in the process. Campbell (1997) also found timelines that were flexible to allow for varied progress and occasional set backs were most effective.

It is essential to have the support of all parents involved, including the parents of children without disabilities, if inclusion is to be successfully implemented (Palmer et al., 2001). Parents of children with disabilities are supposed to be actively involved in the placement decisions for their child. Research shows parents are more supportive of inclusion when the school placed a higher value on developing social skills as opposed to academic skills (Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy & Widaman, 1998). Parents on both sides tend to view social acceptance as one of the main benefits and goals of inclusion (Garrick & Salend, 2000). Therefore, it is important that social acceptance is a focus in the inclusive classroom. Parents are more supportive of inclusion when they have all of the information and communication possible.

Successful inclusion efforts occur when the administration has an active commitment to the idea (Lieber et al., 2000). Teachers are more successful if they participate in placement decisions, have opportunities to observe other teachers in inclusive classes, receive assistance in the classroom and undergo extensive training. A predictor of the success of inclusion is the attitudes of the teachers who will be involved. Without the support and backing of these teachers, inclusion may be set up for failure. Lieber et al. found the following factors affected the success of included students: (a) tolerance of diverse student skill levels, (b) teacher's level of knowledge about students with disabilities, (c) ability to implement a cooperative group learning environment, and (d) collaboration between general and special educators.

Collaboration between special and general educators is essential in enabling general educators to feel prepared and comfortable in working with children with disabilities (Olson et al., 1997). Special education teachers can offer advice on appropriate classroom and program set up, and help troubleshoot problems that may arise. Teaching teams need to form a cooperative working relationship, which sometimes proves difficult as both parties often have very different ideas about how things should be done. To effectively implement an inclusion program, it is important for administration to offer training to all teachers involved and to be sensitive to the issues teachers may encounter. Olson et al. found that successful inclusionists were teachers who were tolerant, reflective, and flexible. These teachers described themselves as easy going, calm, patient, and friendly. All teachers surveyed expressed a feeling of equal responsibility for the education of students with and without disabilities. The attitudes of the teachers favored interpersonal warmth and acceptance with the goal of providing environments that fostered development and sensitive communities.

Overall, successful inclusion is a team effort by committed professionals and families. There must be a positive climate created by parents and professionals who are there by choice. There must be a focus on the individual needs of each child and every child must be treated as a valued member of the class community. Children must be socially integrated into the general education class, which means that children are connected and maintain relationships of the same quality as the typically developing children. Even with the abundance of research on successful inclusion, research shows that these ideal conditions are not the norm. In fact, inclusion is often forced on teachers

and parents with little or no choice or training involved (Bricker, 2000; Dybvik, 2004; Lieber et al., 2000) resulting in barriers to successful inclusion.

Barriers to Successful Inclusion

Unfortunately, inclusion is not universal due to the fact that it is not always interpreted, adapted, and practiced in a consistent manner. Children with physical disabilities do not always receive proper handling or specialized equipment, and may be isolated (confined to their wheelchairs). Specialized services, when provided, may promote isolation of children with disabilities by removing them from the classroom setting to receive the services (Bricker, 2000). Children are also frequently placed by chronological age rather than developmental levels, which can cause problems for the teacher when adapting curriculum. Grouping by age may result in social issues for the child with disabilities. According to Dybvik (2004), some of the worst practices in inclusion are: insisting on inclusion at all costs, settling for the mere presence of children with disabilities in the class, providing little or no training to teachers, watering down curriculum, and failing to teach other children about the nature of disabilities and how to interact with children who are disabled.

One reason a widespread movement toward inclusion has not occurred is because, in order to be successful, it must have parent support (Palmer et al., 2001). Many parents whose children would be affected by this do not support the idea. This lack of support as well as the perceptions, concerns, and beliefs of parents both of children with and without disabilities creates a barrier to successful inclusion. Understanding parent perspectives is important because according to legislation, parents are the decision makers in placement

of their children in inclusive settings. Parents play a central role in their child's development. They are the driving force behind the child's services, are often the initiators and advocates of reform, and can be instrumental in the success of the inclusion (Garrick & Salend, 2000). Parents of children with and without disabilities may have concerns about the quality of programs, teacher preparedness, and acceptance of children with disabilities. Although parents in each group may have similar concerns, in general parents of children with special needs have been found to be more supportive of inclusion than parents of children without special needs (Stoiber et al., 1998). This may be due to the fact that these two groups of parents have different sets of concerns. Parents of children with disabilities have a natural desire for their children to participate in school and society as normally as possible whereas parents of children without disabilities may be concerned that their child will not receive enough time and attention when children with disabilities are present (Garrick & Salend).

Perceptions and Concerns of Parents of Children without Disabilities. Research reports both supportive and unsupportive attitudes toward inclusion from parents of children without disabilities. One study found that before placement in an inclusive class, parents of children without disabilities were worried about the effectiveness of instruction, availability of services and adequate teacher attention to their children (Garrick & Salend, 2000). Parents were also concerned their child would emulate the behaviors of children with disabilities. These concerns are commonly found in the research and reflect a possible lack of knowledge and/or experience with disabilities on the part of the parents. Peck et al. (2004) found parents of children without disabilities

were concerned their children's needs were overlooked, behavioral disruptions of children with disabilities took up too much teacher attention, and scarce resources were unfairly allocated to children with disabilities. These parents may feel that they have had little choice in the placement of children with disabilities in their child's class and may be unsure as to how this will affect their child. Although this and many studies have found that the majority of parent opinions are positive, these are still concerns for parents and affect whether they would place their child in an inclusive classroom in the future. As previously stated, parent support of inclusion is essential for success and if parents are apprehensive or worried about the outcomes of inclusion, or are dissatisfied with the way in which it is being approached, success will be impossible.

Perceptions and Concerns of General Education Teachers. Another potential barrier to inclusion is the attitudes of the professionals that are involved including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals. General education teachers may find they are unprepared for the task of teaching in inclusive settings and often are overwhelmed with the class size, work load, and lack of preparation time involved in their jobs (Buysse, Wesley, & Keyes, 1998; Hewitt, 1999; Mulvihill et al., 2002; Pace, 2003; Seery et al., 2000). Inclusion demands that teachers deal with challenges for which they were never properly trained. Teachers may have completed one course on disabilities in their education, and though they are supposed to be meeting with the special education teachers for guidance, the special education teachers may have a caseload that does not permit them to do so (Dybvik, 2004; Hewitt, 1999).

Demands for more planning time are high, yet few districts allot time for these meetings and access to time with specialists is quite limited (Olson et al., 1997; Seery et al., 2000). Without the help of special education teachers, general education teachers may feel that they are unable to serve children with special needs properly. To add to the concerns, teachers may worry that they are shortchanging the children without disabilities as they deal with the challenges of the children with disabilities (Dybvik, 2004). In an effort to offer assistance in the classroom, paraprofessionals are often hired to assist children with special needs. The problem with this lies in the fact that these paraprofessionals are not required to have any prior education or experience in the field of education (Dybvik). This leaves teachers with very little support in program planning and effective interventions for working with children with disabilities and may further contribute to negative feelings about inclusion in general.

With the lack of support to teachers, it is no wonder they feel children with speech, language, and mild cognitive delays are most easily accommodated (Stoiber et al., 1998). Stoiber et al. also found that children with autism, behavior problems, neurological disorders, and visual or hearing impairments were viewed as needing the greatest amount of classroom adaptations, and therefore are not ideal candidates for inclusion. Teachers have expressed a need for more hands-on experience as well as on-going training to effectively include children with disabilities in their classes. With increased training, they may feel more comfortable with serving a variety of children with special needs.

Social Acceptance. Social competence and acceptance has reportedly been one of the main goals and benefits of inclusion efforts (Dybvik, 2004). Friendships are an important part of the development of self-esteem and sense of belonging for all students (Bergen, 1993). Lack of social acceptance by peers can prove to be a barrier to successful inclusion as it can be detrimental to students. When it comes to making friends and forming attachments with peers, the child with disabilities may have more difficulty than his non-disabled peers, since friendships are naturally based on similarities (Cook & Semmel, 1999). Peer acceptance is important to the quality of life of all students and particularly to students with disabilities, as their acceptance rates in society run the risk of being lower than children without disabilities.

Children with disabilities may be pressured through peer rejection and the feeling that they are too different and need to conform or leave the group (Cook & Semmel, 1999). Severely disabled students may be more accepted by peers because their disabilities are often quite obvious, resulting in peers adjusting their expectations and having an “excuse” for the differences (McHugh, 1970). Children who are mildly disabled may not appear different at all and when they act differently than their peers, they may not be accepting (Siperstein, Budoff, & Bak, 1980). In a 1999 study by Cook and Semmel, children with severe disabilities were more accepted in non-heterogeneous classes than their counterparts in heterogeneous classes. They also discovered that students with mild disabilities were better accepted in heterogeneous classes. Children’s social competence determines their social status in the preschool years, which in turn contributes to their status throughout their education and into adulthood. If children with

special needs are not perceived as playmates by typically developing peers, they may have fewer opportunities for social interaction resulting in poor social competence and possible long-term delays in social development (Nabors, 1997).

Research reports a variety of outcomes related to social acceptance of children with disabilities who are enrolled in inclusive classrooms. Through interviews with children enrolled in an inclusive classroom, Nabors (1997) found that children with special needs did not receive more negative nominations as a desirable friend and playmate than would be expected based on their representation in the class. However, children with special needs did receive fewer positive nominations than expected in 75% of the classes. Many children with disabilities did not receive positive or negative nominations, suggesting a neglected status. The lack of nominations also indicates that children with special needs may not have a positive social status. The children with disabilities that received negative nominations were reported to be mean and aggressive 85% of the time in this study.

A similar study involving interviews and observations of children enrolled in inclusive classes found no difference in ratings of social acceptance of children with or without disabilities (Okagaki, Diamond, Kontos, & Hestenes, 1998). Okagaki et al. also found that children reported being equally willing to play with children with and without disabilities. When the same children were observed, they were equally likely to play with members of each group. Different results were found in a 1999 study by Cook and Semmel where students with disabilities were rated consistently lower than children without disabilities by their classmates in desirability to work and play with categories.

Although the related research on social acceptance reports a variety of findings, it does indicate that parents' concerns about the acceptance of their child are valid and that negative social status may create a barrier to successful inclusion.

Conclusion

In order to effectively include children with disabilities in general education settings, everyone involved needs to work cooperatively, have an accepting attitude and become well informed about disabilities. The laws, although open to interpretation, all endorse inclusion for children with special needs. Regardless of this preference toward inclusion, the fact is that there are many barriers to successful inclusion. If children with disabilities are not accepted by their peers, inclusion may not be successful. Ineffective program implementation may interfere with inclusion, especially if those involved are inadequately trained and unprepared. If the parents and teachers lack a shared vision and feel forced into dealing with inclusion, they may form negative attitudes or concerns, which can be detrimental. A lack of knowledge about disabilities can cause fear in parents and teachers, which may turn into an attitude of resistance. Parents and teachers are key players in the success of inclusion so we must start by identifying and eliminating their concerns before we can expect a widespread move toward inclusion.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this study was to determine possible barriers to inclusion at the preschool level by evaluating the perceptions of parents of children without disabilities, and those of general education preschool teachers, regarding inclusion. The questions this study intended to answer were: (a) what are the perceptions of parents of preschool children without disabilities related to inclusion, and (b) what are the perceptions of regular education preschool teachers related to inclusion?

Research Design

This was a descriptive study using a survey method with two groups of participants: parents of typically developing preschool children and preschool teachers. Comparisons between the responses of the two participant groups were made to determine whether the groups had similar perceptions as well as to determine what perceptions were most common.

Participants

There were two groups of participants in this study. Each group consisted of 15 participants chosen using a convenience sample of people who were affiliated with Bright Horizons Family Solutions/Marin Day Schools (BHFS/MDS). The two groups included: (a) preschool teachers over the age of 18 who were employed as teachers of children between the ages of 2 and 5 years in a private preschool setting, and (b) parents over the age of 18 who had at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5 years, enrolled in a private preschool program.

Table 1 shows demographic information for the teacher participant group. There were 13 female and two male participants. Eight of the teacher participants reported “some college” as their highest level of education, six reported holding a BA, and one held a MA degree. The most represented age group was the 24 to 29 year old group, of which there were nine. There were three participants over 48 years old, and one each in the age groups 18 to 23, 30 to 35, and 36 to 41.

Table 1

Demographics for Teacher Participants

Age Range	n	Education Level	n	Gender	n
18-23	1	Some College	8	Female	13
24-29	9	BA	6	Male	2
30-35	1	MA	1		
36-41	1				
42-47	0				
Over 48	3				

Table 2 shows the demographic information for the parent participant group. There were 11 female parent participants and 4 male parent participants. The majority of parent participants fell into the 36 to 41 year old age group; there were nine in this group. There were also three participants ages 30 to 35 years old, and one each in the 24 to 29, 42 to 47, and over 48 age groups. Four parent participants reported holding BA degrees;

four reported holding MA degrees; three reported holding PhD's, and four reported having some college education.

Table 2

Demographics for Parent Participants

Age Range	n	Education Level	n	Gender	n
18-23	0	Some College	4	Female	11
24-29	1	BA	4	Male	4
30-35	3	MA	4		
36-41	9	PhD	3		
42-47	1				
Over 48	1				

Settings

All participants were associated with the Redwood City, CA campus of MDS/BHFS. This is a private, non-profit preschool serving 110 children, ages 2 months to 5 1/2 years. There are a total of 27 faculty and three administrators on staff.

Instrumentation

Two versions of the same surveys were utilized in this study, one for each group of participants (see Appendices A and B). Both surveys contained the same 11 Likert Scale statements regarding the impact of inclusion and requiring the participant to circle a number from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating they strongly disagree and 5 indicating that they strongly agree with the statement. According to a rank order system, the scoring for the

Likert scale statements was as follows: (a) 5 indicates “strongly agree”, (b) 4 indicates “agree”, (c) 3 indicates “no opinion”, (d) 2 indicates “disagree”, and (e) 1 indicates “strongly disagree”. Each survey included the same two open-ended questions regarding perceived benefits and drawbacks of inclusion. The demographic section was different for each survey. The teacher survey included 11 demographic questions regarding training, class enrollment, and experience with special needs. The parent survey included four demographic questions focused on parent age, education level, and whether their child had ever attended preschool with a child with special needs. The teacher surveys had 25 questions and the parent surveys had 17, and were developed directly from information gained through the literature review process to ensure validity. The surveys were field-tested resulting in the elimination of one question, re-wording of two questions, and clarification of the instructions.

Data Collection Procedures

Teacher participants included all those who taught children ages 2 to 5 years at the Redwood City campus of BHFS/MDS. Parent participants included parents with children ages 2 to 5 enrolled at the Redwood City campus of BHFS/MDS. Packets containing the survey, cover letter, letter of informed consent, and self addressed stamped envelope were placed in the mail slots at the center for all parent and teacher participants. Directions for participants included a simple, functional explanation of related terms and specific directions for filling out the survey. One week after the mailing, a note thanking the participants for their time and asking that they take the time to do the questionnaire if they had not, was placed in the same mail slots.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by keeping the survey responses completely anonymous through use of a letter of informed consent rather than a signed letter of consent. Surveys did not include any identifying information and participants returned questionnaires by mail. Questionnaires were stored in a locked fireproof box at the researcher's home.

Benefits and Risks

There was no compensation of any kind offered to the participants of this study. There were no anticipated risks to the participants of this study. Possible benefits may include an increased awareness of what is needed to provide successful inclusion at the Redwood City BHFS/MDS campus, leading to a training and education plan for teachers and parents.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the quantitative data. Guba and Lincoln's (1981) coding system was used to analyze the qualitative data from the open-ended questions.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Quantitative Results

This section reports the results of the 11 Likert scale statements contained in the surveys used with each participant group. Means were calculated for each item. Figure 1 (Appendix C) shows the mean responses of all 11 items for both participant groups.

Item one on each survey stated, “Parents of children with special needs would likely prefer that their child attend school with children who have similar special needs and not with typically developing children.” By rank ordering the means, it appears that teachers generally disagree with this statement more than parents and parents are slightly more neutral on the subject. The mean response for teachers was 2.33 and for parents was 3.13 out of 5.00.

Item two stated, “Most preschool teachers lack the training and experience to effectively teach typically developing children and children with special needs in the same classroom.” By rank ordering the means, it appears that both teachers and parents agree with this statement. The mean answer for teachers was 4.00 and for parents was 3.93 out of 5.00.

Item number three stated, “The presence of children with special needs will promote acceptance of differences in typically developing children.” Teachers agreed with this statement slightly more than parents, but the difference was minimal. The mean response for this question for teachers was 4.07 and for parents was 3.53 out of 5.00.

Item number four on each survey stated, "It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains children with special needs and children with typical abilities." Both groups answered close to "no opinion" on this item, with parents agreeing slightly more than teachers. The mean for the teachers was 3.00 and for parents, 3.53 out of 5.00.

Item number five stated, "The needs of children with special needs typically cannot be met by a regular education preschool teacher." Teachers in general disagreed with this statement. The mean response for teachers was 2.67 while parents were just over neutral on the subject, with a mean response of 3.40 out of 5.00.

Item number six stated, "Typically developing children will likely mimic the behavior problems of children with special needs when both are educated in the same classroom." Both groups of participants disagreed with this statement. The mean response for teachers was 2.33 and for parents was 2.80 out of 5.00.

Item number seven stated, "Children with special needs will have increased self esteem as a result of participation in regular education preschool classes." Again, teachers and parents appeared to have similar views on this subject. Both groups answered between "no opinion" and "agree" on this item. The mean for teachers was 3.80 and for parents was 3.47 out of 5.00.

Item number eight stated, "Children with special needs will be isolated by typically developing children when the two groups attend the same classroom." It appears that teachers disagree with the statement slightly more than parents. The mean response for teachers was 2.67 and for parents was 3.07 out of 5.00.

Item number nine stated, “Children with special needs monopolize teacher time and attention.” Teachers and parents seemed to agree with this statement. Parents appeared to agree more strongly about it as their mean response was 3.80 as opposed to the teacher mean of 3.33 out of 5.00.

Item ten stated the following, “The benefits of inclusion outweigh the possible problems for both typically developing children and children with special needs.” This item had the most variance between groups. Teachers agreed with this item while parents tended to disagree. The mean response for teachers was 3.53 while for parents it was 2.60 out of 5.00.

The final item of the survey stated, “The quality of education that a typically developing child educated in an inclusive classroom receives is improved as a result of the inclusion experience.” Rank ordering the data showed that this item had the second greatest variance in responses between groups. Teachers agreed with this statement, the mean for the group was 3.73 out of 5.00. Parents disagreed with this statement and had a mean response of 2.87 out of 5.00.

Qualitative Results

All parent participants responded to both of the open-ended questions. Out of 15 teacher participants, five did not answer either open-ended question, one skipped question number one, and one skipped question number two. Seven themes emerged from analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions. Of the seven themes, the following three were related to the perceived benefits of inclusion: (a) Increased acceptance and awareness of disabilities and differences on the part of all children, (b)

Children with special needs gaining increased levels of development and motivation to succeed as a result of watching the typically developing children, and (c) Increased self esteem for children with disabilities. The remaining four themes were related to the drawbacks of inclusion, they were as follows: (a) Lack of time and attention available to typically developing children and behavioral concerns, (b) Lack of staffing, resources and training available to teachers, (c) Children with special needs being isolated by peers and possibly not receiving the attention they need, and (d) Children with special needs holding back the group.

Benefits. It appears that the most important theme was that acceptance and awareness of disabilities on the part of all children would increase as a result of inclusion. Both groups saw this as the main benefit to inclusion. There were 11 comments made by parents under this category and nine by teachers. Teachers and parents cited this theme as a benefit to inclusion more often than any other theme. An example of a parent comment related to this theme was, “One of the major advantages is that it teaches children acceptance. I think it is important for children to learn early that not everyone is the same.” One of the teachers stated, “Allowing children to have the experience of having many different children in the classroom will lead to more sensitive and tolerant experiences in their lives.”

The next theme, and second most cited as a benefit of inclusion, was that children with special needs would have increased levels of development and motivation to succeed as a result of watching the typically developing children. There were four parents and two teacher comments under this section. One parent stated, “The special

needs child may develop quicker because they see the typical child performing things with ease.” One teacher commented, “The children with special needs may get motivated by typically developing children and may do their best to improve themselves.” The other teacher comment was, “The special needs child will get more and may develop faster.”

The last theme cited as a benefit to inclusion was increased self-esteem for children with disabilities. This theme was not commented on by any of the teacher participants and only three of the parent participants. One parent stated, “Special needs children could have a better sense of self esteem while in a classroom with typical children.” The other two parents simply listed “increased self esteem”.

Drawbacks. The theme that received the second most comments concerned the possibility of lack of time and attention available to typically developing children and behavioral concerns. This was cited as a major drawback to inclusion more often than any other theme discussed by parents, indicating that parents believe this to be the biggest drawback to inclusion. Parents commented on this theme 13 times while teachers commented six times. One parent stated, “Too much attention is diverted to the special needs child who requires a disproportionate amount of time than the ‘normal child.’” Another parent commented, “[A major drawback is] mainly disruptive behavior that is reflected by the other typically developing children.” One teacher stated, “The other children may not get the care they need if a special needs child needs more one on one and the class is maintaining the same ratio...” while another commented, “I believe that children with special needs would take most of my time and wouldn’t let me pay enough

attention to typically developing children and consequently, they [typically developing children] feel neglected and I won't be able to respond to their needs effectively."

The next most cited drawback to inclusion was lack of staffing, resources and training available to teachers. Evaluation of comments showed that teachers cited this theme and the previous theme equally as a drawback to inclusion. There were six teacher and seven parent comments under this theme. Examples of a parent comments included the following: "Teachers require special training to accommodate special needs children." "The lack of general funding for education means that the teachers are already overwhelmed. Special education, while Federally mandated, is not fully funded so this further exacerbates the funding problem." and finally, "The child that has special needs will not get the special attention that he or she needs because he/she needs specially trained teachers." Some of the teacher comments were, "Lack of staffing, special equipment, training and support", "Teachers aren't educated well enough for [dealing with] special needs" and finally, "The major drawback would be staffing. It is difficult to find good qualified teachers in this field with the low pay. The other drawback would be lack of training..."

The next theme cited as a drawback was that children with special needs may be isolated by peers and may not receive the attention they need. Three parents and two teachers had comments related to this theme. The parent comments were as follows: "A child with special needs may not get the individual attention that is needed to help them fully develop;" "Typically developing children tend not to understand why a child with special needs cannot follow along or listen like the rest of the class which can cause

confusion and feelings of sadness for the child with special needs;” and “Depending on the group of children, there may be some isolation.” The teacher comments were, “Children tend to group together on developmental levels, special needs children would be left out,” and “I think that the typically developing children are always a step ahead, it would be better for the special needs children to be with others like themselves.”

The last theme was that children with special needs would hold the entire group back. There was no evidence of this concern from teacher participants. Only three parent participants expressed this concern. One parent stated, “Teachers work to the lowest common denominator in the room.” Another commented, “[A drawback is] Delays in moving the children forward in the curriculum due to special needs children’s capacity and ability to keep up with the pace of the typical child.” The last parent wrote, “A classroom can only learn at the speed of the slowest children.”

Conclusion

It appears that parents and teachers had similar perceptions about preschool inclusion. Both groups of participants believed teachers lacked the needed experience and training in dealing with special needs that is required to make inclusion successful. Both participant groups also agreed that children with special needs would monopolize teacher time and attention in an inclusive class. Teachers and parents felt children with special needs would experience increased self-esteem when enrolled in an inclusive preschool class, and typically developing children would learn to accept differences as a result of their participation in the environment. Teachers and parents did not agree on two of the statements. First, teachers believed they could meet the needs of a child with

special needs but parents believed they could not do so. However, parents reported the benefits of inclusion did not outweigh the possible challenges, but teachers felt that the benefits outweighed the challenges. According to written comments, parents perceived acceptance and awareness of children with special needs on the part of typically developing children to be the major benefit of inclusion. The parents reportedly perceived lack of time and attention available to typically developing children as a result of inclusion of children with special needs as the main drawback to inclusion. Teachers also viewed acceptance and awareness of children with special needs on the part of typically developing children to be the major benefit of inclusion. Teachers saw the major drawbacks of inclusion to be lack of time and attention available to typically developing children, and lack of staffing, resources, and training available to teachers.

Although the results of the quantitative data for both participant groups were not extremely positive or negative, this rank order analysis of the quantitative data showed trends that help in understanding the perceptions of these two groups. Analysis of the qualitative data also helped in understanding what parents and teachers felt were the major benefits and drawbacks to inclusion.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This research was aimed at examining perceptions of parents and teachers toward inclusion. The first question addressed the perceptions of parents of preschool children without disabilities related to inclusion. The survey results revealed that parents of children who are typically developing have both positive and negative perceptions toward inclusion. These parents reported that their children would learn to accept differences as a result of participation in an inclusive classroom and would not isolate children with disabilities. They thought the self-esteem of the child with disabilities would be increased as a result of placement in an inclusive environment. Parents did not report concerns that children would begin to mimic the behaviors of the children with disabilities.

Parents reported concerns about inclusion practices in preschool environments. One of the areas of concern was teacher competence and experience. Parents reported the belief that preschool teachers lack the training and experience required to make inclusion successful, and that they would be unable to meet the needs of children with disabilities. This is consistent with the findings of Garrick and Salend (2000). Parents in this study thought it would be difficult to maintain order in such a classroom and children with disabilities would monopolize teacher time and attention. Parents believed that the benefits of inclusion do not outweigh the problems and felt that parents of children with disabilities would prefer their child to attend a classroom consisting of other children with disabilities, rather than an inclusion class.

The second question of this study addressed the perceptions of general education preschool teachers related to inclusion. Analysis of the survey results revealed that teachers had similar perceptions to those of parents in regards to inclusion. Teachers believed that children who were typically developing would learn to accept differences as a result of participation in an inclusive classroom, and children with disabilities would not be isolated by their typically developing peers. Teachers also reported that the self-esteem of children with disabilities would be increased as a result of placement in an inclusive environment. Teachers did not think that typically developing children would mimic the behaviors of children with disabilities as a result of participation in an inclusive classroom.

Teacher participants reported that preschool teachers lack the training and experience required to make inclusion successful. Similar findings were reported by Hewitt (1999) and Pace (2003). However, teachers believed that they would be able to meet the needs of children with disabilities in a classroom setting. Teachers thought it would be difficult to maintain order in an inclusive classroom and children with disabilities would monopolize their time and attention. They also believed parents of children with disabilities would likely prefer that their child attend a special class instead of an inclusion classroom. Unlike parents, teachers agreed that the benefits of inclusion outweigh the possible problems it may cause.

A significant finding in this research is that parents and teachers share many similar perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of inclusion in preschool classrooms. Scores on all but two of the Likert scales items were very similar for both groups.

Another significant finding deals with the two survey items where teachers and parents did not agree. The first such item was statement number five, which stated that a general education preschool teacher could not meet the needs of children with disabilities. Parents agreed with this statement while teachers disagreed. The second item of disagreement was number ten, which stated that the benefits of inclusion outweigh the possible problems it may create. Parents disagreed with this statement while teachers agreed.

The qualitative data revealed that parents and teachers perceive the main benefit of inclusion to be increased acceptance and awareness of children with special needs by typically developing children. It was also found that both groups agreed that the main drawback of inclusion is less available time and attention for typically developing children due to children with special needs requiring increased teacher energy. One interesting theme that emerged from the open-ended questions that was unfounded in the review of literature was the belief that children with special needs may develop faster as a result of being educated with children who are typically developing. It is difficult to determine exactly why parents and teachers would feel this way since the survey questions did not identify any specific type of disability. It would be interesting to know whether they would answer the same if talking about a child with developmental delays as opposed to a child with behavioral or emotional issues.

There are several factors that may have contributed to the similarities and differences in responses to the survey items between participant groups. First, the parents and teachers surveyed had little to no experience with children with special needs. This

may have resulted in increased fear and uncertainty surrounding teacher ability to maintain order and teach effectively in an inclusion classroom. Second, participants in this study were all from a preschool that seeks to promote differences and self-esteem in children, suggesting they believe these things are important in an early education setting. Given this fact, it is logical that both groups of participants would agree that the possible positive effects of inclusion would be increased acceptance of differences as well as increased self esteem for children with disabilities. Third, the teachers in this study all worked in classrooms using a primary care giving system, meaning each teacher is primarily responsible for a small group of three to seven children. This system provides an opportunity for individualized care and a possible explanation as to why the teachers believed they could meet the needs of a child with special needs. Parents are often amazed that the teachers can meet the needs of all of the children in their care, which may contribute to their perception that the addition of a child with a disability would create too many demands on the teacher and that the teacher could not meet the needs of a child with special needs. Finally, teacher participants are prepared to meet the needs of many different children at once and are educated in the benefits of individualized early education. Even without inclusion experience, it seems natural for teachers to agree that the benefits would outweigh the drawbacks, as teachers are thinking of the entire class, not just the impact on one child. Parents did not agree that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks, possibly because parents are naturally focused on their child and the impact inclusion would have on him or her.

If a widespread system change to inclusion is expected and even mandated by law, it is obvious that parents and teachers will need more knowledge and experience when it comes to educating children with special needs, and how to implement inclusion practices in the classroom. This study suggests that teachers and parents see a need for extra support, training, and funding in order to feel comfortable supporting inclusion. Teacher training universities and state licensing agencies need to stand firmly behind future inclusive practices by requiring that courses in special education be a requirement for early education credential and degree programs and licenses. Program administrators may need to develop their own training programs and workshops on this topic and make them available to teachers and parents. This study revealed that parents and teachers are aware of and agree upon the benefits of inclusion. The next step for this preschool program is to get training and professional development programs set up for teachers and parents in order to set the stage for successful inclusion in the future.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that should be considered. The participants were all chosen from one preschool and their opinions may not reflect those of teachers and parents in other schools or geographical regions. Also, the participants did not have experience with inclusion and this may have been their first opportunity to consider the benefits and drawbacks of such a system. Many participants also commented that the statements in the survey were difficult to answer without having a specific disability to consider. For instance, participants may have answered differently when asked if it would be difficult to maintain order in a classroom with a child who is

blind versus a child who has severe behavioral and/or emotional problems. Lastly, the general nature of the survey may have caused participants to answer closer to the middle (no opinion).

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the limitations of the current research, future research may attempt to survey perceptions toward inclusion using participants from a variety of schools, in a variety of geographic regions. In addition, it may be helpful to use an instrument that is narrower in focus or to give a brief informational session regarding inclusion and disabilities to participants before they fill out the survey.

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Appendix A

Parent's Opinions about Preschool Inclusion

Parent's Opinions about Preschool Inclusion

The following survey will ask you to answer questions regarding preschool classrooms and explore the concept of educating children with and without special needs in the same class. Please answer each question to the best of your knowledge and give your honest opinions based on your knowledge of the typical preschool situation. Some definitions you will need to know are listed below.

Typically developing child: A child who appears to be developing normally.

Special needs: This can include many things including health problems, behavior disorders, emotional disorders, cognitive delays, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, etc.

Inclusion: The practice of educating children who are typically developing and children with special needs in the same classroom.

For the following questions please check only one box.

1. How old are you?
 - ☐ 18-23
 - ☐ 24-29
 - ☐ 30-35
 - ☐ 36-41
 - ☐ 42-47
 - ☐ Over 48
2. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
3. What is your highest level of education?
 - ☐ High School Diploma
 - ☐ Some college
 - ☐ Bachelor Degree
 - ☐ Masters Degree
 - ☐ Doctorate Degree
4. Has your child ever attended preschool with a child with special needs?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Don't know

Please respond to the following questions by circling the number that best represents your opinion about the statement. (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=No Opinion, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

5. Parents of children with special needs would likely prefer that their child attend school with children who have similar special needs and not with typically developing children.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

6. Most preschool teachers lack the training and experience to effectively teach typically developing children and children with special needs in the same classroom.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

7. The presence of children with special needs will promote acceptance of differences in typically developing children.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

8. It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains children with special needs and children with typical abilities.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

9. The needs of children with special needs typically cannot be met by a regular education preschool teacher.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

10. Typically developing children will likely mimic the behavior problems of children with special needs when both are educated in the same classroom.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

11. Children with special needs will have increased self esteem as a result of participation in regular education preschool classes.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

12. Children with special needs will be isolated by typically developing children when the two groups attend the same classroom.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

13. Children with special needs monopolize teacher time and attention.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

14. The benefits of inclusion outweigh the possible problems for both typically developing children and children with special needs.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

15. The quality of the education that a typically developing child educated in an inclusive classroom receives is improved as a result of the inclusion experience.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

Please respond to the following questions.

16. What are the major drawbacks of including children with special needs in preschool classrooms with typically developing children?

17. What are the major advantages?

Appendix B

Teacher's Opinions about Preschool Inclusion

Teacher's Opinions about Preschool Inclusion

The following survey will ask you to answer questions regarding preschool classrooms and explore the concept of educating children with and without special needs in the same class. Please answer each question to the best of your knowledge and give your honest opinions based on your preschool teaching experience. Some definitions you will need to know are listed below.

Typically developing child: A child who appears to be developing normally.

Special needs: This can include many things including health problems, behavior disorders, emotional disorders, cognitive delays, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, etc.

Inclusion: The practice of educating children who are typically developing and children with special needs in the same classroom.

For the following questions please check only one box.

1. How old are you?

- ☐ 18-23
- ☐ 24-29
- ☐ 30-35
- ☐ 36-41
- ☐ 42-47
- ☐ Over 48

2. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Bachelor Degree
- ☐ Masters Degree
- ☐ Doctorate Degree

4. Do you have training in dealing with special needs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some

5. Would you be interested in receiving training in special needs?
☐ Yes
☐ No
6. In what type of program do you teach? (check all that apply)
☐ Center-based
☐ Home-based
☐ For-profit
☐ Non-profit
7. How many children are enrolled in your class? _____
8. How many teachers work in your class? _____
9. Are there children with diagnosed special needs in your classroom?
☐ Yes
☐ No
10. If yes to #9, please indicate what types of special needs are present in your classroom.

11. Are there children with suspected special needs enrolled in your classroom?
☐ Yes
☐ No
12. If yes to #11, please indicate what types of special needs are suspected but not officially diagnosed.

13. In order to implement inclusion in my classroom I would need (check all that apply).
☐ Additional Staff
☐ Training
☐ Special equipment or modifications to current equipment.
☐ Parent support
☐ Administrative Support
☐ Other _____

Please respond to the following questions by circling the number that best represents your opinion about the statement. (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=No Opinion, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

14. Parents of children with special needs would likely prefer that their child attend school with children who have similar special needs and not with typically developing children.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

15. Most preschool teachers lack the training and experience to effectively teach typically developing children and children with special needs in the same classroom.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

16. The presence of children with special needs will promote acceptance of differences in typically developing children.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

17. It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains children with special needs and children with typical abilities.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

18. The needs of children with special needs typically cannot be met by a regular education preschool teacher.

Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

19. Typically developing children will likely mimic the behavior problems of children with special needs when both are educated in the same classroom.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

20. Children with special needs will have increased self esteem as a result of participation in regular education preschool classes.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

21. Children with special needs will be isolated by typically developing children when the two groups attend the same classroom.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

22. Children with special needs monopolize teacher time and attention.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

23. The benefits of inclusion outweigh the possible problems for both typically developing children and children with special needs.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

24. The quality of education that a typically developing child educated in an inclusive classroom receives is improved as a result of the inclusion experience.

Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1	

Please respond to the following questions. If you need more space, you may use the back of this page.

25. What do you consider the major drawbacks to having children with special needs in your classroom?

26. What do you consider the major advantages?

Appendix C

Figure 1

Mean Scores of Likert Items

Figure 1

Mean Scores for Likert Items