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## A Study of Rural Teacher and Administrator Attitudes Toward Instructional Models for Educationally Handicapped Elementary Students

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The purpose of this study was to assess and compare the attitudes of special educators, regular educators, principals and special education directors regarding their models of instruction for the handicapped. This assessment and comparison was accomplished by surveying these four groups using a 35-item questionnaire. By a random selection process, 738 questionnaires were distributed to the groups resulting in a 63% rate of return. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess levels of satisfaction and differences (direction directors). While there were statistically significant differences among the four groups on 8 of the 18 variables, the grand mean of responses on each question fell in or near the positive area on the Likert scale. Data revealed that these educators are reporting a high degree of satisfaction with present special education models.

### Problem

With the enactment and implementation of PL 94-142, instructional models for meeting the mainstreaming mandate have changed significantly. As mildly handicapped students have been identified, numerous instructional models have been developed and implemented for instructional delivery purposes. Section 612(5) of P.L. 94-142 requires that handicapped children be placed with nonhandicapped to the maximum extent possible and appropriate. In meeting this requirement, most mildly handicapped special education service systems normally fall into two categories: (1) Regular classroom placement with instructional support within that self-contained classroom, or (2) Regular classroom placement with resource room instructional support. The first approach requires the handicapped student to be in the regular classroom for special education instruction [1].

Public Law 94-142, with its numerous definitive requirements, has created an array of economic as well as instructional and management problems. Yet, limited research exists to measure the positive or negative educational effects of mainstreaming on either mildly handicapped children or regular elementary children in rural areas. The full impact of "Pull-Out" is simply not known at this time [7]. Further compounding the mainstreaming issue for many states and school districts is the necessity to meet the needs of an extremely divergent population. Meeting the needs of mildly handicapped children in rural states and rural districts is considerably different from meeting the needs of their urban counterparts.

### Method

In order to determine Teacher and Administrator attitudes toward instructional models for educationally handicapped students, a questionnaire of 35 items was developed. A five point Likert scale was used (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with each question. The questionnaire assessed demographics, special education delivery models, and teacher and administrator satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their respective special education delivery models.

Seven hundred and thirty-eight elementary school educators were selected from a list of all teachers and administrators in Wyoming using a Control Data Corporation Model 760 computer random number generator. Five hundred elementary teachers (grades 1-6), one hundred special education teachers, ninety-six elementary principals, and forty-two special education directors were randomly selected. Four hundred sixty-six (63%) usable questionnaires were returned. Three hundred and seven (61%) elementary teachers, sixty-seven (67%) special education teachers, sixty-six (66%) elementary principals, and twenty-six (61%) special education directors returned the survey.

The random sample of seven hundred and thirty eight educators included educators throughout the State of Wyoming. Communities ranged in population from 200 to approximately 60,000. However, according to the United States Department of HEW guidelines (HEW, 1982), the entire State of Wyoming is classified as rural, based on population characteristics.

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**Table 1**  
Means and Standard Deviations of Each of the Four Groups on the Measures

Measure	Regular Teachers (N = 307)		Special Education Teachers (N = 67)		Regular Administrators (N = 66)		Special Education Administrators (N = 26)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Model Meets Need of Hdcp.	2.22	1.13	2.05	1.16	2.27	1.46	3.15	2.12
Model Does Not Interfere with Non-handicapped	1.93	0.96	1.52	0.82	1.56	0.80	1.53	1.06
Provides Individual Instruction	1.99	0.81	1.41	0.80	1.51	0.70	1.65	0.79
Enhances Self-Concept	2.03	0.85	1.59	0.81	1.92	0.79	1.65	0.93
Motivates Students	2.17	0.86	1.92	0.84	1.86	0.76	1.73	0.87
Provides Success at Student Ability Level	1.88	0.83	1.46	0.70	1.72	0.71	1.46	0.81
Economically Cost Effective	2.27	0.94	1.88	0.94	2.27	1.13	1.76	0.99
More Instructional Time Non-Handicapped	2.26	1.18	1.71	1.22	2.09	1.01	1.92	1.19
Reduces Special Education Stigma	2.35	1.08	2.22	1.13	2.24	0.99	1.69	0.88
Team Approach to Instruction	2.07	0.96	2.04	1.06	1.95	0.84	1.61	1.02
Increases Parent Support	2.31	0.92	2.28	1.01	1.96	0.84	1.92	1.12
Reduces Grading Problems	2.62	1.19	2.56	1.20	2.59	1.17	2.61	1.49
Decreases Behavior Problems	2.49	1.13	2.20	1.09	2.30	1.05	2.03	1.11
Decreases Disruption Problems	2.57	1.16	2.29	1.10	2.36	1.15	2.00	1.09
Improves Communication Between Reg. & Special Education Teachers	2.11	1.00	1.97	1.01	1.98	0.93	1.61	0.98
Creates Lost-Time Pull-Out Problem	2.99	1.31	3.14	1.32	3.12	1.25	2.50	1.36
Creates Paper Work—Red Tape	2.80	1.32	2.59	1.27	2.66	1.33	2.80	1.60
Administration Provides Adequate Inservice	2.62	1.27	2.89	1.24	2.07	0.98	2.00	1.09

Note: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = unsure, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.

Results from the questionnaire on attitudes toward instructional models for the educationally handicapped elementary student allowed for a comparison among the four groups: Regular Elementary Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Elementary Principals, and Special Education Directors. The method used for the statistical analysis was one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc comparisons. Analysis of variance was used to deal with the four unequal groups and the relatively small populations among these groups [4].

### Results

The means and standard deviations of the four groups on the 18 measures are presented in Table 1.

The SPSS [8] one-way analysis of variance program was used to analyze the data. Significant differences were

found among the four groups on 12 items.

Post hoc comparisons (Tukey) of the educator's perceptions of their models revealed significant differences between groups on the following: (1) special education administrators differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (3.15) than the other three on "model meets needs of handicapped;" (2) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (1.93) than special education teachers on "model does not interfere with nonhandicapped;" (3) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (1.99) than special education teachers and regular administrators on "provides individual instruction;" (4) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (2.03) than special education teachers on "enhances self-concept;" (5) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating

(1.88) than special education teachers and regular administrators on "provides success at student's ability level;" (6) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (2.26) than special education teachers on "more instructional time for the handicapped;" (7) regular teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (2.35) than special education administrators on "reduces special education stigma;" and (8) special education teachers differed significantly from and responded with a lower rating (2.89) than regular and special education administrators "on administration provides adequate inservice."

### Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the four groups of professional educators (i.e. regular educators, special educators, principals, and special education directors) differed significantly among groups on eight questionnaire variables. Since an effective "mainstreaming" approach for the handicapped ostensibly depends on a co-operative or "team" approach to the school's special education delivery mode, it would appear such differences in perceptions among these groups should be identified whenever possible.

While there were significant post hoc comparison differences among group responses on eight variables, it is important to note that there were no significant differences among the groups on ten questionnaire variables. The educators surveyed showed no significant differences on their perceptions of the delivery models on the following variables: (1) motivates students, (2) is economically cost effective, (3) creates a "team" approach to instruction, (4) reduces grading problems, (5) decreases behavior problems, (6) decreases disruption problems, (7) improves communication between regular and special teachers, (8) creates a "lost-time" pull out problem, (9) creates paperwork/red tape problem, and (10) increases parent support.

The following discussion will address the variables in which at least one of the four Groups' responses differed significantly from other groups.

Regarding the question of whether or not their "model meets the needs of the handicapped," special education directors responded with a lower rating (3.15) than did the other three groups. Special education directors apparently felt more strongly than other groups that there was room for improvement in meeting the needs of the handicapped.

On the question of whether or not the "delivery model interferes with the non-handicapped education," the regular teachers surveyed responded with a lower rating (1.93) and differed significantly with the other groups. While still responding near the "agree" level on the scale, they apparently felt more strongly that their schools' delivery modes did interfere to a greater degree with the non-handicapped students' education than did the other groups. Vacc and Kirst [9] indicate that the regular educators they surveyed often resist having the handicapped in their classrooms because they feel that handicapped

children in the regular classroom hold back the progress of the regular students. Their view is supported by the teachers surveyed here.

Regular teachers differed significantly from the special education teachers and principals by responding with a lower rating (1.99) for the statement that their "model provided more individual instruction." It appears that the regular education teachers were not as convinced as the special educators that their school's model provided individualized instruction. This supports Calhoun and Elliott [1] and Leinhardt [6] who reported that the mildly handicapped in their studies achieved more academically when provided individualized instruction in the regular classroom than they did when provided individualized instruction in special education classrooms.

On the issue of whether or not their delivery model "enhances the handicapped child's self concept," the regular teachers responses again differed significantly (2.03) from special education teachers and principals. The regular teachers' doubts in this area support Elenbogen's [2] early study which showed that handicapped students placed in the regular classroom were less well adjusted than those placed in a special education classroom. (In a recent review of research by Maddin and Slavin [7] findings conflict with this study and the earlier Elenbogen study.) Maddin and Slavin's findings indicated that full-time regular classroom placement for the handicapped generally produced higher self-esteem in students than occurred in those students who were partially integrated into regular classrooms.

Responses to the question of whether or not their school's model provided success at the handicapped student's level, regular teachers responded with a lower rating (1.88) and differed significantly from both special education teachers and principals. Providing a possible rationale or basis for these differences in responses, Gickling and Theobald [3] indicated they found that regular class teachers feel poorly prepared to deal with the academic needs of the handicapped, making it difficult for these special needs students to succeed in the regular classroom.

Regular teachers rated the question of whether or not "their model reduced special education stigma" with a lower rating (2.35) and differed significantly from special education directors. Gottlieb, Gampel, and Budoff [5] support the regular educators' lower rating on the question of reducing special education stigma. Their findings revealed that handicapped children were less well accepted than their normal peers when they were labeled and provided special education services.

The question of whether or not "their model provides adequate inservice" was rated lower (2.89) by special educators and their responses differed significantly from principals and special education teachers' ratings on this variable. These findings apparently show that the special teachers and regular teachers feel a greater need to have more adequate inservice in this area than do the principals and special education directors.

In looking at the total responses to the survey, all four groups appear to be fairly positive about their respective

special education delivery models. An analysis of the two statements which were phrased in negative terms (i.e., creates a lost-time/pull-out problem and creates paperwork red tape) revealed that the grand mean of all four groups was 2.83. This rating was close to "three" or the "unsure" indicator on the Likert Scale. Contrasting with this grand mean was the grand mean of responses to the sixteen questions which were phrased in positive terms (i.e., model meets the needs of the handicapped, enhances self-concept, etc.) The grand mean for the positively phrased statements from all four groups responses was 2.04. It should be noted that "two" was the "agree" level of response on the Likert Scale. These data reveal that, as a whole, respondents from all four groups reported more positive than negative attitudes toward their respective special education delivery models.

An analysis of specific findings of this survey or one similar to it would be useful when school districts are modifying existing delivery models or adopting new models. Should major differences in attitudes exist among regular teachers, special teachers, principals and special education directors in their school district it would be very valuable to know about these difficulties in advance of making changes. Likewise any statewide or nationwide modifications in laws affecting special education might benefit from a survey such as this one.

Future studies of the attitudes toward special education delivery modes might profit by including parents, and when appropriate, the handicapped students themselves. Wider scale studies would allow for an analysis of the consumers' views of their special education services along with the views of the service providers.

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