

Running head: ATTITUDES AND PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSION

Attitudes and Perspectives of Students Without Disabilities and Teachers on Inclusion
~~XXXXX~~ and ~~XXXXX~~
University of Kansas Medical Center

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“Inclusion is a movement that seeks to create schools and other social institutions based on meeting the needs of all learners as well as respecting and learning from each other’s differences” (Salend 1998). By delivering services in the natural environment, Occupational therapists, parents and educators may provide the ideal learning opportunity for all children, both with and without disabilities. Being knowledgeable about how our current educational system affects children with and without disabilities is necessary to provide optimal treatment interventions utilizing their natural environment in order to support daily life functions. The latest revision to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 has influenced the delivery of special education services by school systems. IDEA attempts to ensure all children with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that is designed to meet their specific needs and prepare them for the future. Further, IDEA protects the rights of students with disabilities and their parents, as well as assisting agencies in providing an effective education for children with disabilities (Retrieved April 29, 2003, from <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21.txt.htm>).

Since 1997 IDEA has been revised, to include children with disabilities in regular education classrooms. This has raised questions about the true effects of inclusion, not only on students with disabilities but also on their non-disabled peers. Little evidence exists of the impact of inclusion on attitudes and perspectives of non-disabled students and educators. Teachers and students previously have indicated varying viewpoints regarding inclusion. According to Cook (2001), teachers’ attitudes on inclusion vary based on severity of the child’s disability. Students diagnosed with a mild disability are expected to perform academically at the same level of their

typical peers and socially rejected more often than those with a severe disability because these less-affected children may lack obvious differences from typical developing peers. Salend and Duhaney (1999) synthesized multiple studies that teachers' perspectives of inclusion were directly related to their successful/positive experiences. Additionally, the study revealed students' attitudes and perspectives about inclusion varied. Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, and Forgan (1998) interviewed students with and without a learning disability and found that the majority indicated, "pull-out was better for learning but inclusion was better for making friends". Murata, Hodge, and Little (2000) determined that positive contact between non-disabled and disabled students resulted in more optimistic attitudes toward inclusion. Salend and Duhaney (1999) compared multiple studies and discovered inclusion did not have a negative effect on non-disabled students' academic performance. Additionally, Salend and Duhaney (1999) indicated non-disabled students viewed inclusion positively. For example, non-disabled students believed their acceptance and tolerance for physical and behavioral characteristics displayed by peers with disabilities had improved due to inclusion. York and Tundidor (1995) conducted a study asking educators, parents, and students if they felt inclusion was a good idea. Overall, participants thought it was beneficial for students with disabilities to be around non-disabled peers, but only if all students were treated as equals, students with disabilities were not teased, and all students were safe when students with disabilities exhibit challenging behaviors. The preceding studies have provided some information on the attitudes and perspectives of students and educators regarding inclusion but more research is needed to further understand the impact it has on all individuals within the education system.

Due to the fact that a policy of inclusion directly influences the current educational system, two research questions guided this study. The purpose of executing this study in a school

environment where inclusion is practiced is to 1) describe the attitudes and perspectives of third and fourth grade students without disabilities toward their peers with disabilities as well as the experience of having children with disabilities included in their daily educational experience, and 2) determine the attitudes and perspectives of third and fourth grade teachers toward inclusion and how inclusion effects the teacher and students both non-disabled and disabled. More specifically, the study categorizes the participants' attitudes and perspectives into three main areas, focusing on social outcomes, on academic outcomes, and on learning opportunities. We expect to obtain accurate representation of the attitudes and perspectives of teachers and students without disabilities toward inclusion. We anticipate the results will provide helpful information about creating the most appropriate educational environment for an educational system designed to serve students of all abilities.

Methods

Participants

Participants included third and fourth grade students (n=114) without disabilities and third and fourth grade general education teachers (n=16). Third and fourth grade teachers in the ~~XXXXX, XX~~ school district were invited to participate and consented in order to take part in the study. Incentives for teacher participation consisted of an honorarium of \$150 for completing all activities, or a prorated honorarium for activities completed if participant decided to withdraw from the study. Teachers identified students with and without disabilities that may be included in the sample pool. Letters were mailed to parents requesting consent for their child to participate in the study. The letter included the purpose, the procedures, voluntary nature, confidentiality, risks, and benefits. Consent of parents and assent from students were also required to participate in the

study. Students were randomly selected from the sample pool if more than eight students per targeted classroom were eligible for participation.

Instruments

Targeted teachers and targeted students without disabilities were given a survey on their attitudes and perspectives toward inclusion. The student survey consisted of 26 questions rated on a five point Likert-type scale (1=yes, 3=maybe, 5=no) (see Appendices A). The teacher survey contained 25 questions, which were rated on a four point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree) (see Appendix B). Both surveys addressed the three main areas of social outcomes, academic outcome, and learning opportunities.

Design and Procedure

The targeted students were removed from the classroom as a group to administer the survey. Surveys typically were completed in less than 20 minutes in a quiet environment. Test administrators introduced themselves, stated the purpose of survey, defined disability, and answered any preliminary questions. Sample questions were provided to help the students understand how to score the survey and were asked if there were any additional questions. Each survey question was read aloud by the test administrator and participants were encouraged to answer only the current question being read. When participants asked questions during the survey, the administrators responded by repeating the question and encouraged students to do their best to answer the question. Test administrators recorded each student's identification number on the survey and asked if they had any thoughts or questions once the survey was completed.

The targeted teachers were given a perceptual measure, the *Teacher Acceptance Scale*, which required about ten minutes to complete. Project administrators reiterated the intent of

determining what teachers think and feel about educating students with disabilities in the general education setting, and asked the teachers if there were any questions prior to beginning the survey process. Administrators emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and the information collected would be kept confidential.

Results

A descriptive analysis was utilized to determine the attitudes and perspectives of non-disabled students toward their disabled peers, as well as inclusion as an educational model. Frequency, mean, and standard deviation were calculated on each of the student survey questions to determine where student's scores fell on a five point Likert-type scale. Survey questions were divided into three main focus areas to determine specific information about social outcomes, academic outcomes, and learning opportunities. For the purpose of data analysis, the three areas were broken down into sub-categories (social positive, social negative, academic positive, academic negative, classroom/learning opportunities) to offer a more in-depth description of each area (Appendix A).

An overwhelming number of students responded positively about social interaction toward a student with disabilities. On a 1-5 Likert scaling, 83.3% of students responded yes when asked if they would say, "hi" to a kid who has a disability. The students rated the other five questions addressing social outcomes as yes, ranging between 57.9%-71.9% (see Figure 1).

An additional purpose of this study was to analyze the attitudes and perspectives of teachers toward inclusion using the Teacher Acceptance Scale. A descriptive analysis was also used to determine where the teachers' scores fell on a four point Likert-type scale. Frequency, mean, and standard deviation were calculated on all of the teacher survey questions. For the purpose of the data analysis, the teacher questions were also divided into the three main areas

and further divided into the following sub-categories: social positive, social negative, academic positive, and classroom/learning opportunities (Appendix B).

When examining learning opportunities, four questions specifically addressed whether or not regular education teachers felt qualified to teach students with disabilities. Specifically, when including students with a disability in a regular classroom, 75% of the teachers felt they needed more training. Another item on the survey asked the teachers if they felt they had enough training to teach students with disabilities and 43.8% responded “strongly disagree”. These two items demonstrate the survey’s internal validity based on the consistency of the responses (see Figure 2).

The researchers were also interested in teachers’ views on social and academic outcomes. Responses to a question addressing behavior problems in the regular classroom indicated that 25% of teachers strongly agreed that students with disabilities have behavior problems, while none of the teachers strongly disagreed. Answers to a question that focused on social outcomes revealed that 31.3% of teachers strongly disagreed that students with disabilities can best be served in regular classrooms. Teachers' responses were identical on question #7 which focused on academic outcomes (see Figure 3). When teachers were asked if the regular classroom created too much confusion for the student with disabilities, responses ranged from 6.3% strongly disagreeing to 18.8% strongly agreeing.

Within the area of learning opportunities, teachers were asked if being in a regular education classroom helped a student with a disability to learn academics and 25% responded that they strongly disagreed. When students were asked questions focusing on learning opportunities such as, “I would help a kid with disabilities in my class if they had a lot of trouble

learning something”, 81.6% answered yes. Results indicated that 69.3% of students would pick a kid with disabilities to be in their group or to work on a group project (see Figure 4).

Items were extracted from each of the surveys regarding whether or not teachers have sufficient time for all their students. The results from the teacher survey indicate that 43.8% strongly agree and 31.3% agree those students with disabilities take time away from typically developing students, while 18.8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The survey indicated that 68.8% of teachers strongly disagreed when asked if students with disabilities did not require extra time. Due to the consistency of the responses, it indicated internal validity within the survey instrument. When students were asked a similar question, 45.6% did not feel that teachers would not have enough time to help them if a student with disabilities was in their classroom (see Figure 5).

Discussion

The current study provided helpful information about how students without disabilities and teachers feel about inclusion. Results were commiserated with previous research, which has indicated that teachers have varying views about inclusion, while students without disabilities possess more positive views.

Based on previous studies, we expected students without disabilities to view inclusion positively, but were surprised to find how many students responded “yes” to questions that focused on social outcomes. These results indicate that students without disabilities do value socialization with peers with disabilities and the interactions that the inclusion service delivery model provides (see Figure 1).

From the teacher survey, four items were selected and analyzed to determine teachers’ views on social outcomes and academic outcomes. The first two items looked at social outcomes.

More specifically, the items were asking if teachers felt students with disabilities have behavior problems in a regular education classroom and if it was the best environment in which to serve these students. While responses were spread across the continuum, the data analysis indicates teachers do believe that students with disabilities have behavior problems and that a regular education classroom is not the best environment in which to serve these students. The second set of questions analyzed how teachers felt about academic outcomes for students with a disability when a policy of inclusion has been implemented. Again, the teachers' responses were inconsistent, suggesting that teachers possess varying ideas about what the most ideal learning environment should look like for students with disabilities. These variable responses might be explained by teachers previously stating they did not feel qualified to teach students with a disability in the regular classroom. Social and academic outcomes might be viewed more positively if regular education teachers were provided additional training on how to work with a student who has a disability (see Figure 2).

Another aspect of the current study examined learning opportunities. When teachers were asked if a regular education classroom helps a student with disabilities learn faster or learn academics, teachers' responses varied, but overall were inclined to disagree. These results imply that teachers feel a regular education classroom does not meet all needs of students with disabilities. One may conclude that teachers do not feel that they have the resources or skills that are adequate for meeting their learning needs. Additionally they may believe that a regular education classroom might serve disabled students effectively if more support was provided. Students responded much more positively when asked questions about learning opportunities. The data indicated that students are open to learning opportunities for themselves, as well as for students with disabilities. Students have an opportunity to help peers with disabilities, which may

enable them to have an increase in self-esteem as well as a rewarding experience. Another possible explanation for the students' responses might be due to the fact that they are so young, they may lack the exposure to negative experiences with individuals who have a disability (see Figure 4).

When asking teachers if they felt they divided their time equally between students with and without disabilities, we were not surprised to find that teachers viewed items negatively due to the fact limited funding has decreased support and resources in the classroom. However, we did not anticipate the contradiction between student and teacher responses (see Figure 5). The results suggest that students are not concerned with teachers spending extra time with students who have a disability. Non-disabled students did not feel that their time was being compromised because students with disabilities were included in the regular classroom. One interpretation of the results could be students without disabilities may be instructed to engage in independent activities while teachers are helping students with disabilities, therefore, being unaware of how the teacher may be spending their time.

Teachers were also asked how qualified they felt when students with disabilities are included in the regular classroom. The majority of teachers felt they needed additional training, while the other three questions demonstrated a wide variance in viewpoints. Teachers believed that special education teachers were able to better meet the needs of students with disabilities. Regular education teachers feel that special education teachers have been provided more training to work with students with disabilities. If inclusion is going to be a successful service delivery model, then school districts need to recognize that regular education teachers do not feel qualified and need to develop a plan. The plan could include providing additional training for regular education teachers and/or increasing supports in the classroom such as effectively

utilizing related services or hiring extra paraprofessionals. It is vital that regular education teachers feel qualified so that they can best serve all students. If teachers do not feel qualified then they may be apprehensive about inclusion and may not understand the full intent.

Limitations

Some aspects of our study must be examined in more detail to determine how it may have limited our results. Since opinions were analyzed, the validity of the responses must be questioned. It is possible teachers could have answered conservatively or that students responded based on what they felt were acceptable answers. This is difficult to determine and researchers must assume that responses reflect in some way how the participant truly feels.

Another limitation could be a restricted sample size. Our sample population only looked at students and teachers in Independence, MO and results may not generalize to other school districts such as inner city schools. This limitation, however, will be corrected when the data from our study is combined with data from the other two sites participating in the overall study.

The five point Likert-type may have been another limitation. Some students found it difficult to determine what “2” and “4” meant on the rating scale. The survey may have been too complex for some students where as a 3 point Likert scale may have been easier for some students to utilize. The Likert scale on the teacher survey may have also been another limitation. The teacher scale only had a rating of 1-4, which left no midpoint for teachers to answer. This may have limited teacher responses by forcing them to agree or disagree on a statement that perhaps they were uncertain on.

Implications for Practice

Due to the fact, there are many different service delivery models that have been implemented to meet IDEA requirements, individuals are often unclear on what “true” inclusion

looks like in practice. This lack of clarity creates a problem when stakeholders are striving to take a stance on how they feel about the effects of inclusion on the educational system.

Occupational therapists (OT) look at individuals from a holistic viewpoint, so stakeholders might find an OT insight to be useful. They are concerned with not only the student themselves but how the student is able to function in their context. For example, they recognize the importance of socialization amongst peers at this age and attempt to facilitate this exchange. Not all professionals possess an occupational therapist unique viewpoint and might be capable of broadening their attitudes and perspectives on the effects of inclusion because they are able to look beyond focusing primarily on a student's academic performance.

A suggestion for future research may be to develop instruments that have a similar design. For example, Likert rating scales would be identical as well as the survey containing questions that may be capable of conducting T-tests to further analyze differences and similarities amongst teachers and students. Future researchers should consider distributing surveys to different age groups other than third and fourth graders in order to generalize attitudes and perspectives on inclusion.

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Figures

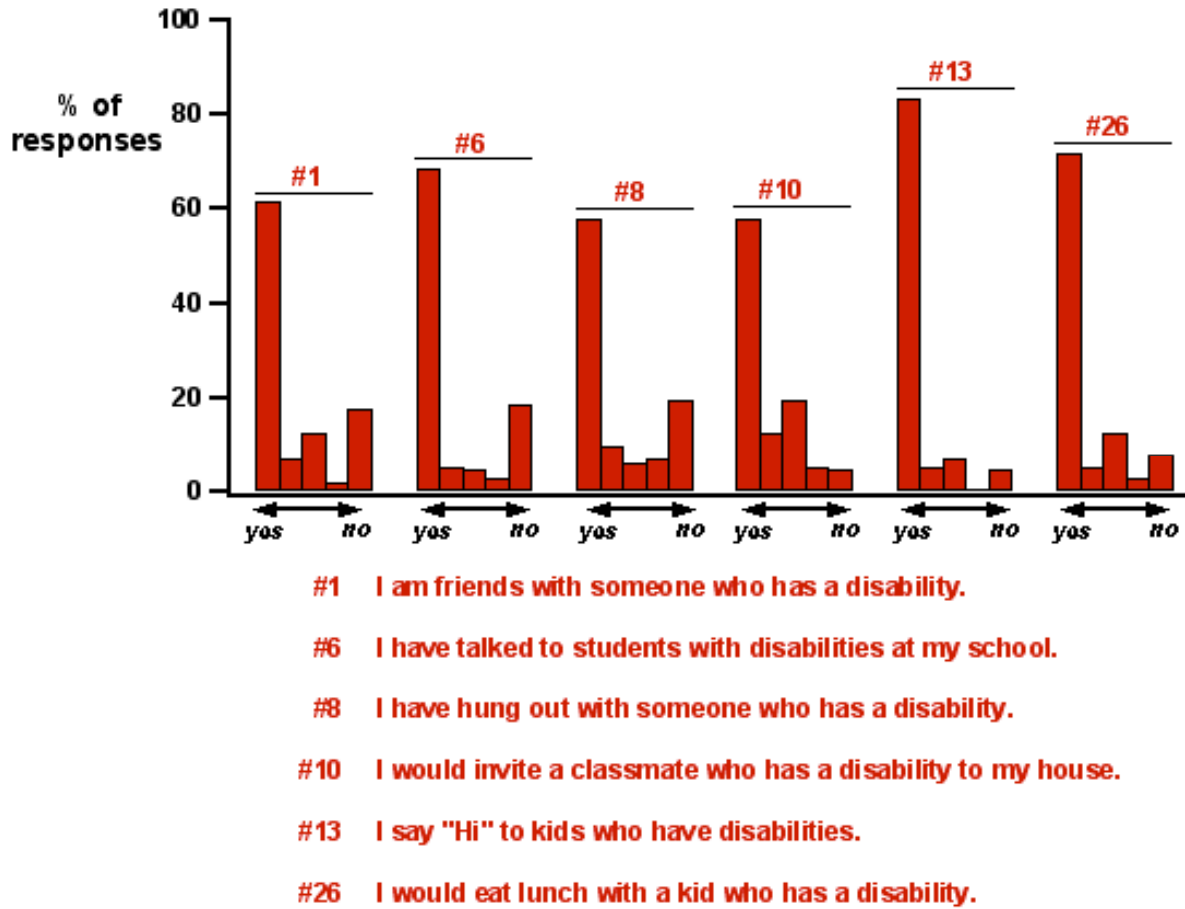


Figure 1. Percentage of responses from students without disabilities on the category of social outcomes toward students with disabilities.

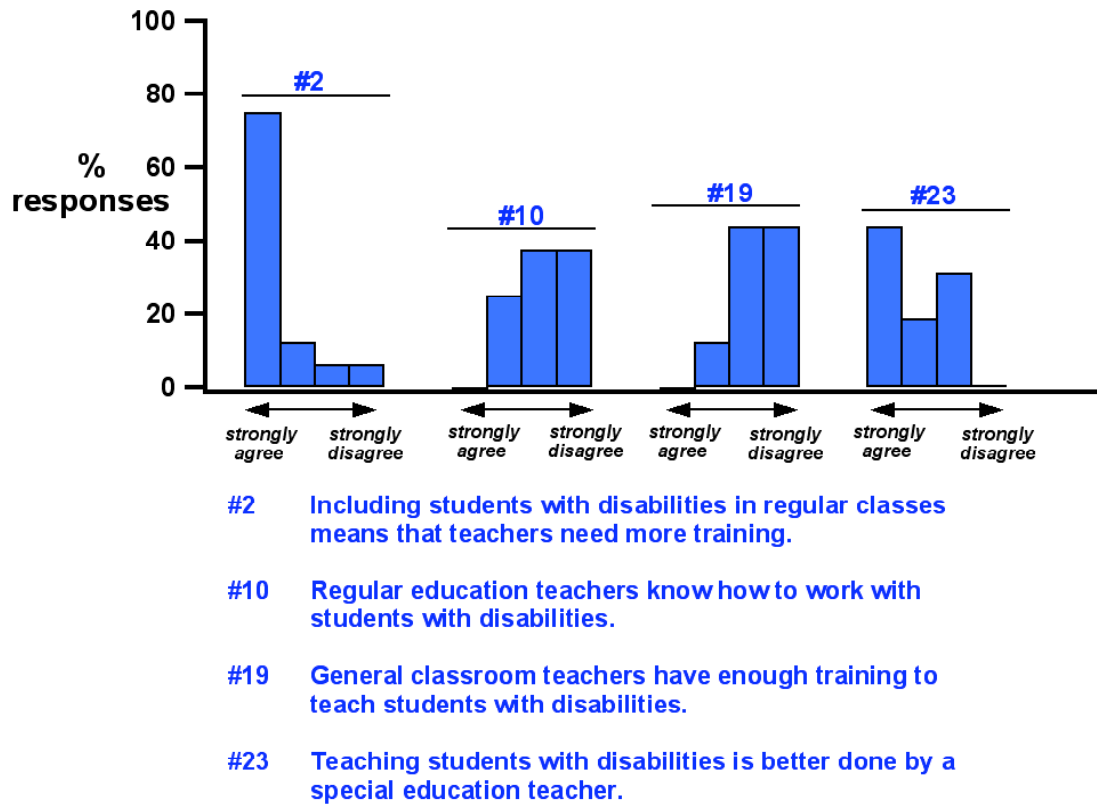
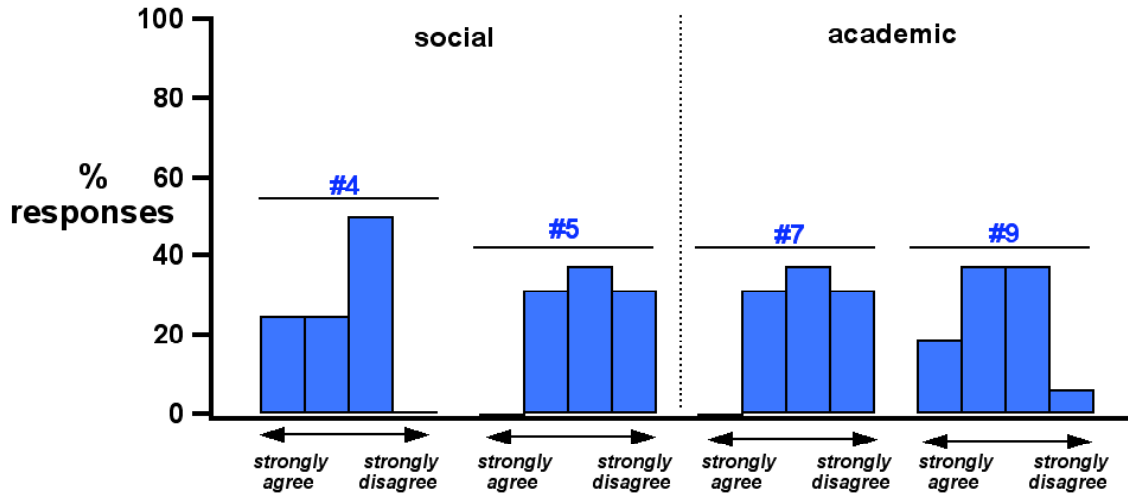
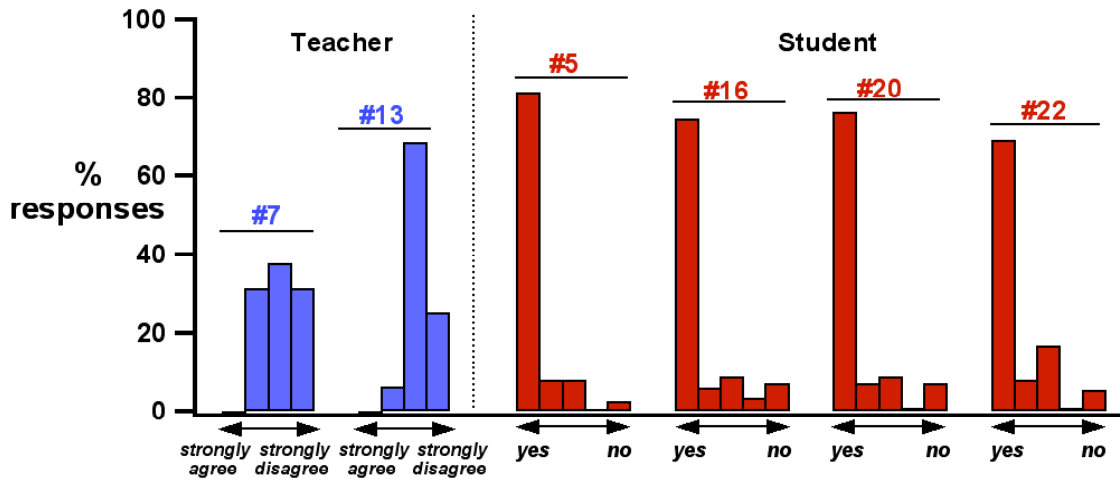


Figure 2. Percentage of responses from teachers about how qualified they feel when teaching students with disabilities in a regular education classroom.



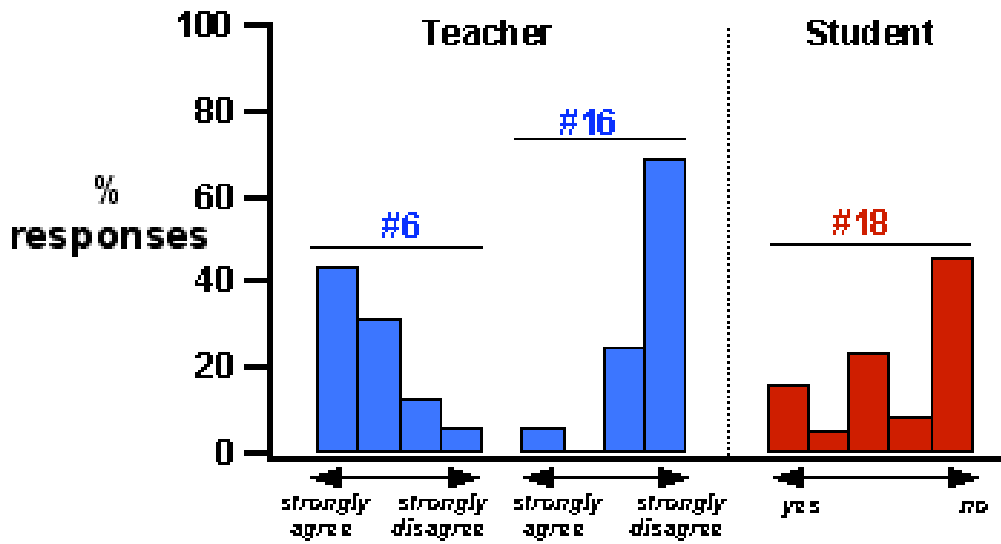
- #4 Students with disabilities have behavior problems in a regular classroom.
- #5 Students with disabilities can be best served in regular classrooms.
- #7 Being in a regular class helps the student with a disability learn academics.
- #9 The regular classroom creates too much confusion for the student with a disability.

Figure 3. Teachers' views on academic and social outcomes toward students with disabilities based on percentage of responses.



- #7 Being in a regular class helps the student with a disability learn academics.
- #13 Being in a regular class helps students with disabilities learn faster than if they were in special education class.
- #5 I would help a kid with disabilities in my class if they had a lot of trouble learning something.
- #16 It's OK for kids who are deaf to be in school with kids who can hear.
- #20 It's OK for kids who are blind to be in school with kids who can see.
- #22 I would pick a kid with a disability to be in my group or to work on a project with me at school.

Figure 4. Teachers and non-disabled students attitudes and perspectives toward learning opportunities for students with disabilities.



#6 The extra attention that student with disabilities need takes attention away from other students.

#16 Students with disabilities do not take up any more time than other students.

#18 If there are too many kids in my class who have a lot of trouble with math and reading my teacher won't have time to help me.

Figure 5. Percentage of responses from teachers and non-disabled students on how equally time was distributed among all students in the regular classroom.

Appendix A

Student survey questions, grouped by theme.

Students

Social-positive

1. I am friends with someone who has a disability
6. I have talked to students with disabilities at my school
5. I would help a kid with disabilities in my class if they had a lot of trouble learning something new
8. I have hung out with someone who has a disability
9. I'm ok being around kids who talk to themselves
10. I would invite a classmate who has a disability to my house
13. I say hi to kids who have a disability
14. I have helped a kid who uses a walker or a wheelchair
16. It's ok for kids who are deaf to be in school with kids who can hear
20. It's ok for kids who are blind to be in school with kids who can see
21. I would sit near a kid who sometimes hits or yells out in class
22. I would pick a kid with a disability to be in my group or to work on a project with me at school
25. Most people important to me think that I should be kind to everyone in my class including kids with disabilities
26. I would eat lunch with a kid who has a disability

Social-negative

4. Kids who have a hard time talking should be in separate class at school
17. I get embarrassed when I talk to someone who has a disability, who looks or acts real different from me
23. It's ok to tease kids who have a have trouble doing things
24. I think kids with disabilities are unhappy or lonely

Academics-positive

3. Kids with disabilities can do well in school
19. Kids who have a lot of physical and emotional problems can still be real smart

Academic-negative

11. I think that kids with disabilities are not very smart
15. Children who are too slow to learn new things should not be in my room at school

Classroom/Learning Opportunities

2. It's ok for classmates with disabilities to get extra help from teachers
4. Kids who have a hard time talking should be in separate class at school
5. I would help a kid with disabilities in my class if they had a lot of trouble learning something new
7. Teachers should give different work to kids who have a disability
12. If a kid with a disability did something wrong in class, they should be treated the same as everyone else
15. Children who are too slow to learn new things should not be in my room at school
16. It's ok for kids who are deaf to be in school with kids who can hear
18. If there are too many kids in my class who have a lot of trouble in math and reading, my teacher won't have time to help me
20. It's ok for kids who are blind to be in school with kids who can see
22. I would pick a kid with a disability to be in my group or to work on a project with me at school

Appendix B

Teacher survey questions, grouped by theme.

Teachers

Social-positive

3. Including students with disabilities in regular classes helps typical students learn to understand and accept difference
14. Including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms helps them learn important social skills
17. Including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms can be good for students without disabilities
24. Being in a classroom with other students like themselves helps students with disabilities develop socially and emotionally
25. Students with disabilities fit in socially in the regular education classroom

Social-negative

4. Including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms can be good for students without disabilities
11. Having students in the regular education classrooms does not help typical students learn about individual differences
12. The behavior of students with disabilities sets a bad example for students without disabilities
15. Having students with disabilities in a class makes it harder to keep order, compared to classrooms where there are no students with disabilities
18. Students with disabilities are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom
20. Including students with disabilities in a regular classroom hurts their emotional development

Academic-Positive

1. Most students with disabilities try hard to complete their assignments
7. Being in a regular classroom helps the student with a disability learn academics
9. The regular classroom creates too much confusion for the student with a disability
13. Being in a regular class helps students with disabilities learn faster than if they were in a special education class

Classroom/Learning Opportunities

3. Including students with disabilities in regular classes helps typical students learn to understand and accept difference
5. Students can best be served in regular classrooms
6. The extra attention that students with disabilities need takes attention away from other students
11. Having students with disabilities in a class makes it harder to keep order, compared to classrooms where there are no students with disabilities
16. Students with disabilities do not take up any more teacher time than other students
17. Including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms can be good for students without disabilities
18. Students with disabilities are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom
21. Students with disabilities should be allowed to be in the regular education classroom

