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Views of Inclusive Education from the Perspectives of Pre-service and Mentor Teachers

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Abstract

The trend of inclusive education in the U.S.A., and across the globe, is expanding. Consequently, teacher preparation for inclusive practices is thus a necessary consideration for teacher educators worldwide. An important role in shaping pre-service teacher dispositions comes from school experiences and interactions with mentor teachers. It is through this relationship that pre-service teachers formulate their own attitudes, beliefs and skills around inclusive practices. This paper reports the findings from a set of surveys containing both closed- and open-ended responses related to inclusive education from both pre-service (student) and mentor teachers. Analysis of the open-ended responses revealed definitions of inclusive education focused on student deficits, and barriers to implementation of inclusive practices that focused on deficits in the capacity of the environment. Four themes emerged when participants defined inclusion. Both groups of educators further described their perceived barriers to implementing inclusive education for students with disabilities, as well as the concerns they have heard others express as organized by five themes. Implications for teacher preparation, including challenging of deficit-based assumptions, are discussed.

Views of Inclusive Education from the Perspectives of Pre-service and Mentor Teachers

There has been an increasing trend in the U.S.A. towards inclusive education for students with disabilities over the past two decades (McLeskey et al. 2012). This trend is situated within international calls to include people with disabilities in all aspects of society, including schools . However, it appears many teacher preparation programs in the U.S.A. (e.g., (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson 2013) and internationally (Ahmmed, Sharma, and Deppeler 2014, Eriks-Brophy and Whittingham 2013, Karni, Reiter, and Bryen 2011) emphasize inclusive education, but schools remain segregated. Thus, there is a growing disconnect between what is taught in teacher preparation programs and fieldwork experiences (Caspersen 2013). With more students being included in general education, teacher programs must prepare new teachers for this reality.

Preparation for inclusive education consists of both orientation of a positive disposition for inclusion, as well as providing teachers with the necessary skills to implement inclusive education. Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu (1977), can be defined as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions...which functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82-83). Dispositions can be thought of as "a person's enduring favorable or unfavorable cognitive evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies toward some object or data" (Boone & Kurtz, p. 281-282, 2002). Simply put, dispositions are the tendencies to act or think in a particular way. The individual develops these dispositions in response to the objective conditions he or she encounters.

Dispositions are formed and influenced by beliefs (Brandes and Crowson 2009), peer groups (Boyer and Tschann 1999), culture (Haviland 1987), and mass media (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Direct instruction, such as teaching dispositions, can also impact disposition

formation (Kress 1975). Dispositions have been found to be at least equally as important as knowledge and skills for inclusive teachers (Forlin and Chambers 2011). However, typically, "teachers enter the profession and the initial period of preparation with beliefs about teaching and learning that are intransigent and hard to change" (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, p. 540, 2009).

This highlights the importance of the teacher preparation period as a time for reflection, discussion, and challenging feedback from others. Exposure to students with disabilities is also thought to be important in shaping positive dispositions (Park, Chitiyo, and Choi 2010), as is teacher preparation for inclusive practices (Leblanc, Richardson, and Burns 2009). For example, Stanovich and Jordan (1998, 2002) found that teachers who are overall more effective with all of their students area also more likely to be skilled in inclusive practices. This finding suggests that effective teachers and teaching practices are effective for *all* students.

Examining teacher or student teacher dispositions related to inclusion in the context of education is not a new phenomenon (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000, Avramidis and Norwich 2002, Beacham and Rouse 2012, Cook, Semmel, and Gerber 1999, de Boer et al. 2012, Proctor and Niemeyer 2001, Soodak, Podell, and Lehman 1998). Collectively, these studies have found that teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding inclusion are influenced by a plethora of factors including the nature and type of disabilities students have and the level of student support needs (Avramidis and Norwich 2002, Solis et al. 2012).

In the teacher preparation period, student teachers, in the U.S. model, work closely with and are supervised by mentor teachers, also known as field based educators. Mentor teachers are likely to play an important role in shaping dispositions (Rademaker 2013). These mentors also

bridge the theory to practice gap, and help student teachers gain skills and self-confidence as teachers. Felt competence is important in inclusive education; those teachers who have worked with students with disabilities felt more competent about inclusion than those teachers who had not (Everington, Stevens, and Winters 1999). While teachers express a range of concerns about their skills to implement inclusive education, research consistently finds that teachers who are effective are effective for all students (Stanovich and Jordan 2002, Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond 2009).

It is our belief that student teachers also either explicitly or implicitly adopt attitudes related to inclusion through this mentorship. In terms of a body of research, we have only begun to consider the perceptions of both student teachers and mentor teachers. Kurth and Foley (2014) began to tackle the complex puzzle of inclusive education by documenting interviews and perceptions of both student teachers, mentor teachers, university faculty and fieldwork supervisors in a region in the Southwest of the United States.

Results from this work indicated that student teachers were in fact receiving very mixed and contradictory messages about inclusive education (Kurth and Foley 2014). This study skimmed the surface on what these messages were; the themes regarding inclusive education were largely grouped in terms of physical placement of where students are educated or participation, or engaging in activities in general education settings. These initial themes informed the design of the study presented. The present study, as will be discussed further later, was conducted in the Midwest region of the United States. It was decided, based on this previous study, to focus initially on the student teachers and mentor teachers, not ignoring the importance of other perspectives of fieldwork supervisors and university faculty, but recognizing

that to reach the level of in-depth understanding and intricacies of the development of dispositions, it was best to have a narrower focus. It is our belief, however, that a future study ought to be conducted to capture these other important viewpoints.

In this study, we set out to document and analyze the ways that *student teachers* and *mentor teachers* describe their inclusionary dispositions using a mixed-methods approach. Specifically, we ask, (1) What are student and mentor teacher dispositions related to inclusive education? (2) How do mentor teachers and student teachers define inclusion? and (3) What barriers of inclusive education do mentor and student teachers identify in relation to the fieldwork setting?

Method

An online 72-item survey concerning perceptions, beliefs, and dispositions of inclusion was undertaken with student teachers and mentor teachers who were enrolled in a university practicum course at a research intensive university located in the Midwest of the United States. Descriptive analyses were performed on the close-ended items, and open-ended items were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to identify themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Participants

Participants included 43 student teachers seeking special education endorsement and 36 mentor teachers in whose classrooms student teachers were completing fieldwork. Student teachers were seeking Master's of Science in Education degrees in conjunction with initial endorsement in high- or low-incidence disabilities. The teaching endorsement program of study requires students to complete two fieldwork courses in K-12 classrooms, one at the beginning of their program of study coinciding with a methods course, and the other fieldwork course at the

end of their coursework (a capstone experience). The fieldwork experiences provided opportunities to work with mentor teachers while also completing seminar courses that focused on developing skills and dispositions for the teaching profession, centered on state and Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) teaching competencies. Mentor teachers were experienced educators nominated for experience and quality who provided support for student teachers by allowing these educators to work in their classes, to develop and teach lessons under their supervision, and to provide mentoring and support. Demographic characteristics of the participants are Table 1.

Data Sources

A 72-item online survey was administered anonymously to study participants using Qualtrics software, an online survey program (www.qualtrics.com) following approved Institutional Review Board procedures. The survey responses included a 4-item Likert scale rating to respond to 58 items with options including: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. An additional 2 items were open-ended, 5 items required respondents to select either 'general education' or 'special education,' and 7 items were demographic in nature. The survey instrument has adequate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha= 0.785$), with questions grouped into eight categories, as seen in Table 2, with the demographic and open-ended categories not reported in Table 2.

The surveys were administered at the beginning of fall semester 2013 and spring semester 2014. Each student teacher enrolled in fieldwork, and their supervising mentor teacher, were emailed a link to the Qualtrics survey within the first week of the semester. A total of 50 student teachers were enrolled over the two semesters, with 43 completing the survey (86%

response rate). A total of 53 mentor teachers were sent the survey, with 36 completing the survey (68% response rate). Only completed surveys were included in the analysis, and partially completed surveys were discarded (*n*=1 student teachers; *n*=8 mentor teachers). These surveys were discarded because only demographic questions had been answered, and therefore deemed unsuitable for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Data from the online survey were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics were utilized to describe participant demographics, mean responses and standard deviations for both groups to each item (mentor teachers and student teachers). Independent samples t-tests were calculated to describe how each group responded to survey items.

To identify the themes from the open-ended items, a grounded theory approach was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The identified themes allowed the researchers to gain depth of understanding into the lived experiences of the participants regarding inclusive practices. Each author examined these data for patterns in phrases and descriptors related to inclusive education and barriers to implementing inclusive practices. Once individual analyses were completed, inter-observer reliability was established by comparing findings and themes to classify similar responses. Any disagreements were discussed and consensus reached.

Results

Closed-Ended Survey Responses

Independent samples t-tests were calculated for mean responses to each survey item for mentor teachers (MT) and student teachers (ST). Levene's test for equality of variances

determined that equal variances could be assumed; one-tailed tests of significance were calculated. No significant differences between MT and ST were identified.

The survey items were grouped into eight categories based on the overall theme of the questions, and Cronbach's alpha for each group, are reported. As seen in Table 2, mentor and student teachers responded similarly to questions within each of these groups.

While a neutral response option was not provided in the Likert rating scale, the mean responses for most categories were overall neutral. The positive attitudes towards inclusion items (*n*=10 items) included items such as, "All students can learn important skills in general education settings." Means for both groups were near 2.5 (neutral), with student teachers slightly more positive in their attitudes towards inclusion than mentor teachers. The negative attitudes towards inclusion items (*n*=15 items) included items such as "some students cannot be effectively included," which was also essentially neutral for both groups, with student teachers slightly more likely to disagree with negative dispositions items than mentor teachers. Placement preferences questions asked participants to select general education or special education as the best place to teach a skill (e.g., "the best or most effective setting to teach social skills"). Again, the overall responses for both mentors and student teachers were neutral, with mentor teachers slightly more favorable towards special education settings.

Similarly, both mentor teachers and student teachers were neutral overall in responses to items about serving hypothetical students in a special education setting (*n*=12 items) using the 4-point Likert scale. A sample item from this category is, "It is best to serve students with self-care needs, such as a student who needs assistance using the restroom or wears diapers, in a special education setting." Both groups were also neutral in terms of identifying barriers and

obstacles to inclusion at the fieldwork site (*n*=12 items), with students slightly more likely to identify obstacles than mentor teachers.

While still largely neutral, the means of some categories varied to a greater degree from neutral. For example, mentor teachers were more likely to agree they have the skills and ability to implement inclusion than mentor teachers. A sample item from this category (*n*=4 items) is, "I have an understanding of ways to adapt an assignment or activity to meet the needs of a student with a disability in a general education setting." Likewise, mentor teachers were somewhat more likely to agree with items representing the category that some students cannot be included than student teachers (*n*=2 items), which included the items "some students cannot be effectively included" and "to best meet the range of student needs, schools should offer a full range of placement options." Finally, while still overall neutral, student teachers were more likely to agree that inclusion could be implemented to a greater degree in their current fieldwork setting than mentor teachers (*n*=5 items) in their responses to items such as, "in the fieldwork setting, more students could be included in general education academic courses than are currently."

Open-Ended Responses: Defining Inclusive Education

Four themes emerged when mentor teachers (MT) and student teachers (ST) were asked to define inclusion: a) Physical Classroom Placement and Time with General Education Peers, b) Curricular Access, c) Determining "appropriate" Placement, d) Supportive and Meaningful Environment.

Physical classroom placement and time with general education peers

Under this theme, inclusion was viewed as a physical placement and incorporated elements of percent of time spent with general education peers.

MT1: "A practice in which children with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled peers"

MT3: "Students with disabilities participating in the general education setting with their same age peers."

MT4: "Including individuals with disabilities in all learning environments in a school setting."

ST4: "Inclusion is when a student is in their general education classroom or setting with no support, modifications/accommodations, or support from school personnel.'

ST5: "One with special needs being just as involved as another student in the class in the same manner."

ST6: "Students who receive special education services are placed in the general education classroom and also participate in all school activities as their non-disabled peers."

Curricular access

Under this theme, access implied that teachers would deliver the standard curriculum (same for all), and that different students will make more or less connections, meaning, and progress in this standard curriculum.

ST11: "Including students with special needs and disabilities within the regular classroom, participating in same activities."

ST21: "Students being 'included' or having access to the general education curriculum along with activities (field trips)"

ST13: "Inclusion is when students with disabilities are educated in the general education setting with their grade levels peers and have access to general education curriculum."

MT15: "All students, no matter their disability, have access to the general education curriculum and environment."

MT25: "Equal opportunities for all students."

Determining "appropriate" placement

This theme, rooted in the medical model of disability, relates to deeming who is "appropriate" to be educated in inclusive settings, and who makes that decision. The thread defining this theme focuses on trying to 'fix' the student to make him or her conform to the demands of the setting.

MT 12 "Students learning in the regular classroom, with their peers, as much as is appropriate."

MT 33 "[Students] participate in as many general education classes as appropriate for his/her level of social and academic performance"

MT27 "Students who receive special education placement and specialized services who successfully participate in as many general education classes as appropriate for his/her level of social and academic performance"

ST38: "Students being included as much as possible with their general education peers"

Supporting and meaningful environment

Contrary to the previous theme, this is about designing the environment to support students. The roots of this theme are in the social model of disability.

MT18 "Including everyone in instruction in the general [education] setting, and differentiating instruction based on the needs of students within the classroom."

ST26 "Giving students with special education needs the necessary accommodations and augmentation to be successful in the general education classroom"

ST19 "Students who have disabilities receiving their education within the general education classroom given the necessary supports and modifications for them to access the general curriculum."

MT8 "Students with disabilities being included in the general education classroom with the accommodations and modifications needed to access the general education curriculum."

Open-Ended Responses: Defining Concerns and Barriers to Inclusive Education

Both groups of educators further described their perceived barriers to implementing inclusive education for students with disabilities, as well as the concerns they have heard others express. Five themes emerged: a) Addressing Student Needs, b) Teacher Readiness, c) Capacity of Schools to Serve Students, d) Impact on Students Without Disabilities, e) Fear of "Watering Down" the Curriculum.

Addressing student needs

This theme identifies concerns about the ability to meet unique student needs in inclusive settings as well as student capacity to benefit from such placement.

MT8: "There is not one size fits all in any method or philosophy. I do think the child should fully participate as his or her needs allow"

MT24: "The level of teaching that a Sped student needs has to be offered for the student to progress from their starting level. There are advantages of being with peers for socialization and community for all students, but it is still unclear for many teachers what and how to modify for these students to actually be learning."

ST11: "That it's not being used correctly, we are putting students out that shouldn't be out in the general education"

MT32: "That inclusion is for ALL students. Inclusion should be conducted responsibly and only when the student will gain from the experience."

Teacher readiness

Mentor and student teachers discussed teacher skills, attitudes, time, and resources that shaped their definition of teacher readiness, and how comfortable they were about implementing inclusive practices in the classroom.

ST19: "The lack of knowledge of how to include students and lack of understanding and use of UDL by general educators."

MT3: "Lack of understanding about how easy it can be to include all students."

ST27: "Teachers think inclusion is when the students with disabilities are in the same room, not working or sitting next to students who are typically developing. Some general educators are great and understand that the students might not be able to do the work but are able to listen, write, help, or be involved in the lessons."

MT23: "Training staff to provide appropriate support. Time to generate good accommodations and modifications that fit each mainstreamed class Time to meet with regular education teachers in order to be informed of classroom plans."

Capacity of schools to serve students

Both groups of participants spoke about the capacity of the school environment to support students in inclusive settings. The scope of this theme was outside of the direct classroom environment and focused more globally on the school environment and/or district.

MT3: "Not enough time to plan and prepare for children to be successful, especially when behavioral issues are also involved and everyone needs to respond in the same ways and follow a behavior plan."

ST23: "If there are paraeducators in the classroom that they are non-intrusive to the special education students and they help all students in the classroom."

MT29: "While it may afford social opportunities, it is not always the most appropriate academic or life-skill oriented learning situation."

MT30: "Sped teachers can be relegated to high paid [paraeducators] if the [general education] teacher is not provided with a coinciding planning period or the personality of the teacher does not allow for shared teaching and planning. Each student should be considered individually. Full inclusion is not for every child."

Impact on students without disabilities

This theme identified concerns the groups had regarding students without disabilities in the classroom.

MT23: "Students with significant cognitive or behavior difficulties disrupt the learning environment for others."

ST9: "Distractions to the "normal" kids"

ST14: "Slowing an entire classroom down while others play catch-up, or leaving behind those who need help, while others move on"

ST29: "The biggest concern that I have seen with inclusion revolves around student pacing and the speed at which many classrooms move at. Sometimes, special education students may not be able to keep up with other students as far as assignments go. This could also lead to a teacher slowing down the classroom which could have harmful affects on general education students."

Fear of "watering down" the curriculum

Both groups of participants expressed concerns about how curricular modifications would be viewed.

MT4: "I am concerned when I see "adapted" being interpreted as "making things easier" for students."

MT30: "Sometimes the modifications are so significant as to render the inclusion experience insignificant."

ST18: "Students receiving a grade on a subject without documentation on transcripts, yet the curriculum is severely modified"

Discussion

Limitations

Prior to delving into the findings, however, there are limitations of this study that must be considered. First, we recognize that the size and diversity of the sample was limited, however we felt it was still a fairly high response rate given the timeframe with which the study took place. We captured opinions of 43 student teachers (out of 50) seeking special education endorsement and 36 mentor teachers (out of 53). This study focused on one geographic region in the Midwestern portion of the United States. However, studies such as this build on previous work (such as Kurth & Foley, 2014) and help to build a repertoire of studies that examine dispositions about inclusion. It is important that work like this continues particularly as policies and regulations evolve and the landscape of students with disabilities in American schools changes.

Secondly, the research design of this study was a survey instrument. Therefore, the questions were fixed in nature, including the open-ended responses. While a strength of this design is that the same questions were asked to all participants, a weakness of this design is that there was no opportunity for participants to digress on an important topic, or to dialogue with the researchers to dig deeper on particular concepts or examples provided. Therefore, this design may limit potential findings.

Finally, we did not conduct interviews with the faculty members who taught the student teachers, which may have provided additional useful information about the content of student coursework in this teacher preparation program. Even with these limitations, however, the voices of student teachers *and* mentor teachers provide important information that must be considered across stakeholders and systems in the implementation of inclusive schooling. Despite these limitations, we felt there were additional strengths as well. The survey was done online, so the

tendency to skip open-ended responses due to ease of typing a response versus handwriting likely contributed to the depth and amount of responses we received.

<div align="center">Dispositions for Inclusive Education</div>

Analysis of the closed survey responses indicates responses between mentor and student teachers were quite similar, with both groups overall reporting neutral dispositions and beliefs to the survey categories on average. Likert scales presume respondents have some underlying, or latent, continuous variable whose value characterizes the respondents' attitude and beliefs (Clason and Daromdy 1994). The survey was designed without a midpoint option, given concerns about participants' tendency to choose midpoint responses (e.g., Weems & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). Despite this, mean responses fell overwhelmingly on the midpoint for each category, perhaps indicating a neutral disposition, or possibly indicating that the respondent simply didn't know how to respond (Sturgis, Roberts, and Smith 2014).

Both interpretations of a midpoint mean indicate a failure of respondents, on the whole, to indicate a deeply held conviction about inclusive education. Instead, respondents on average appear to be rather "lukewarm" in their views about inclusive education. This is troubling to inclusion supporters, given the sustained advocacy needed to disrupt segregated education practices and engage in the myriad systems-change activities needed to transform school practices and cultures (Artiles et al. 2006, Sailor 2008-2009, Wedell 2008). It takes a team to achieve full inclusion, and if stakeholders within the school are not willing to take a bold stance, this paints a particularly grim picture for the future of inclusion. Such neutral dispositions may account for assertions that there has been a regression towards more segregated placement for students with significant disabilities (Ryndak et al. 2014). However, while not statistically

significant, student teachers indicated a somewhat more positive disposition towards inclusive education than mentor teachers in most of the survey categories. Understanding the bases of these subtle differences, including the impact of coursework, faculty dispositions, and school cultures will be needed through additional research activities.

<div align="center">Defining Inclusion</div>

Interpretations of mentor and student teacher dispositions related to inclusive education depend upon how these groups defined inclusion. Four definitions of inclusion emerged from qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses. Defining inclusion as a place, or as an amount of time spent in general education, was common in both groups. While the context of education is tremendously important in terms of access and participation (e.g., Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008-2009), it is also problematic in that physical placement alone is insufficient to guarantee meaningful access and participation.

In fact, simply being present differs very little from "dumping" a student in a setting. Without appropriate supports and accommodations, it is unlikely that many students with disabilities will be successful in such a circumstance. Such a definition of inclusion assumes the purpose of the practice is exposure or some form of participation, but not necessarily learning, developing, and gaining skills. While being present in the general education classroom is an important step, without the right supports in place, including accommodations, learning for students with disabilities will be unlikely to occur. Learning does not occur through the process of osmosis, and therefore restricting a definition of inclusion to purely physical placement is detrimental. Future educators must not be limited to defining inclusion as physical placement or

percentage of time in the general education classroom as inclusion. We encourage current and future educators to take a bolder claim on defining inclusion, and put these claims into practice.

A second definition of inclusion centered on access to the standard curriculum. Here, access was largely defined as a general education teacher delivering the standard curriculum, with individual students making more or less connections, meaning, and progress in that standard curriculum. This definition is analogous to exposure, rather than mastery (Dymond et al. 2007). This definition assumes that the purpose of inclusion is exposure to core content and general education experiences, again failing to account for student learning and progress. Modern interpretations of inclusive education focus on enhancing educational practices to support all students, including strategies such as universal design for learning and assistive technology (e.g., Wehmeyer, 2009).   Implementation of these practices enables all students to learn and make progress in the general curriculum with appropriate accommodations and supports in place, as opposed to simply being exposed to it.

A third definition of inclusion emphasized the need of professionals and other Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members to determine an "appropriate" placement. This definition assumes that there are a variety of placements available, and that students with disabilities can essentially be slotted into a placement to address their unique needs. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) requires IEP teams to place students in the least restrictive environment to meet their needs, this has been widely misinterpreted to mean a continuum of placement options (e.g., Taylor, 1988). The underlying thread of this theme focuses on needs to 'fix' the student to make him or her ready for the general setting; in other words, the student must learn the skills or behaviors to

conform to the existing demands of the environment, including teaching styles, curriculum, and supports already in place. This view is firmly rooted in the antiquated medical model of disability (Swain and French 2000) which views disability as a tragedy, and people with disabilities as needing to be fixed or cured. The onus is therefore on people with disabilities to conform to the existing context; such a model is inherently segregationist, assuming that only some students will be appropriate for, and benefit from, some parts of the general education context, and that experts can best make those decisions.

The crux of the medical model of disability is that it is the perception of people with disabilities by the non-disabled majority. Meaning, the voices and opinions of people with disabilities are not included, rather they are squelched by the viewpoints of the dominant culture. In a school-based setting, this definition assumes that the purpose of inclusion is to provide access to those students deemed worthy and capable of learning, and segregated classrooms as the places where learning and preparation for inclusive learning occurs. It is our contention that for students with disabilities, the *only* appropriate setting is the general education classroom alongside his or her peers, using a range of supports and services including curricular adaptations and co-teaching models.

The fourth and final definition of inclusion from these mentor and student teachers embodies a more modern definition of inclusion, and represents a social model of disability. Participants who defined inclusion within this theme described a student with disabilities as being present in the general education context, with the supports and services provided to the student to be successful. This definition incorporates ideas around designing the environment to support learners, rather than learners being required to gain entry by their ability to conform to

the existing context. The roots of this theme are squarely within the social model of disability and the systems of supports framework, which focuses on the provision of supports to make contexts meaningful and accessible for all (Thompson et al. 2009). This definition of inclusion assumes that the purpose of including students is to enable all students to learn together, without the need to separate some learners for some activities.

<center>Barriers to Inclusive Education</center>

Five themes emerged from open-ended responses in which participants identified barriers of inclusive education at the fieldwork setting. The first theme that emerged was a concern about the capacity of schools to adequately meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in general education settings, as well as the capacity of students to benefit from inclusive education. As with definitions of inclusion that focused on appropriateness or readiness, mentor and student teacher responses within this theme assume that some students will not benefit from an inclusive education. Existing research, however, continues to document that students with disabilities have equal, if not superior, outcomes when educated in general education settings, including academic achievement (e.g., Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013). Placement in general education settings has also been found to increase teachers' learning expectations for students (Kurth and Mastergeorge 2010). However, respondents indicated that schools and school staff were not yet "ready" to confer such benefits to students with disabilities; instead, participants remained entrenched in current segregated practices. An alternative to this view has been proposed, in which inclusion is defined through the structures and interventions in place (Sailor and McCart 2014). This view focuses on matching support systems to student needs, through the schoolwide application of multi-tiered systems of support, such as response to

intervention (RTI), thus improving teaching and learning for all students, not only those with disabilities.

A second theme focused on teacher readiness to implement inclusive practices. Mentor and student teacher quotes from this theme focus on teacher skills, attitudes, time, and resources needed for inclusive education. In a 1996 analysis of published investigations of teacher attitudes about inclusive education, Scruggs and Mastropieri found general education classroom teachers were largely supportive of the concept of inclusion, but few thought they had the time, skills, training, and resources needed to implement inclusive education. Over the ensuing 20 years, additional researchers have documented largely similar findings (e.g., Berry, 2010; Cook, 2002; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Findings from this analysis contribute to the body of literature documenting teachers holding generally positive attitudes about inclusion as a concept, but real concerns about their ability to implement inclusive practices given their limited time and resources. Again, this theme reiterates the "un-readiness" of current teachers to implement inclusive practices.

A third theme in this analysis was the incapacity of existing schools and systems to serve students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Comments in this theme focused on school- and district-wide shortages and barriers. Concerns such as the availability of resources, including paraeducators, planning time, and other systems characterize this theme, which are common complaints. For example, Santoli and colleagues (2008) surveyed middle school teachers and found teachers did not believe they had adequate time to consult with others, attend meetings, and take on the responsibilities of educating students with disabilities. Examinations of co-teaching have further revealed that many teams lack planning time and resources (Magiera and

Zigmond 2005). However, McLeskey and colleagues (2014) recently outlined features of an effective inclusive elementary school, documenting the structures in place to facilitate inclusion. These authors found school leadership to be a key factor in this effective inclusive school, including the flexible and efficient use of resources, such as scheduling academic instruction at times when resources would be available, along with distributed decision making, data-driven decisions, and high-quality professional development focusing on teacher-identified needs. Continued research into effective inclusive schools is needed, including secondary schools. Without explication and illustration of solutions, many practicing educators will continue to only identify obstacles and remained mired in a system that is not yet "ready" for inclusion.

In addition to concerns about student ability to benefit from inclusive education and teacher ability to deliver inclusive supports, respondents also indicated a concern about the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities. Responses within this theme focused on negative impacts, such as disruption to teaching, or slowing down the pace of instruction. In fact, research has consistently documented that inclusive education has a neutral or positive impact on students without disabilities (e.g., Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Kalambouka, Farrell, & Dyson, 2007; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). However, it is likely that these positive benefits are associated with quality implementation of inclusive education, defined as physical placement of students with disabiliteis along with the classroom wide application of supports and services, including RTI and accessible curriculum. As few participants defined inclusive education in this manner, it is possible that their definitions of inclusion which were more akin to "dumping" a student in a classroom would result in few benefits to the student and her or his classmates without disabilities.

Finally, participants expressed a concern about watering down the curriculum for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Many of these concerns centered on the appropriateness of accommodations and modifications delivered in inclusive settings, particularly related to grading and promotion implications of modified work. Accommodations and modifications allow access and participation to the core general curriculum, regardless of ability level (Kurth and Keegan 2014, Wehmeyer, Lance, and Bashinski 2002). They can take many forms, including *curricular* (what is taught), *instructional* (how content is taught), and *alternative outcomes* (changing the goals or activities of instruction; Janney & Snell, 2004). Respondents to this survey appear to have a very narrow definition of accommodations and modifications, in which these dramatically alter the curricular and instructional content, rendering the content so different as to be irrelevant to participation in general education contexts. However, most agree that the general setting is the most appropriate setting in which to gain access to the general curriculum (e.g., Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008-2009), and simply being present in general education settings improves student outcomes (e.g., Cosier & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). Concerns about grading students with disabilities in general settings, particularly grading modified work, are substantial barriers to inclusive education, particularly in the current era of high-stakes testing. Limited research has documented teacher acceptance of modified work, with existing research suggesting elementary teachers are more willing to accept and grade modified work compared to secondary teachers (Kurth et al. 2012). Further research is needed to understand teacher concerns and implications for assigning grades to students who complete substantially different work in inclusive settings.

Implications

Empirical research documents positive student outcomes associated with inclusive education (Hughes et al. 2013, Kurth and Mastergeorge 2012, Ryndak et al. 2010). Despite these positive outcomes, high-quality inclusive education is unlikely widely implemented. Educator dispositions are presumed to be a factor in this lack of implementation. The present analysis found a startling disconnect between dispositions when defining inclusive education and dispositions associated with implementing inclusion.

Specifically, definition themes centered on first "fixing" the student to make the student conform to the existing education system, which is a medical model approach to disability (Oyler 2011). This model is thought to alienate and oppress groups of students in schools and society (Frattura and Topinka 2006). However, when identifying barriers and concerns related to implementing inclusive education, educators focused on the lack of capacity of the environment, including teacher training, curriculum, and environmental supports, to implement inclusion, a social model of disability (Hughes and Paterson 1997). These findings suggest a pervasive readiness model, in which both the student and environment need to be fully prepared to benefit from and implement inclusive practices. The concern is that by blaming both student and the capacity of the environment, no amount of preparation will ever be sufficient, and students with disabilities will continue to be relegated to segregated settings and lives. Teacher preparation at the pre- and in-service levels must continue to challenge these deficit-based assumptions and provide alternative solutions to implementing high-quality inclusive education for all students.

Further, the present analyses highlight the need to infuse inclusive education as a disposition and set of skills in teacher preparation programs. General and special educators must feel prepared for inclusive education at a fundamental level; unfortunately, however, inclusion is

considered an afterthought in many discussions, much like UDL, so that contexts, curriculum, lessons and activities must be retrofitted to make inclusion "work" (Meo 2008). This view enables educators to feel inclusive education is something to be accomplished when the stars align just so, rather than as a set of skills and dispositions that guide development of all contexts, curricula, lessons and activities in a proactive manner.

Finally, these analyses confirm the importance of the fieldwork setting in modeling and teaching both skills and dispositions related to practice. As in other analyses comparing mentor and student teacher definitions and dispositions (e.g., Kurth & Foley, 2014), respondents here articulated the notion that inclusive education is measured by time and placement in general education classrooms while conveying a number of practical barriers. Extant research documents the impact fieldwork experiences and mentor teachers have on skill and disposition development (Clifford and Green 1996, Hennissen et al. 2011), demonstrating the importance of ensuring the fieldwork setting, and mentor teacher, exemplify the practices and dispositions the teacher preparation institution espouses.

Conclusion

In this research, we have reported findings from an on-line survey of student and mentor teachers related to inclusive education. Student and mentor teachers largely expressed similar, overwhelmingly neutral, dispositions related to inclusive education. Definitions of inclusive education focused on place and time, rather than supports and services, for both groups, while barriers to inclusion centered on the lack of the school context (curriculum, teachers, and time) to be ready for inclusive services. While there may be differing teacher training models internationally, the universal takeaway is the importance of a mentoring relationship between

newer and veteran teachers for both individuals to dialogue about inclusive practices and challenges that may arise. The results of this analysis demonstrate the importance of teacher preparation for inclusion, as well as the need to develop of fieldwork experiences that model inclusive practices. Without these substantive changes, inclusive education will likely continue to be misinterpreted, barriers will persist, and the very ideal of inclusion will remain an add-on experience for millions of students with disabilities worldwide.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Mentor Teachers	Student Teachers
Number of Participants	36	43
Mean Age (in years)	46	32.6
Age Range	27 - 59	21 - 52
Gender	Male – 2	Male – 13
	Female – 34	Female – 30
Mean Years of Experience Special Education Teacher	5.9 (range = 3-44)	1.9 (range = 1-4)
Mean Years of Experience General Education Teacher	1.3 (range = 1-3)	1.3 (range =1-3)
Mean Years of Experience as a Paraeducator	1.1 (range = 1-3)	1.25 (range =1-4)
High-Incidence Endorsement Held / Sought	21	30
Low-Incidence Endorsement Held / Sought	15	13
Elementary Level Placement	27	25
Secondary Level Placement	9	11

Note. Some student teachers were working as teachers without endorsement on teaching waiver

Table 2

Survey Responses by Item Group for Mentor and Student Teachers

Category	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	MT Mean	ST Mean
Positive Attitude Towards Inclusion [a]	10	.806	2.47	2.67
Negative Attitude Towards Inclusion [a]	13	.893	2.59	2.48
Placement Preferences [b]	5	.518	1.45	1.38
Self-Confidence for Inclusion [a]	4	.525	3.36	2.67
Hypothetical Student Placement [a]	12	.892	2.53	2.46
Obstacles to inclusion [a]	12	.684	2.48	2.57
Some students cannot be included [a]	2	.894	2.82	2.55
Inclusion in Fieldwork Setting [a]	5	.714	2.52	2.75

Note. MT = Mentor Teacher; ST = Student Teacher

[a]Scaled where 1=strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

[b]Scaled where 1=general education; 2 = special education