

## TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INTEGRATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS INTO THEIR CLASSROOMS

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This paper, which deals with teachers' attitudes toward integration of disabled students, was carried out during the term of the previous Labor government at a time when the Victorian integration policy was the most radical of any Australian state. The aim of the paper is to investigate the attitudes of classroom teachers "paramount in the successful mainstreaming of children into the normal classroom" (Curtain & Phemister, 1985, p.16) toward the integration of disabled students into their classrooms through:

1. Examination of the relationship of the following selected teacher and classroom related background factors and the formation of teachers' attitudes toward integration:

- Formal training in special education/integration
- Inservice training in special education/integration
- Experience teaching disabled students
- Contact with a disabled friend or family member
- Confidence teaching disabled students
- Grade level taught
- Class size
- Support from integration teachers
- Support from integration aides
- Support from School Support Centres

2. Consideration of different aspects of teachers' attitudes toward the integration of disabled students into their classrooms.

These different aspects of teacher attitude will be ascertained through analysis of responses to individual statements on the survey instrument, the Educational Attitude Survey (Modified) or EAS.

### METHOD

#### Subjects

The subjects were 170 classroom teachers from 100 randomly selected primary schools in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. Of the 200 survey questionnaires mailed to schools, 175 were returned with 170 suitable for

processing, a return rate of 87.5%. All 100 schools were sent a preliminary report two months after participating in the study.

## The Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts: (1) Background Data which sought information from teachers regarding the selected background factors and (2) The Educational Attitude Survey (EAS), used with the permission of Professor William Reynolds of the University of British Columbia, which contains a Likert Scale to ascertain teachers attitudes toward integration. Developed by Reynolds and Greco in 1980, this instrument factors into two subsets of items - Administrative Aspects of Mainstreaming and Educational Aspects of Mainstreaming.

## Data Analysis

Data analyses included frequency distributions, mean scores and standard deviations for teacher attitude displayed against background factors, Pearson product moment correlations and multivariate canonical correlations using SPSS-X.

## RESULTS

### 1. Teacher and Classroom Related Background Factors

The main frequencies of these factors, obtained from Section 1 of the Survey Questionnaire are presented in the following figure.

Figure 1: Percentage of teacher response to background factors

### 2. Relationship Between Teachers' Attitudes and Background Factors

Breakdown tables showed that the highest teacher attitude scores were recorded for teachers with high confidence teaching disabled students (50.88); high support from integration aides (50.44) and moderate support from School Support Centres (51.47).

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients showed the following correlations with scores on the EAS: confidence teaching disabled students ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ); support from integration aides ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ) and support from School Support Centres ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ). The relationship between teacher attitude and these background factors is shown in the following figure.

Figure 2: The relationship between teachers' attitudes and background

factors

### 3. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Integration as Shown on the EAS

Teachers' attitudes toward integration were ascertained by analysing responses to individual statements on the EAS and the five items which attracted the highest percentage of agree or disagree responses are presented in figure 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of teacher agreement or disagreement with statements on the EAS

Responses to these five statements revealed that, from the Administrative Aspects of Mainstreaming subscale, 51.7% of teachers agreed that the proponents of integration are concerned with the quality of education, 72.9% agreed that integration is being imposed rather than explained and 66.5% thought it to be more of a legal and political matter than an educational one.

Responses relating to the Educational Aspects of Mainstreaming subscale showed that the majority of teachers (66.5%) felt that disabled students would receive more adequate instruction in special classes than they would if integrated into regular classrooms and that the majority of teachers (56.5%) felt that integrated students have great difficulty adjusting to the regular classroom. The means obtained by Reynolds and Greco (1980) were significantly greater than those of the present study for both the two subscales and the total EAS scores, 52.81 as compared with 45.43.

The canonical correlation analysis showed five trends, the major one being that teachers with confidence teaching disabled students, support from integration aides, School Support Centres and integration teachers and inservice in special education/integration were more positive about integrating disabled students. These teachers felt that they were being consulted in the integration process, that disabled students would benefit from inclusion in the regular classroom and that such inclusion was fair to all students. The total variance explained by the canonical correlations was 11.79%, consistent with a correlation of .35.

## DISCUSSION

### Factors Correlating With Teachers' Attitudes

The factor which correlated most highly with teacher attitude was teacher confidence in instructing disabled students. With a Pearson product moment correlation of .31, it was the most important of the ten factors studied.

This finding complements the results of other investigators, in particular a study carried out in the US by Larrivee and Cook (1979) which found the factor "teacher perception of degree of success" to have a correlation of .36 with teachers' attitudes. These authors note that "it seems reasonable to conclude that teacher perception of degree of success...is the single most important variable of the seven considered" (p. 321).

The second highest factor correlating with teacher attitude was support from integration aides with a Pearson product moment correlation of .21, supporting the findings of Gow, Ward, Balla and Snow (1988), Larrivee (1981), Larrivee and Cook (1979), Long (1985) and Myles and Simpson (1989) that integration aides are vital to the development of positive teacher attitude. Long (1985) notes that the provision of "effective and concerned support personnel" is necessary for successful integration programs (p. 11).

However, it is important that teacher aides be given direction and support from teachers qualified in special education/integration and not be expected to design and implement programs or be considered "synonymous" with integration (Tarr, 1988, p. 66) and a cheap alternative to integration teachers. The nineteen teachers who reported aides receiving no support from integration teachers and the eleven who classified support for their aides as low would indicate that this is, in fact, occurring to some degree. As Pickering (1992) says "The cost [of an integration aide] is less than that of an integration teacher but, in the absence of professional direction, expensive for the quality of service provided" (p. 140).

The third and final factor correlating with teacher attitude was support from School Support Centres with a Pearson product moment correlation of .19. This was consistent with results obtained by Curtain and Phemister (1985), Gow, Balla, Hall, Konza and Snow, (1986), Larrivee and Cook (1979) and Salend and Johns (1983) which showed the availability of support services to positively influence teacher attitude to integration.

That 71% of teachers indicated that this support is insufficient or nonexistent would appear to account for the "general dissatisfaction with support services currently being provided for the purpose of mainstreaming children" (Center & Ward, 1987, p. 52).

The remaining seven teacher and classroom related factors were not found to be significantly related to teachers' attitudes toward integration. As the reported percentages of these frequencies were relatively small, these results, although at variance with those noted in the literature, are not surprising.

Different Aspects of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Integration

Teachers' replies to the Administrative Aspects of Mainstreaming subscale of the EAS revealed that they tended not to feel that integration was being implemented against their advice. As Myles and Simpson (1989) found that "willingness [to integrate students] appears to be dependent upon opportunity to participate in the mainstreaming decision-making process" (p. 488), this finding gives cause for some optimism. Victorian teachers, it appears, feel that they are being given some say in the integration process.

However, about three-quarters of the teachers felt that integration is being imposed rather than explained. This finding agrees with the criticism of the 1984 Ministerial Review by Sykes (1989) that "more attention should have been directed to actual curricula, teaching and learning considerations. Teachers seeking specific directions and guidelines in the Review...were generally confused and disappointed" (p. 99). In addition, two-thirds of teachers considered integration to be a product of legal and political forces rather than educational ones again agreeing with comments

by Sykes that the terms of reference of the Review "were drawn from...the ALP policy on educating children with disabilities with its emphasis on the rights of disabled children and their parents" (p. 86). More recently this situation has been expressed in a stronger vein by Haskell when he referred to "children sacrificed on the altar of Marxist ideology" (Opening address, Curriculum Day, 17-2-92, Deakin University, Burwood).

Teachers' answers to the Educational Aspects of Mainstreaming subscale showed that they tended not to see integration as impinging upon the rights of other students and conducive to the positive self-image of the disabled child, results consistent with those of Center and Ward (1987) who noted "little dispute regarding the philosophical principles underlying the policy of integrating disabled children into regular classes" (p. 41) and Pickering (1992) who found that special school teachers "perceived the benefits of integration to be mainly in the area of social development" (p. 87).

However, over half of the teachers felt that disabled students would have great difficulty adjusting to the regular classroom and two-thirds felt that special classes could provide more adequate instruction for their students, particularly as Center, Ward, Parmenter and Nash (1985) note, in the case of moderately to severely disabled students. These findings agree with those of Pickering (1992) which seem "to suggest that the special educators have little confidence in the regular schools' ability to provide the adaptive and modified curricula provided in special schools" (p. 186).

#### Teachers' Comments on Survey Forms

A total of 42.9% of teachers entered informal comments on the survey forms (see Figure 4). Twenty nine percent of all respondents (50 teachers) qualified their responses with statements such as "It depends on the degree

of disability" and that students' needs be assessed on an individual basis because "not all children can be successfully integrated due to the extreme severity of their disability". These comments show that many teachers are concerned with the level of disability of the integrated students in their classes. As Jenkins, Pious and Jewell (1990) state "The line needs to be drawn somewhere to protect teachers from unrealistic demands and to assure parents of normally achieving students that their children will prosper" (p. 485). It seems clear that many of the teachers in this study wish to draw such a line.

Figure 4: Percentage of teachers' informal comments on survey forms.

### Implications and Recommendations

These findings argue for (a) provision of greater support services to enable teachers to further increase their confidence in teaching these students and (b) the need to address teachers' concerns regarding integration. The following recommendations are made:

1. That the continuing demand for special schools be recognised and that these schools be accorded equal status with regular schools in every aspect.
2. That consideration be given to the ability of regular schools to meet the curriculum demands of moderately to severely disabled students, particularly in the areas of independent learning and adaptive behaviour.
3. That consideration be given to whole school resourcing to provide access to a comprehensive inclusive curriculum for all students and that teachers be assisted to acquire these curriculum development skills by consultants from School Support Centres.
4. That the partnership model between special and regular education teachers be developed through consultation between the staff of special schools and regular schools, allowing the flow of special school expertise into the regular school.

Support from curriculum consultants from School Support Centres would assist teachers to develop effective instructional and management strategies and increase their confidence in teaching a wide range of students. This could help prevent the development of the ironic situation where mildly disabled students are forced to seek enrolment in special schools because integration resourcing is given to more severely disabled students.

The use of special school teachers in regular schools would enable the

special school to provide both whole school and individual support for all students. Special school teaching strategies such as non-confrontational approaches, awareness of the antecedents of disruptive behaviour, emphasis on the development of positive student qualities and praise and encouragement have a valuable place in the education of all students. Support for more severely disabled students might include provision of programs and resources to meet individual student needs and instruction of integration teachers and aides in strategies such as task analysis, behaviour modification and non-speech communication, thereby assisting these students to achieve maximum independence.

Classroom teachers therefore, would be required only to cater for those students who would benefit from a modified developmental curriculum, with the students who require an alternative curriculum being taught by specialists either in the special or regular schools, these students having the freedom to move between these environments according to their needs.

The relationship between the provision of support for teachers of disabled students and teacher attitude toward integration has emerged as the central theme of this paper. It is to be hoped that the implementation of recommendations outlined in the recent Cullen-Brown Report (1993) will result in improvement in such attitude. Clearly, with the change of government in Victoria will come a whole series of challenges and new research questions regarding integration.

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#### 1984 Review: Five Guiding Principles

1. Every child has a right to be

educated in a regular school.

2.Non-categorisation.

3.Resources and services should,  
to the greatest extent possible,  
be school based.

4.Collaborative decision-making  
processes.

5.All children can learn and be  
taught.

Percentage of Teacher Response

to Background Factors

The Relationship Between Teachers' Attitudes and Background Factors

Percentage of Teacher Agreement or

Disagreement with Statements on the EAS

Percentage of Teachers' Informal

Comments on Survey Forms