SUPPORTING GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

by

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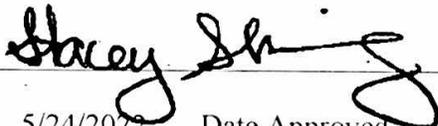For the Degree of

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Abstract

With inclusion becoming more prominent throughout the United States, educators need training and knowledge in reference to special education students. The increased rate of inclusion and the challenges surrounding entering an inclusive classroom (Dev & Haynes, 2015) has left general education teachers feeling underprepared to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Avramidis et al., 2019). These educators could be better supported through training that includes pre-service training, required professional development once on-the-job, professional development outside of that required, and experience in the classroom. Through a survey model, data was analyzed regarding how the training and experience of general education staff on special education topics impacts their feelings towards teaching in an inclusive setting. In turn, this data can be used to determine what type of training and professional development is most useful when training general educators to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

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Chapter 1

Students with disabilities have received more opportunity to learn in a general education classroom in recent years. Per a 2012 study by McLeskey et al., the rate of general education placement for students with Emotional Disturbance increased by 105% between 1990 and 2007. With this increase in opportunity, general education teachers could be in need of more training to feel prepared to have students with disabilities in their classrooms. The study analyzed how the training and experience of general education teachers impacts their feelings toward teaching in inclusive environments. Furthermore, the researcher also sought to identify what types of training and/or experience have the most positive impacts on general education teachers' feelings of self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Inclusion research has become more prominent in education as researchers attempt to identify best practice for supporting students with disabilities in inclusive environments. This has led to a large increase in the amount of data that is accessible surrounding inclusive practices and teacher self-efficacy (Avramidis et al., 2019). Many studies compared general education and special education teachers' levels of self-efficacy; these studies largely found that special education teachers felt more equipped to support their special education students (Buell et al., 1999). Different forms of teacher training have been analyzed throughout this work, but few have asked general educators to identify what was the most impactful training for them in their preparation to support students with disabilities in their classrooms.

By utilizing a survey model, the researcher used a teacher reporting method to identify what type of training has been the most impactful for general education teachers in their careers in reference to supporting students with disabilities. Studies have been performed that examine the rate of change a specific training had for educators (Ford et al., 2001; Shani & Hebel, 2016),

but few have identified what type of training is the most impactful per a teacher report. By comparing the efficacy and impact of the different training models, i.e., professional development, pre-service training, experience; the data determined what training had the largest perceived impact on general education teachers working in inclusive settings. Without concrete evidence of the most impactful training, general education teachers are less equipped to properly support their students with disabilities that are in their classroom. The evidence collected can aid in improving the overall efficacy of inclusion for students with disabilities.

The intent of this author's study was to determine what type of teacher training general education teachers have found to be the most impactful in their careers when working with special education students. This study occurred in a Midwestern suburb where general education teachers completed a Google survey via their district email accounts. The researcher identified what type of teacher training on special education topics was perceived as the most effective for general education teachers. The researcher also identified the impact that amount of experience has on feelings of self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities.

Answering the aforementioned questions created the opportunity for the researcher to identify best practice in the training of general education teachers to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms. The data also has the opportunity to help ensure the best training is being implemented with general education teachers to aid in improving inclusive practices in the researcher's district. The study was administered via district email. This could cause a skew in the data due to potential feelings of discomfort when asked to report on perceptions surrounding students with disabilities. Participants may report higher levels of self-efficacy due to the fear of the data being "recorded" by the district via their emails. The study also focused on one Midwestern suburb which provided data for that district, but it may not be as applicable or

generalizable to other districts around the country. The researcher put measures in place, such as anonymity, to help lessen these impacts on their study.

In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews past research surrounding teacher self-efficacy, teacher training, and the inclusive practices of students with disabilities. Chapter 3 outlines the methods the researcher took to collect the data, analyze the data, and identify the limitations of the study's design. Chapter 4 analyzes and discusses the data that was collected through the survey. Finally in Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the implications of the data collected in reference to future research and best practice.

Chapter 2

The field of special education has a long history of "otherness", where special education students are seen as different from their general education peers. This stigma surrounding teaching students with disabilities has made the fight for effective inclusive practices in schools and districts a challenge. Proper special education training can be harder for general education teachers to find to help increase their effectiveness, confidence, and teaching abilities. Through an this survey, analysis of teacher reported training needs, the positive results of special education training, and teacher perspectives the need for an increase in special education training and professional development was apparent. An inclusive setting is defined as "a service-delivery model whereby students with and without disabilities are taught the same content and in the same setting, with modifications and accommodations as necessary" (Dev & Haynes, 2015). Inclusion can take many forms, for example, it could present as having students in general education classes full time, having students in general education classes for part of the day, or having students participate in general education classes outside of their core classes.

General Education Teacher Perspectives on Special Education

Although "sit and get" professional development is reported to be not as impactful due to the workload teachers have (Peterson-Ahmad et al., 2018), professional development that is tailored to the building and district can be more impactful (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Classroom management was an important topic for teachers to have included in professional development (Peterson-Ahmad et al., 2018). This contributes to the idea that behavior management of special education students is something that requires more training and support. Second, professional development surrounding reading disabilities and intervention was reported as the most beneficial, which alludes to additional training being required to properly support

students with reading disabilities so that teachers are more equipped and prepared to aid students with disabilities.

Focusing predominantly on general educators' perceptions of teaching in inclusive settings, Koh and Shin (2017) found that with the implementation of IDEA approximately 30 years ago, general educators still hold negative and mixed feelings about inclusion. They determined that in the early years of inclusion teachers focused on the need for sufficient training and the need for resources to provide inclusive education. These seem to be the same barriers that are appearing in present day inclusive education as only 23% of pre-service training programs require more than two courses on special education topics. This low amount of required courses leaves general education teachers feeling underprepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms and thus leads to negative feelings about teaching inclusive education.

In order to better support students with disabilities, training modules and professional development need to be implemented. A survey before and after a training module was given and the trainees displayed a significant change in their beliefs surrounding those with disabilities (Lanterman & Applequist, 2018). Through a simple module about students with disabilities, those participants were educated on a topic with which they were not necessarily comfortable or confident. With repeated training, self-efficacy can be built for teachers when working with special education students. With general educators less positive in their self-efficacy towards inclusion, their willingness to use inclusive practices in their class is less than special education teachers (Avramidis et al., 2019). Crucial inclusive practices cannot be implemented for special education students if their educators do not have the proper training to effectively teach them.

If the proper training is not provided to general educators, a negative attitude can have an impact on the inclusive practices in the classroom. Orr (2009) interviewed special education teachers about inclusion and identified that the negative attitudes of general education teachers is considered a large barrier to implementing effective inclusive practices. Additionally, lack of knowledge of inclusion and insufficient administrative support were identified as barriers. Building and administrative support can have an impact on inclusive practices and the professional educators' feelings towards inclusion in their classrooms. If administrators set the tone for inclusive expectations, they can positively impact the school and their inclusion efforts.

Another examination of general education teacher feelings about inclusion was conducted by Coates (2012). Through a survey of physical education teachers and their feelings of confidence and preparedness in an inclusive setting Coates found significant results when comparing two groups of pre-service teachers who completed different programs. Overall, four-year students received more formal training on inclusion in comparison to the post baccalaureate program, but both groups underwent the same level of expectations when teaching in inclusive environments. While both of these groups reported that they felt prepared to teach in an inclusive environment, they also reported that more hands-on training in an inclusive environment would be beneficial.

Through an interview model, Lohrmann and Bambara (2006) gathered data on teachers' perceptions of what would help them to be more successful when having students with disabilities included in their classrooms. The teachers identified that a school-wide culture of support of inclusion would be imperative to helping them successfully teach inclusively and the researchers identified this as the first level of supports. The second level identified was to give individualized supports to the teachers as they arise when working with students with disabilities.

Both levels revolve around support for the general education teacher themself and reemphasizes the "otherness" of special education where a student with disabilities cannot be taught by simply one teacher.

Analyzing survey data that was self-reported by teachers providing inclusive education, McKenna et al. (2021) looked at best practice in reference to inclusion for students with emotional disturbance. There was statistically significant difference found between the use of best practice when comparing special educators and general educators. Special educators used a majority of practices more often than general educators particularly in reference to behavioral support items and methods of differentiation. With a co-teaching model, special educators may be taking the lead on using those best practice methods when working with general educators. Special educators are considered the "experts" when working with students with disabilities which can contribute to the "otherness" of special education students. Buell et al. (1999) also found that in every area addressed on their survey, special education teachers rated their efficacy, ability, understanding, and resources higher than their general education counterparts.

Pre-service Training/Teacher Needs

Special education and general education teachers both complete and perform large amounts of pre-service training as well as professional development while they are teaching but the amount of training in the field of special education that is offered for general education teachers is minimal (Koh & Shin, 2017). This minimal training leaves teachers with areas in which they feel they are less qualified, and special education is a common area in need of support. Chitiyo et al. (2019) administered a survey in three African countries. Of the teachers surveyed, they were all strongly in favor of special education and inclusion and rated professional development in special education as highly important. While this study was

successful in gaining teacher perspectives on the importance of special education and training in that area, the results could be skewed. With special education becoming more prevalent and accepted in Africa, the claim could be made that it would be taboo for an educator to openly admit they do not believe in inclusion or having special education services for students. With this in mind, the validity of the Chitiyo et al. research could be called into question because one cannot prove that all educators were being completely truthful. With the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1975, formerly known as the Education of Handicapped Children Act, students with disabilities have been more accepted and included in the American education system. If this study were to be replicated in the United States, it is likely that similar questions surrounding validity could apply. Despite these concerns surrounding validity, the study shows the importance of collecting data surrounding perceptions of special education and how societal acceptance can have an impactful role on special education.

Pindiprolu et al. (2007) examined the specific professional development needs of general educators, special educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. These groups displayed different areas that they would like to have as a focus for professional development, but professional development surrounding problem behaviors was a larger focus. Specifically, training on functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans were requested. This may contribute to the perception among general educators that problem behaviors for special education students require extensive training and support for them to be addressed and implemented. This could be avoided through a collaborative approach to problem behaviors for both special education and general education students but brings emphasis to the idea that special

education students display different problem behaviors than their peers and thus behaviors must be handled in a different way.

A qualitative study by Dev and Haynes (2015), focusing specifically on the inclusion of students who were previously taught in a resource room or self-contained setting, helped to identify the hurdles that special education students face when entering an inclusive setting. The teachers involved felt that students with severe emotional and physical disabilities would be best served in a self-contained setting and also identified that their special education students were most hindered by their lack of social skills when entering an inclusive setting. Participants stated three areas of need for successful inclusion practices in this case: pre-service teacher education for inclusive settings, teacher attitudes towards inclusion, and administrative support to help special education and general education teachers to plan for the entire class (Dev & Haynes, 2015). Two of these three areas of need are largely discussed and acknowledged throughout discussions on inclusion.

An increase in training, as aforementioned, is commonly requested by educators in reference to special education in order to increase educators' skills and knowledge to better teach students with disabilities (Pindiprolu et al., 2007). Through a self-reported survey of educators, special education teachers' self-reported confidence level was significantly higher in comparison to general educators' (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009). This confidence in teaching special education students has not increased in correlation with more teaching experience. This self-report on educator confidence helps to indicate the lack of training general educators have received on special education topics because they do not feel as though they have the knowledge to effectively educate and support special education students. An increase in general education

professional development on both teaching practices and stigma could help to decrease the "otherness" of the special education field.

Although the pitfalls of teacher training and special education services are commonplace in conversations surrounding education, Huberman et al. (2012) examined the practices of districts with strong academic performance for special education students. These practices included: inclusion, access to core curriculum, collaboration between staff, continuous assessment, use of Response to Intervention, targeted professional development, and explicit direct instruction. While many of these practices are used in districts, the need for more targeted professional development is needed to help increase the confidence levels in reference to special education (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009).

While on-the-job professional development can have a large positive impact on teachers' views on special education topics, pre-service training is a viable option for positive change in this area. Sanz-Cervera et al. (2017) used a survey model to identify the knowledge, misconceptions, and gaps surrounding autism spectrum disorder that first-year and fourth-year pre-service teachers have. Fourth-year pre-service teachers displayed greater knowledge but also showed more misconceptions surrounding autism spectrum disorder than the first-year pre-service teachers. This information leads one to question the training and education the pre-service teachers are receiving as an increase in knowledge should, ideally, decrease the misconceptions about autism. If the training and education is properly analyzed this institution could use that data to help dismantle the "otherness" that special education students often endure by increasing their pre-service teachers' knowledge on special education and decreasing their misconceptions and gaps in the same area.

Teacher perspectives towards students with disabilities in general education settings can also have a large impact on the students themselves. Second and third grade students with autism spectrum disorder presented with lower levels of behavioral problems and were included more socially in their general education class when their general education teachers perceived their relationship as positive (Robertson et al., 2003). With general education teacher perspectives having a large impact on their special education students, it is clear that adequate training and support for general education teachers is vital for students with disabilities to be successful in inclusive settings.

Positive Results of Special Education Professional Development and Training

Multiple methods of training have been implemented through professional development as well as in teacher preparation programs. Special and general educators usually complete different educator preparation programs in college that often do not intertwine. An Israeli teacher program combined the special education and general education programs to increase teacher effectiveness. Pre-service teachers learned how to better modify their curriculum and teach to a diverse group after they were able to teach to different types of learners (Shani & Hebel, 2016). This produced positive results for teacher effectiveness, but the implementation of the program did not display equality. Not everyone taught a special education class; some only taught general education or special education and some taught both classes. This would lead to varying results for the effectiveness of the program and the students' perspectives afterwards, this also does not give an equal opportunity to the general education pre-service teachers to develop that skill of teaching a special education class.

A similar model on co-teaching in a teacher preparation program produced different results. The pre-service teachers were taught by a co-teaching team of a special educator and a

general educator and thus were able to learn through co-teaching. Flexibility, faculty modeling, willingness to participate, and open communication were identified as key aspects in a successful co-teaching model (Ricci & Fingon, 2017). These future educators provided the opportunity to learn through a model that has become prevalent in recent years and thus could identify the strengths and weaknesses of that model. For example, co-teaching requires a lot of teamwork and a strong relationship between co-teachers. This firsthand experience could help future educators to identify the most beneficial methods when collaborating with their co-teacher and thus make them a more effective educator.

The restructuring of an entire pre-service teaching program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for general education teachers was conducted to prepare their pre-service teachers to better serve all students, including those with disabilities. Ford et al. (2001) discussed a wide array of positive changes that were made. For example, after the restructuring they incorporated components where students examined the collaboration and supports that were used to support students with disabilities and "at risk" students in live classrooms. This increased awareness of the general education teacher, their supports, and their students in the classroom in comparison to pre-service teachers prior to the restructuring. This in turn helped pre-service teachers to understand and capitalize on the collaboration that is vital in teaching in inclusive environments.

Co-teaching is often used as a means to work towards inclusive practices, but it is often forgotten that training on inclusion and special education too need to be inclusive. The aforementioned "sit and get" model of professional development is not the best approach when working to create inclusive schools and the professional development must be tailored to the building and district's needs (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). A survey, such as the Chitiyo et al.

(2019) survey, would be beneficial to ensure that districts are educating their staff on the most beneficial, impactful, and useful professional development for them. By individualizing the professional development educators receive, educators are more equipped to individualize their inclusion practices and implement them more effectively (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

When working towards improving professional development on inclusive practices at the secondary level, Grskovic and Trzcinka (2011) conducted a survey for those who have taught or were currently teaching secondary students with disabilities. This survey examined what standards are the most important to aid in preparing secondary general education teachers for teaching in inclusive settings. The three standards that were voted as the most important for inclusive teaching were instructional strategies, classroom management, and collaboration. There was a total of 31 essential standards that the special education teachers surveyed identified that were recommended for secondary general education teachers to have in their training curriculum. This helped special education teachers identify the standards they felt were more important for preparing other teachers on how to best support students with disabilities and gave them an outlet to share their opinions regarding areas in which teachers could be best supported.

Conclusion

Self-contained classes can create an "otherness" factor for students with disabilities, it leads both students and educators to believe that there is a special skill that must be acquired to teach and work with these students. This stigma could be reduced through professional development, more teacher training for general education staff, and a more comprehensive and inclusive pre-service training model for general education teachers. By normalizing and building self-efficacy in general educators' abilities surrounding special education, the stigma of special education could be reduced, and inclusion implementation could be increased. With a list of the

positive impacts of teacher training in special education, what type of teacher training have general education teachers found to be the most impactful in their careers when working with students with disabilities?

Chapter 3

Teacher training and professional development have an impact on teacher feelings of self-efficacy in many areas. General education teachers have received more experience working with students with disabilities since the passing of IDEA in 1975 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1975). Therefore, training for general education teachers has become available on special education topics. General education teachers receive training on these topics through on-the-job professional development, pre-service training, professional development outside of that required, and experience in the classroom. While all of these types of training are available, there is less data surrounding what type of training is the most effective for general education teachers. The goal of the survey study is to determine which type of general education teacher training on special education topics is self-reported as the most impactful by general education teachers. The researcher attempted to answer this question by administering a survey assessing general education teachers on what type of training they believed was most effective.

Setting and Participants

The study occurred in the researcher's school district in a Midwestern suburb at the middle school level. The school served students in 6th and 7th grade. As of the 2020-2021 school year, there were fourteen schools in the district with nine of them being elementary schools, three being middle schools, and two being high schools. The focus middle school had an enrollment of just over 650 students in the 2020-2021 school year with 62% of the students identifying as white, 11% identifying as Black or African American, 11% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, just over 8% identifying as Two or more races, 7% identifying as Asian, less than 1% identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and less than 1% identifying as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, 13% of students were students with a

disability, 36% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 5% were English Learners.

The participants included general education teachers who taught students with disabilities in their classroom. General education teachers were defined as teachers of core classes such as math, literacy, science, and social studies as well as elective teachers who teach language, family and consumer science, art, and technology education. There were 51 surveys sent to teachers and 45 responses returned, yielding a response rate of 80%. Of those respondents, 28 fit the criteria of being a general education teacher. Of the 28 participants, 19 taught a core class and 9 taught an elective class. Additionally, 79% of the participants identified as female and the remaining 21% of participants identified as male. For ethnicity, 96% of participants identified as Caucasian/white and 3.6% identified as Two or more races. The 36-40 year age range had the largest variation with 21.4% of participations with the remaining ages as follows: 26-30 (18%), 31-35 (14%), 41-45 (14%), 20-25 (11%), 56-60 (11%), 46-50 (7%), and 51-55 (4%). The highest degree of education completed was a master's degree, with 79% of participants obtaining their master's degree and the remaining 21% obtained their bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. In terms of experience, 54% of participants had more than 10 years of experience as a professional educator.

Procedure

The survey was administered via email and used a Likert scale to gather data on the four types of training that general education teachers had access to: pre-service training, required professional development once on-the-job, professional development outside of that required, and experience in the classroom. The participants rated how their comfort level and/or self-efficacy was impacted by each area of training when working with students with disabilities. A

four point Likert scale was chosen because the researcher did not want participants to have a neutral option to help decrease social desirability bias (Garland, 1991). Therefore, participants had to choose if a method was more or less impactful. The participants received an initial email, foreshadowing the email they received at a later date to participate in the study. They then received the email with the survey link attached and received a final email as a reminder to complete the study. Both the second and third emails had the consent forms attached to the email. The email messages are included in Appendix A. The full survey can be found in Appendix B and contained five demographic questions including professional education position, gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, and years teaching. These questions were included to help the researcher get a more comprehensive understanding of the participant set. Participants were then asked a series of four questions:

1. How well do you feel your undergraduate training has prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?

2. How well do you feel on-the-job professional development has prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?

3. If you sought out your own professional development beyond that required on special education topics, how well do you think that prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?

4. How has your years of experience contributed to your skill level today when working with students with disabilities?

The above questions were each answered via a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very well) to 4 (not well). Question 4 used a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 (It has contributed a lot.) to 4 (It has not contributed.) Question one was asked to give participants the opportunity to

identify the impact that their undergraduate courses have impacted their teaching of students with disabilities. Ford et al. 2001 study that focused on the restructuring of a Wisconsin pre-service teaching program, identified meaningful ways that students were educated that helped them improve their self-efficacy. This question aided the researcher in identifying how impactful pre-service teaching was in the building. Question two was asked to determine the effectiveness that on-the-job professional development has as McLeskey & Waldron (2002) reported that much of the "sit and get" professional development that is offered to teachers is not as impactful. The researcher wanted to determine if the professional development teachers are receiving is positively impacting teachers' classrooms. Jenkins & Ornelles (2009) determined that there was a need for more targeted professional development surrounding special education in order to increase confidence levels of staff. Question three was asked to determine if this additional, targeted professional development was more impactful. McLeskey et al.'s 2012 study focused on how the training and experience of general education teachers impacted their feelings toward teaching students with disabilities. Question four was asked to determine the impact that experience has on general education teachers and how impactful experience was for them in their classrooms. The final question of the survey asked participants to:

Rank the four types of training based on their impact on your abilities to work with students with disabilities in your classroom:

- Pre-service training (collegiate training)

- On-the-job professional development

- Professional development other than that required

- Experience in the classroom with students with disabilities

Huberman et al. (2012) identified seven practices, i.e. inclusion, access to core curriculum, collaboration between staff, continuous assessment, use of Response to Intervention, targeted professional development, and explicit direct instruction, that have supported students with disabilities to perform well academically. This final question was asked so participants were required to rate four options that Huberman et al. touched on as important. By asking participants to rate the four options in comparison to each other, the researcher was able to determine if participants rated the trainings individually was reliable. This comparison also required participants to reflect on what was most impactful for them in their teaching careers and helped the researcher to identify what the least impactful area was as well.

Data and Analysis

A survey method was utilized to gather information on how the training and experience of general education staff on special education topics impacted their feelings toward teaching students with disabilities. Visual analysis was completed to determine what type of training was the most impactful for general education teachers. Teoh et al. (2004) support visual analysis as humans recall related images and identify irregularities and patterns through visual analysis. Initially, the researcher placed all data into tables and was able to identify what training was the most impactful based on participants' percentage of responses to each training method. The researcher was able to identify if the majority of participants found each individual training method as having a more positive impact or a less positive impact. This allowed the researcher to determine how large of discrepancies there were between the group's reports of impact. The researcher then moved onto the ranking question data. The researcher observed the graph and was able to identify the most and least impactful training methods in comparison to each other.

The researcher then compared the years of experience for educators in reference to their most impactful versus least impactful training method.

Chapter 4

General education teachers have felt underprepared to support students with disabilities in their classrooms as inclusion has become more prominent (Avramidis et al., 2019). Educators could be better supported through many avenues, such as pre-service training, required professional development once on-the-job, professional development outside of that required, and experience in the classroom. Data was collected surrounding the impact that each of these training methods have had on general education teachers' self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

A survey was developed and administered to educators at the researcher's school. Twenty-eight of the 45 responses collected were from general educators and only the data of those 28 participants was analyzed. This survey used a Likert Scale for participants to identify what type of training was the most impactful for them in working with students with disabilities in their classroom. Lastly, participants ranked all four training methods from most impactful to least impactful.

When participants ranked all four training methods in direct comparison to each other, years of experience was rated as number one with 92% of participants stating that it was the most impactful. This is similar to 89.3% of participants stating it had a positive impact when it was not compared to the other training methods. In the direct comparison, on-the-job professional development and professional development outside of that required tied for the second most impactful option with 39% each. When looking at their individual determination of impact, 53.6% of participants reported a positive impact from on-the-job professional development and 67.8% of participants identified professional development outside of that required as having a positive impact. This is a notable finding as the professional development outside of that

required tied for second most impactful in the direct comparison. The third most impactful training method for the direct comparison was on-the-job professional development with 42% of participants identifying it. Lastly, the least impactful training method via the direct comparison question was pre-service training with 60% of participants identifying it as the least impactful. Individually, 46.4% of participants identified pre-service training as having a positive impact while 53.5% of participants reported it did not have an impact. Pre-service training was the only training method that the majority of participants identified as not having an impact when working with students with disabilities in their general education classrooms.

Chapter 5

Discussion

      Students with disabilities are present in general education classes in public education. Therefore, training is helpful for general education teachers who are working with students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher collected data surrounding what type of teacher training general education teachers found the most impactful on special education topics: years of experience, on-the-job professional development, professional development outside of that required, and undergraduate training. A survey 28 general education educators completed gave an array of data surrounding what type of teacher training was the most impactful for them when working with students with disabilities. Participants were asked to rate four different types of teacher training based on how impactful they were on a Likert scale. On-the-job professional development, professional development outside of that required, and experience in the classroom all were identified as having a positive impact when working with students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Years of experience was the most impactful variable when working with students with disabilities with 89.3% of participants reporting a positive impact and 10.7% reporting less of an impact. With a discrepancy of 78.6%, this displays that more time in the classroom working with students with disabilities helps cultivate more self-efficacy for general education teachers. When general education teachers had more opportunity to hone their skill with students with disabilities in the classroom, they were able to learn more about how to teach and work with students with disabilities from the students themselves. This hands-on training was reported as the most impactful for the majority of participants.

      The closest discrepancy was in reference to on-the-job professional development opportunities. There were 53.6% of participants who reported that on-the-job professional development had a positive impact for them when working with disabilities while 46.4% of

participants reported there was less of an impact. This leaves a discrepancy of 7.2% between groups. This may be due to the fact that on-the-job professional development can be focused on an array of different areas ranging from curriculum instruction to inclusion. The researcher thought that educators with more experience may have found on-the-job professional development as more impactful because they may have received less instruction on working with students with disabilities in their college prepatory programs. The researcher found a relationship between more years of experience and level of positive impact that supported that claim. The majority of educators who had more than ten years of experience reported on-the-job professional development as being impactful. On the other hand, educators who had less than ten years experience were split on the decision of whether or not on-the-job professional development was impactful. A study performed by Huberman et al. (2012) identified targeted professional development as impactful for strong academic performance for special education students. This leaves the researcher with questions as to why teachers with less experience were split on the decision of whether or not it was impactful. Jenkins and Ornelles (2009) also found that targeted professional development can improve teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. It is possible that with inclusion being implemented newer teachers have a higher chance of receiving more direct instruction pertaining to students with disabilities. On the other hand, newer educators may not have been teaching long enough to participate in impactful professional development on-the-job in support of students with disabilities. In turn, this could make on-the-job professional development less impactful for newer educators in reference to students with disabilities.

In reference to professional development outside of that required, 67.8% of participants reported it as being impactful, while 32.1% did not. Professional development outside of that

required is a way for educators to hone their skills in their field and/or learn more about an area that they need more support in. This can lead to additional professional development outside of that required being largely up to the educator's discretion. If educators choose to attend professional developments pertaining to working with students with disabilities it could positively impact their perception on how impactful that training was. Alternatively, if an educator chooses to not take professional development pertaining to working with students with disabilities, then this type of training would have been perceived as less impactful. This could be due to the range of topics and delivery methods that are used for professional development. Peterson-Ahmad et all (2018) found that professional development is sometimes identified as not as impactful due to the workload that teachers already have. Additionally, McLeskey & Waldrom (2002) identified that professional development which is targeted and tailored to the building or district is more impactful. If educators are not participating in additional professional development that is targeted towards special education topics, they would likely report less of an impact as the professional development is not targeted to the topic in question.

The fourth type of teacher training, undergraduate teacher training, was the only training method that was not perceived as mostly impactful by the majority of participants. Only 46.4% of participants identified their undergraduate training as impactful, while 53.5% reported it as less impactful. In the United States, only 23% of pre-service training programs require more than two courses on special education topics. Coates' 2012 study compared two groups of pre-service teachers completing different inclusive programs. While both of these groups reported that they felt prepared to teach in an inclusive environment, they also reported that more hands-on training in an inclusive environment would be beneficial.

For the final questions, participants were asked to compare the four training methods and rank them from most impactful to least impactful. Experience in the classroom was ranked number one for all but two of the 28 participants. Those two participants placed experience in the classroom as their second most impactful choice. This data supports the majority of participants responses to the individual question pertaining to determining how impactful experience was in the classroom without comparison to the other training methods. With all participants selecting experience as one of their top two choices, it can be said that there is a relationship between experience in the classroom and feelings of self-efficacy for general education teachers when working with students with disabilities. This conclusion agrees with Lanterman and Applequist's 2018 findings that through repeated training that comes with more experience, self-efficacy for general education teachers working with students with disabilities can be improved.

On the same ranking question, 17 participants ranked their pre-service training, 7 participants ranked professional development other than that required, and 4 participants ranked on-the-job professional development as the least impactful. It is interesting to note that the majority of educators (12 out of 15) with more than ten years of experience ranked their pre-service training as the least impactful training method overall. With changes in implementation of inclusion, veteran teachers may not have had as much pre-service training surrounding students with disabilities because inclusion was not as popular or common at that time and there was less training in that area offered. Smith Jr. and Schindler (1980) recommended that all states begin requiring pre-service educators take a minimum of two to three hour courses surrounding supporting students with disabilities. However, there is currently not a federal law mandating teacher prepatory programs to require general education teachers to take courses on special education topics in their college prepatory programs.

The majority of general education teachers identified years of experience as the most impactful method of training in reference to working with students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Alternatively, pre-service/undergraduate training was identified as the least impactful method with on-the-job professional development and professional development outside of that required having moderate impact in comparison to years of experience. The data collected surrounding pre-service teacher training largely identifies ways that teacher prepatory programs can be improved and thus supports why undergraduate training would be less impactful (Ricci & Fingon, 2017). Former research also identified that professional development whether on-the-job or in addition to on-the-job professional development is most impactful when it is targeted and specific (Huberman et al., 2012). Not all professional development will be or is targeted towards special education and therefore it will not always be impactful for special education topics.

Implications

With the aforementioned data in mind, there are many implications that can be made for practitioners and future researchers alike. For practitioners, it can be concluded that experience in the classroom positively impacts general education teachers' feelings towards working with students with disabilities in their classrooms and that pre-service training programs are less impactful. Making classroom experience a larger focus in pre-service training programs and giving more opportunities to work with students with disabilities in pre-service training programs could positively impact general education teachers' skill sets. By combining the most impactful and least impactful training methods, pre-service training programs could make both their programs more impactful and give pre-service teachers more classroom experience to aid their success when they are on the job working with students with disabilities. This could also

demonstrate a need for strong mentoring programs for new teachers that have a large focus on inclusive practices.

For districts, the results show that classroom experience is most impactful when working with students with disabilities. This means that it would be most beneficial for students with disabilities to hire educators with more classroom experience. As a majority of the data collected supported years of experience as impactful for general education teachers supporting students with disabilities. Further research should analyze whether or not if feeling more comfortable working with students with disabilities actually leads to better outcomes for students. Additionally, districts would be able to look at what teacher preparation programs offer the most classroom experience for their students. This could help them in determining which local programs will be supporting students more to be prepared to teach and support students with disabilities more effectively.

The data shows that when professional development other than that required is utilized for special education topics, it is more impactful for general education teachers. With this in mind, districts could offer, promote, or encourage their educators to utilize professional development that focuses on special education topics. With more promotion at a building level, these additional professional development opportunities could aid general education teachers in areas they may feel less versed in such as differentiation, behavior management, or non-violent crisis intervention for example.

Future researchers should utilize the data surrounding the importance of classroom experience for educators when working with students with disabilities. A deeper look into classroom experience could help identify more specific ways that students with disabilities are impacted and how it improves their educational experience. There may be other avenues that

could be used to identify ways to better implement support for general education teachers working with students with disabilities. By identifying ways that professional development could be improved, special education topics could be greater embedded into professional development opportunities.

Strengths and Limitations

Limitations of this study include the comfort level of professional educators to be honest surrounding their feelings of self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities in their classrooms. This study examined self-reported teacher efficacy and comfort level in reference to inclusion but did not contain direct observation of any teachers teaching in an inclusive environment which could have added perspectives on teacher efficacy from an observer. Additionally, teachers in one Midwestern district are the only group surveyed through this study design, which could make generalizing the findings to other districts and areas more challenging.

Another limitation surrounds the question about professional development that is outside of that required. There was no question to identify if participants had participated in any professional development on special education topics. Participants answered the question whether or not they have participated in professional development on special education topics. If participants had not had that experience, professional development outside that required would not be impactful for participants and in turn, the data could be skewed.

Strengths of this study are that information is being gathered from four subgroups for comparison. Therefore, this data can identify several areas of strength or that are in need of improvement. This study could help to identify what areas of training are in need of change to help them be more impactful when training professional educators to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Additionally, a Likert scale was used without a center option of

"neutral" or "not sure" in order to potentially improve the usefulness of participant responses. This required participants to choose how impactful a particular method of training was for them, without the ability to select neither and be neutral. The lack of a "neutral" option helps to minimize social desirability bias (Garland, 1991) and is a strength of this study. The survey also only contained questions that directly related to the research question, to promote content validity. However, the researcher failed to have other experts in the field verify these as appropriate questions for the survey. The questions examined the impact that different types of training have on the participants' feelings surrounding inclusion in their classrooms. This research method was suitable to answer the research question because it directly collected data on teachers' perceptions on inclusion and the best training to help them increase their self-efficacy in that area.

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Appendix A: Emails

Dear Educators,

You are being contacted to participate in a survey. The survey surrounds teacher perspectives on special education training options. The survey will be 100% anonymous. I am administering this survey as part of my field study for completion of my master's program.

You will receive the survey in a few days and it will take around 5-10 minutes of your time. Your participation would be greatly appreciated as it will help me complete my master's program in May of 2022.

Best,

Jenna Treuthardt

Dear Educators,

Attached is the link to the survey for my master's program as well as a copy of the consent form. Please take 5-10 minutes of your time to complete this study and help me gather data on teacher perspectives on special education training options.

This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time. I would greatly appreciate your participation!

Best,

Jenna Treuthardt

Dear Educators,

This is the final reminder to complete the survey for my master's program. The link is attached again as well as a copy of the consent form.

Thank you so much again for considering participating in this survey!

Best,

Jenna Treuthardt

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. Your participation in this research is voluntary. By selecting "I Agree" below, indicates that you agree to participate in this research. A copy of the consent form has been attached to the email you received with this survey link.
2. Identify your professional educator position.
3. What is your Gender?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your Ethnicity?
6. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
7. How many years of experience do you have as a professional educator?
8. How well do you feel your undergraduate training has prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?
9. How well do you feel on-the-job professional development has prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?
10. If you sought out your own professional development beyond that required on special education topics, how well do you think that prepared you to work with students with disabilities in your classroom?
11. How has your years of experience contributed to your skill level today when working with students with disabilities?
12. Rank the four types of training based on their impact on your abilities to work with students with disabilities in your classroom.