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Parental Perceptions Regarding Preschool Inclusion

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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PRESCHOOL INCLUSION

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The legal foundation for mainstreaming is found in Public Law 94-142 (P.L.94-142) called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Passed in 1975, this law mandated free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. This law was passed because children with disabilities were often denied an education because local districts did not provide services for them. P.L. 94-142 did not require educational services for children with disabilities under school age. School districts were encouraged to provide services for 3-year old to 5-year old children with the Preschool Incentive Grant Program. When P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized in 1986 (P.L. 99-457), services were extended to preschool age children. This amendment required the school districts to provide a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for all 3-year-old to 5-year-old children with disabilities and their families. For many of these children the least restrictive environment (LRE) is being integrated into the same class as their typically developing peers (Bailey & Wolery, 1992).

Turnbull and Winton (1992) believe that parents of the children with disabilities and the parents of children without disabilities must feel that their needs and the needs of

their child are met in order for integration to be successful. The purpose of this paper is to recognize the attitudes of parents of children with disabilities and children without disabilities regarding mainstreaming in the preschool years. Research pertaining to the opinions of parents of children with and without disabilities on inclusion will be examined to ascertain if there is a difference in their perceptions on the benefits and drawbacks of preschool mainstreaming.

Parents are very important members of a child's educational team. They play a critical role in determining the educational setting, content that will be addressed in the classroom, and services needed to create the least restrictive environment for their child (Ryndak, Downing, Morrison, & Williams, 1996). Therefore, as educators it is important to be aware of the importance of parents perceptions regarding inclusion. It is also important to be aware of the factors that parents believe will contribute to a positive mainstreaming experience will be reviewed in this paper.

DEFINITIONS

According to Public Law 94-142 and the subsequent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) children with disabilities need to be educated in the *least restrictive environment*. Bailey and Wolery (1992) define the least restrictive environment as the participation of children with disabilities in school activities with typically developing peers to the maximum extent possible. According to Rose and Smith (1993), placing a child in an environment other than regular education

can only take place when, due to the nature and severity of the child's disability, being educated in the regular education setting cannot be realized even with support services.

Placement in the least restrictive environment is often described by the terms *mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion*. Blanchard and Turnbull (1982) define mainstreaming as the placement of children with disabilities into classes intended for children without disabilities and continued on to state that preschool mainstreaming is at the very least the placement of children with disabilities and children without disabilities in the same setting. Mainstreaming is intended to enrich education by providing a typical social environment for learning (Rose & Smith, 1993). Mainstreaming in educational programs according to Miller, Strain, Boyd, Hunsickery, Mckinley, and Wu (1992), occurs when children without disabilities make up more than 50% of the children in the class. Mainstreaming, according to Edgar and Davidson (1979), "is the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive setting as defined by P.L. 94-142" (p. 32).

Another term used in the research is integration. Integration is defined as the active process of mixing children with disabilities and children without disabilities (Odom & McEvoy, 1988). According to Esposito (1987), integrated settings are measured in two dimensions. First there is the dimension of time in which the children with special needs spend with the typically developing children. When the children with special needs spend the whole school day in a regular education setting they are fully integrated. In partial integration, the children with disabilities only participate in specific activities with the children without disabilities. The second dimension on which integration varies is the number of children with disabilities in proportion to the children

without disabilities. In an integrated setting 50% or more of the total number of children are typically developing and the setting is a regular education classroom. Reverse integration occurs when the majority of children have special needs and the setting is a special education classroom.

Inclusion, according to Rose and Smith (1993) occurs when all children are educated together in a supported, age appropriate, and child focused classroom.

Inclusion, as defined by Stoiber, Gettinger, and Goetz (1998), is the integration of children with and without disabilities.

In searching for definitions of these term, many different interpretations were found in the research. Validating what Blanchard and Turnbull reported in 1982, there does not appear to be an established operational definition of mainstreaming and further research should be done to clarify the meaning of mainstreaming. In this paper, these terms will be used interchangeably.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The inclusion of children with disabilities with children without disabilities has been identified as best practice in early childhood special education (Peck, Carlson, & Helmstetter, 1992) and (Esposito, 1987). Considerable research into integration in early childhood has demonstrated that children with disabilities can benefit from integrated programs (Peck et al., 1992). Esposito (1987) surveyed research studies done in the 1970s and the 1980s into the benefits of integration and reported the following advantages, increased time spent with age appropriate developmental peer models, more elaborate play, higher level communication, more realistic reinforcers, and a greater enriching overall experience. More research cited in Reichart, Lynch, Anderson, Svobodny, DiCola, and Mercury, (1989) listed the positive effects of integration as increased social interactions and friendships, improved self concepts of the children with special needs, imitation of developmentally appropriate language skills and behaviors by the children with disabilities, and the attainment of these skills in the LRE. Research into the benefits of integration for the children without disabilities along with the impact on the children with disabilities are important because one of the goals of integration is to meet the needs of all the children involved (Esposito, 1987).

One aspect of successful integration is that parents of children with and without disabilities see that the needs of children are being met (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994). McWilliam, Lang, Vandiviere, Angell, Collins, and Underdown (1995) also stated that one gauge of the effectiveness of an early intervention program is the extent to which the consumers (families) are satisfied. One essential component of an early intervention program evaluation is the measurement of the parents' satisfaction of the services they are receiving (McNaughton, 1994). Reasons for the importance of parental satisfaction in early intervention programs are outlined in McNaughton, (1994). First, the parents of the children in the programs have control over their child's development and the responsibility for that development. As a result, their concerns in this area should have prominence. In order to develop better programs, decisions are made based on the participants' satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the programs and services they provide. Finally information regarding parents' satisfaction of early intervention services may convince other parents or agencies of the benefits of the programs.

Results of evaluations of parental opinions are important whether the perceptions are positive or negative. Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) reported that negative positions that parents hold toward integration could be as effective in limiting integration opportunities for children with disabilities in community programs as legislative or physical barriers. Potentially negative attitudes of parents of children without special needs could have considerable effect on the implementation of preschool mainstreaming. Due to this, the needs of parents of children without special needs should be considered

along with the needs of the parents of children with disabilities (Blacher & Turnbull, 1982).

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The research that has been done regarding the opinions of parents of children in integrated settings has revealed positive attitudes on the part of the parents (Miller et al., 1992). The authors surveyed parents of 304 preschool children participating in integrated settings. The study was based on the 232 parents that returned the survey. The respondents of the survey included 129 parents of typically developing children and 103 parents of children with special needs. The consisted of statements regarding parental satisfaction that the respondents rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These parents generally held positive attitudes in regard to integration and were satisfied with their child's opportunity for involvement with typically developing children (Miller et al., 1992). McNaughton (1994) cautions that if data regarding the perceptions of parents of children in early intervention programs is always positive then aspects of the program that are in need of improvement are not identified. This information is not effective in helping the decision-makers develop successful early intervention programs.

Blanchard and Turnbull (1982) recognized the importance of researching the perspectives of parents of children with special needs regarding mainstreaming due the important role of parents in making placement decisions for their children. The authors surveyed 18 parents of preschool children with disabilities who were attending a

mainstreamed preschool. The survey focused on the rationale for mainstreaming, social interactions among the children, and parent involvement. The parents rated their opinions on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The authors did not report the specific results of the survey, but made general statements based on their results. The researchers stated that overall, parents agreed with the statements on the questionnaire recognizing the value of mainstreaming. Also noted in the study, was the finding that the parents of children with disabilities were generally not sure if the parents of the children without disabilities felt that integration with children with disabilities was best for their children. Regarding the interactions between the children, the parents of children with special needs felt that they only sometimes observed the children without disabilities interacting with the children with disabilities. The parents selected "rarely" (the low point on the Likert scale) in evaluating whether children with disabilities preferred to interact with other children with disabilities to the children without disabilities in the classroom. As to their role in the mainstreaming process, parents did not see that their role as parent volunteers had any impact on the success of mainstreaming in their child's classroom. The parents of children with disabilities also felt that their interactions with parents of children without disabilities took place infrequently (Blanchard & Turnbull, 1982).

A study of parents of children with disabilities enrolled in early intervention programs done in 1995 by McWilliam and colleagues looked at parental perceptions of early intervention services as a whole. Families who received early intervention services participated in this survey. Surveys were sent out to an unspecified number of state

agencies known to be providing early intervention services with instructions to distribute the surveys to randomly selected families. Initially 1,540 surveys were sent to the agencies with a follow up postcard sent two weeks later. Because the local programs functioned as go-betweens between the researchers and the participants, the authors did not have data regarding the extent to which the surveys were distributed to families. The authors were not specific in describing the survey, but reported that the survey consisted of 30 statements that were rated on categorical or ordinal scales. The children receiving services were under 6-years-old. A total of 539 families responded to the survey and reported that almost half were integrated 25% of more of the time. Forty-five percent of the parents' report that they were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted their child placed in a mainstreamed setting. Only 30% of the families in the study were not given a choice as to which type of program in which to put their child. Of the families in this survey, 10% reported that they did not know if they were given the option of mainstreaming. Only 15% of families in this survey did not want their children in an integrated program. Almost one-third of the 273 families of children not served in integrated settings wanted their children to spend more time with children without disabilities. The authors did not give further specific data, but made the statement that some families felt that the option of a self-contained special education classroom provided more individual attention than a mainstreamed setting. McWilliams and colleagues (1995) concluded from the results of the survey that inclusion was less attractive for some parents due to the large numbers of children per adult than smaller highly staffed special education classrooms.

The importance of surveying the opinions of the parents of children with special needs is crucial due to the impact that these parents have on their children's development (Blacher & Turnbull, 1982) and their willingness to advocate on behalf of their children (Guralnick, 1994). According to Blacher and Turnbull (1982), parents make a substantial contribution to their child's cognitive development and social adjustment. The role of parent involvement in a preschool classroom has been a documented factor as to the success of the program (Blanchard & Turnbull, 1982). P.L. 94-142 defined the role of parents as decision-makers in their child's educational experience. Guralnick (1994) added that the parents' role was important not only for their child's development and education, but because the parents of children with disabilities have been on the forefront of changes that have been made regarding services for children with special needs.

Research has demonstrated that parents of children with special needs are generally supportive of preschool integration. Meyers and Blanchard (1987) surveyed 99 families of preschool age children with disabilities and found that they were satisfied with the services that they received in school. Guralnick (1994) reported that parents of preschool children with special needs were generally supportive of mainstreaming. Green and Stoneman (1989) did not report specifically, but from their research into parental perceptions, made similar statements agreeing that the parents they studied had positive attitudes toward mainstreaming. Widerstrom (1982) cited a study of parental attitudes about inclusion done by Edgar and Davidson in 1979 that concluded that the parents of children with special needs understood the concept of mainstreaming and approved of the idea for their child's education. Stoiber, Gettinger, and Goetz (1998) developed a 28-

item survey titled "My Thinking About Inclusion", which they distributed to 488 parents of preschool age children. A return rate of 85% was reported for this survey. Of the 415 parents who completed the survey, 150 were parents of children with children with disabilities, 260 were parents of children without disabilities, and five parents who did not provide this information. The authors did not give specific information in regard to how the parents were chosen or detailed findings of the survey. The authors reported the survey revealed that generally parents of children with disabilities held positive beliefs regarding inclusion, their attitudes were more positive than parents of children without special needs.

Benefits of Integration

Parents of children with special needs see several benefits to integration for their children. In Guralnick (1994) the author described a study in which mothers of preschool children in special education programs were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of inclusion in early childhood programs. Out of the 250 families who agreed to participate in the survey, 222 returned completed surveys. This is an 89% response rate. The survey consisted of 27 statements describing benefits of mainstreaming and drawbacks of mainstreaming. The mothers rated the statements on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from "definitely not a benefit or drawback" to "definitely a benefit or a drawback". While the author did not give the specific results that were obtained, some general findings of the study were discussed. Guralnick (1994) found that parents saw the importance of enhancing a child's social and emotional

development as a positive outcome of inclusion. Mainstreaming also prepared children with special needs for going out into the community and relating to other children who do not have disabilities. These parents felt that mainstreaming was positively affected the education a child was getting in school than a self-contained preschool classroom. The children of the mothers who participated in the survey were placed into the following disability categories: cognitive delays, communication disorders, physical disabilities, and at risk. The children in the at risk category were receiving special education services for fine and gross motor delays or minor speech and language delays. Guralnick (1994) reported that the severity of the child's disability did not seem to alter the parents' perceptions in regard to the benefits of mainstreaming.

The parents of children with disabilities see the teacher as having an impact on the success of an integrated preschool classroom (Guralnick, 1994). Widerstrom (1982) cited research done by Edgar and Davidson in 1979 stating that parents felt that the teacher having a positive attitude toward the children with special needs, and conveying this acceptance to the class is critical to the creation of a successfully integrated program.

Drawbacks to Integration

The research into parental perceptions of children with special needs regarding integration has revealed some drawbacks. Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) cited a study done by Bailey and Winton in 1983 in which parents felt a disadvantage to mainstreaming was the possibility for the social rejection of their child and themselves among the other parents. Reichart et al. (1989) cited a study done by Canslor and Winton in 1983 that

found parents felt integration might be exposing children to emotional pain and ridicule. In Guralnick (1994) the author did not give specific results of the survey, but stated the parents expressed concern for the possible isolation of children. They were also unsure as to whether the parents of children without disabilities believed that integration would be beneficial for their own children. In another study, the authors did not give the specific details of their research, but stated that parents were concerned with the potential for conflicts with parents of the typically developing children who may not be understanding of the special needs of their children (Peck, Hayden, Wandschneider, Peterson, & Richarz, 1989).

In Guralnick (1994) the author reported the instruction of preschool children in the classroom and the lack of availability of resources as a drawback felt by parents of children with special needs. Peck et al. (1989) conducted interviews with 10 parents in which the parents responded to eight open ended questions with each interview lasting about 45 minutes. The authors did not report specific details, but stated the parents were concerned that regular education teachers had lowered expectations for children with special needs. Widerstrom (1982) reported that parents felt that preschool teachers should have additional training in order to more effectively educate their children. Peck et al. (1989) stated that in order to prevent negative attitudes toward children, parents felt that the teachers needed more training into the rationale for integration and into teaching children with special needs. In Widerstrom (1982), parents expressed their concern with the teacher's attitudes and listed this as a critical factor into the success of an integrated classroom. Parents were fearful of conflicts that could arise with the regular education

teachers who might not understand their children's special needs (Peck et al., 1989). In fact, in Reichart et al. (1989) the authors surveyed 82 parents of children enrolled in preschool programs, 52 of whom returned the completed survey. This is a 63% response rate. The Parent Perspectives on Integration Survey is a 17 item questionnaire where parents rated statements pertaining to integration on a 5-point Likert-type scale to ascertain a degree or agreement of disagreement with the items. While Reichart and colleagues did not report the specific results, they stated that the parents were divided as to whether a trained teacher in a segregated setting would be a more effective way for their children to be educated.

Families of children with special needs expressed their concerns with staffing in the classrooms as well as who was making the educational decisions for their children. In McWilliam et al. (1995) the authors reported that large classrooms with a high ratio of children per teacher characterized integrated preschool classrooms. As long as this continued, parents felt that smaller well-staffed classrooms were a more attractive way to educate their children. The parents were also concerned that the persons who were making the educational decisions for their children were not really aware of the issues that these families faced. The parents based this opinion on the fact that the decision-makers often do not have children with special needs of their own (Rose & Smith, 1993).

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF TYPICALLY DEVELOPING CHILDREN

Integration in preschool has become a popular topic in the literature in recent years. One aspect of mainstreaming that has not received as much attention is the

attitudes of parents of the children without special needs toward mainstreaming. The perceptions of these parents are crucial because they could either facilitate integration or stand in the way of attempts to integrate children with special needs into school programs (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Peck et al. (1992) surveyed 275 parents of typically developing children in inclusive preschool programs. The questionnaire consisted of 13 statements that parents rated on a 5-point Likert-type agreement/disagreement scale. Of the 275 parents who received a survey, 125 completed the survey. This is a 44% return rate. The authors did not give specific results, but reported that parents of typically developing children strongly agreed that they would prefer their children not be in an educational setting with only other typically developing children. These parents also perceived positive outcomes for their children participating in an integrated preschool program. In fact, when asked parents disagreed with the statement that they had experienced problems with integration. These parents held mostly positive attitudes in regards to integration when they had experience with these programs (Peck et al., 1992).

Green and Stoneman (1989) surveyed 204 parents of typically developing children in an attempt to gain an understanding of their attitudes regarding mainstreaming. These parents each had at least one child in an inclusive daycare or preschool program. The mean age of the children was 3.6 years. The questionnaires were distributed to the preschool programs that passed them on to the parents. With this method of distribution, it is impossible to accurately figure the exact return rate, but it was estimated that less than half of the questionnaires were returned. The attitudes of parents were gathered in

five areas: global attitudes, academics and teacher attention, behavior problems, impact on the children without special needs, and the impact on the child with special needs.

Green and Stoneman (1989) came to two conclusions with the results that they obtained. First, they reported that positive experiences with mainstreaming predicted parents' favorable attitudes in regard to mainstreaming rather than the amount of time spent in an inclusive setting. For the mothers responding to the survey, the perceived positive experiences they had with persons with disabilities were reflected in the overall positive scores on the survey they gave in regards to mainstreaming. The authors also concluded that parents were more likely to express positive attitudes in regard to mainstreaming if they had prior experience with such programs.

In looking at more specific results, 75% of the parents in the study who reported past experience with integration were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience with mainstreaming (Green & Stoneman, 1989). According to the parents, the children who had experience with integrated programs were more likely to have friends with disabilities than children who did not have experience with mainstreamed programs. Parents expressed the most concern with mainstreaming children with severe mental retardation and behavior problems. Children who are blind, use crutches, are deaf, or in a wheelchair gave the parents less cause for concern. The authors reported that the education level of the parents that participated in the study ranged from less than a high school education to having graduate degrees. The parents with more education were more positive on questions related to the mainstreaming of children with physical disabilities than parents with less education. Benefits that were commonly reported by

parents were the increased sensitivity, acceptance of differences, and knowledge of disabilities. The parents listed the lack of teacher training in teaching children with special needs and reduced teacher attention for the typically developing children as drawbacks of inclusion.

Peck et al. conducted a study in 1992 to compare the perceptions of parents of typically developing children and regular education teachers. The authors reported the perceptions of the parents and the teachers separately so only the attitudes of the parents are given here. For this study, 125 randomly selected parents of typically developing children participating in integrated early childhood programs were surveyed.

Questionnaires were returned by 44% of the parents. The authors acknowledge that this is a low rate for survey research. Peck and colleagues suggested a possible reason for the low rate was that the programs were ending for the summer and there was no way to follow up with the parents to encourage the return of the survey. The authors were not specific in reporting the results of the survey, but stated that the parents were in strong agreement with the statement that children's overall experience with integration had been positive. They expressed high agreement with statements that children were more accepting of differences in other children and more aware of the needs of other children.

The parents also reported that they felt that children would experience less discomfort and have fewer stereotypes of people who look or behave differently than they do. The parents expressed less agreement with statements that indicated that a child received better instruction due to the presence of children with disabilities in the class. There was also limited support for statements such as, the children without disabilities had a better

self concept, were more accepting of their own limitations, and learned desirable behaviors because the children with special needs were integrated into their classroom. The parents disagreed with statements that their children learned undesirable behaviors from the children with disabilities and received less teacher attention because children with special needs were integrated into their class. The authors were not specific, but made the statement that parents reported greater disagreement with the statement that they preferred to have their child education only with children without disabilities. These results supported the hypothesis of the authors that parents of the typically developing children held positive attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Miller, et al. (1992) surveyed parents of preschool age children with special needs and parents of typically developing preschool age children. The parents were given surveys in which they rated their agreement or disagreement with statements about integration on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The purpose of the study was to explore the attitudes of parents regarding integration opportunities and program satisfaction. Of the 304 parents asked to participate in the survey 232 returned completed surveys. This is a 76% response rate. The researchers reported that parents of the children with disabilities held favorable attitudes toward integration as did parents of children without disabilities. There was no difference as to the satisfaction of the parents with children with special needs who had experience with integrated classroom settings and the parents with no previous experiences. A significant difference was found in the parents of typically developing children enrolled in integrated programs and the parents of children in

In looking at the parents attitudes regarding their satisfaction with integration, Miller et al. (1992) reported that parents of children with disabilities in mainstreamed programs felt that their children were involved with the typically developing children at school. They were more satisfied with their children's opportunities for involvement than the parents of children with special needs in segregated settings. The parents of the typically developing children in integrated programs were more satisfied with the opportunity for involvement with the children with disabilities than the parents of children not in integrated settings. These parents with children in a mainstreamed program more strongly agreed that the children with special needs in their child's class influenced their child's development than the parents of children in segregated settings Miller et al. (1992).

Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) conducted a study in which questionnaires were distributed to 30 parents of children with special needs, 60 parents of typically developing children participating in integrated programs and 51 parents of children in nonintegrated programs. The return rate for the surveys was 61% (23 surveys returned) for the parents of children with special needs, 49% (37 surveys returned) for the parents of typically developing children in nonintegrated programs, and 55% (43 surveys returned) for parents of typically developing children in integrated programs. The authors did not give specific results, but reported more positive attitudes toward integration by parents of children in integrated programs than parents of children in segregated programs.

Benefits of Integration

The parents of children without disabilities demonstrated perceptions that were highly similar to the views of the parents of children with special needs. These perceptions were positive, including benefits for children with disabilities as well as for children without disabilities (Guralnick, 1994). The parents of typically developing children felt that a benefit of mainstreaming is the sensitivity to and acceptance of differences that children develop due to being integrated with children with disabilities. Preschool children who were in mainstreamed programs were three times more likely to have a child with a disability for a friend than if they were not on an integrated program (Green & Stoneman, 1989). Parents of typically developing children, who were surveyed in Peck et al. (1992), felt that their children would be more aware and receptive of the needs of others, and be less likely to feel uncomfortable with persons with disabilities if they had attended an integrated preschool program. These types of outcomes were highly valued by parents in the study.

Specific benefits that both parents of special needs children and parents of typically developing children included promoting acceptance of children with disabilities in the community and preparing the children for being "out in the real world" by spending time with their peers in regular education settings (Guralnick, 1994). Parents felt that integrated opportunities provided children a wider variety of interesting and creative activities and that children without disabilities could benefit by learning about individual differences (Guralnick, 1994). Another benefit of integration that Bailey and Winton

(1987) reported was that children with special needs would be more accepted in the community.

Drawbacks to Integration

The perceived drawbacks of mainstreaming reported by parents of children without disabilities are similar to those given by parents of children with special needs. Green and Stoneman (1989) surveyed 204 parents of typically developing children in order to gain an understanding of their attitudes regarding mainstreaming. The authors did not report specifically, but stated that the parents demonstrated strong discomfort with the training of the regular education preschool teachers regarding mainstreaming and the needs of the children with disabilities. The authors felt that although the parents were generally supportive of integration, the concern with the perceived lack of training of regular pre-school teachers may have compromised the attitudes of the parents (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Another drawback given by parents reported by Canslor and Winton (1983) cited in Reichart et al. (1989) was that the children without disabilities would learn undesirable behaviors from the children with special needs in the class. Widerstrom (1982) surveyed research published by other authors and reported that generally parents expressed concern that children would be adversely affected by children with disabilities integrated into the class. Widerstrom (1982) did not report specifically, but concluded from a survey of parents of typically developing children, that the parents expressed worry that their children would not receive sufficient attention in order to have their needs met. This was contradicted in a study by Peck et al. (1992), which did not report specifically, but stated

that parents felt that the children had not acquired any undesirable behaviors or experienced decreased teacher attention.

Both groups of parents also held similar perceptions in regard to the drawbacks of mainstreaming. Miller et al. (1992) reported that the greatest drawback to mainstreaming was instructional in nature. Although Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) did not report specifically, they stated that parents of all children surveyed felt concern with the instructional approaches for both children with and without disabilities. Bailey and Winton (1987), who reported that parents felt instructional effectiveness was a drawback to integration, validated this. Also seen as drawbacks by parents were unqualified teachers and staff ratio (Reichert et al., 1989). The parents also expressed concern with the teacher being able to give sufficient time and attention to their child (Peck et al., 1989). All of the parents reported the possible rejection of children with special needs as one of the most difficult issues regarding mainstreaming (Guralnick, 1994).

FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTAL ATTITUDES

Several of the studies suggested possible factors that may affect attitudes of the parents who were surveyed. Green and Stoneman (1989) reported that the most important variable affecting the parental attitudes regarding mainstreaming was the quality of the experience with mainstreaming. Guralnick (1994) reported that parents of children without disabilities who were participating in integrated programs demonstrated more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming than parents of children enrolled in regular preschool programs. Following participation in an integrated program, the parents of

children without special needs had fewer concerns. Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) stated that the attitudes of parents were positively influenced by previous experiences with integration into educational settings or into the community. The age of the children may have played a part in the parental attitudes. The more favorable attitudes were expressed regarding the integration of younger children. There was limited evidence that persons with lower income levels may have had more positive attitudes regarding persons with mental retardation than adults with higher incomes. People with higher education levels may hold more positive attitudes in general toward all disability groups than people with less education (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Chapter III

SUMMARY

In 1986 Public Law 99-457 mandated free and appropriate education for all 3-year-old to 5-year-old children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. For many of these young children with special needs, the least restrictive environment is being integrated into the same preschool class as their typically developing peers (Bailey & Woolery, 1992). In order for integration to be successful, parents of the children with disabilities and parents of the typically developing must feel that both their needs and the needs of their children are being met (Turnbull & Winton, 1992). The parents of the children with special needs are very important members of a child's educational team. They help to determine the educational setting where their children receive services and what services were needed in order to create the least restrictive environment for their child (Ryndak et al., 1996). The terms mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion describe placement of a child with a disability in the least restrictive environment. The research that was reviewed for this paper gave varied definitions for these terms. Inclusion has been reported to have positive effects on children with and without disabilities. These include increased time spent with developmentally appropriate peer models, more elaborate play, and higher levels of communication (Espisito, 1987). Mainstreaming has

also been credited with increasing social interaction, creating friendships, and improving the self-concept of the children with special needs (Reichart et al., 1989).

The perceptions of parents of the children with disabilities are as important as the opinions of parents of typically developing children. Negative positions that parents can take in regard to mainstreaming can have considerable affects on the implementation of preschool mainstreaming. The parents can be as affective in limiting integration opportunities as physical or legislative barriers (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994).

The research into perceptions of the parents of children with disabilities has revealed positive attitudes on the part of the parents (Blanchard & Turnbull, 1992; Green & Stoneman, 1989; Guralnick, 1994; Meyers & Blanchard, 1987; Miller et al., 1992; Stoiber et al., 1998; & Wiederstrom, 1982). These parents saw several benefits of integration. Enhancing emotional and social development, preparing children to go out into the community, and relating to children without disabilities are benefits were listed in Guralnick (1994). Some drawbacks of inclusion reported by parents were the possible social rejection of their child (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994), lack of training for the teachers (Peck et al., 1989), large classrooms, and high teacher student ratios (McWilliams et al., 1995)

Research has also been done to ascertain the attitudes of parents of the typically developing children in integrated settings. These parents also supported mainstreaming (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994; Edgar & Davidson, 1979; Green & Stoneman, 1989; Guralnick, 1994; Peck et al., 1992; & Reichart et al., 1989). According to Guralnick (1994), the parents of typically developing children hold opinions that are highly similar

to those of parents of children with special needs. Benefits reported in Green and Stoneman (1989) include sensitivity and acceptance of differences in other children. The parents in Peck et al. (1992) felt that their children would be more aware and receptive to the needs of others and be less likely to feel uncomfortable around persons with disabilities. Similar results were reported in Reichart et al. (1989) and Diamond and LeFurgy, (1994).

The drawbacks that parents of children without disabilities reported are similar to those of the parents of children with special needs. The parents demonstrated strong concerns with the training of the teachers regarding mainstreaming and worried that their children would not receive sufficient attention from the teacher (Green & Stoneman, 1989). The parents of the typically developing children also expressed concern that their children would acquire undesirable behaviors from the children with special needs (Widerstrom, 1982).

Several studies into the perceptions of parents of children without special needs regarding integration have been completed in recent years. Green and Stoneman (1989) found that the parents expressed more positive attitudes when they had prior experiences with integration. In 1992, Peck et al. surveyed parents and found that they were in strong agreement and their experience with integration was positive. Miller et al. (1992) and Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) found similar results in that the parents that they surveyed expressed positive attitudes regarding integration.

Several factors affecting the parental attitudes were reported in the research. Green and Stoneman (1989) listed factors such as education levels, income levels, and the

age of the children as factors that may have an affect on parental perceptions of integration. The parents' prior experience with inclusion programs also was shown to have an affect on the perceptions of the parents. Diamond and LeFurgy (1994) agreed with Green and Stoneman in stating that past experiences with integration in educational settings in the community positively affect the parental perspectives of integration.

In reviewing the research that has been completed on preschool mainstreaming several limitations frequently appeared. First there does not appear to be a clear, consistent definition of mainstreaming. This could have affected the validity of the results of the surveys. The preschool programs integrated children with disabilities in different ways. Some children with special needs may have only been included with typically developing peers for a portion of their school day while others remained for the whole day. Mainstreaming could also have been varied in the ratio of children with special needs to children without special needs. The classrooms could have ranged in numbers from one or two children with special needs to a classroom consisting of a few typically developing children in with the children with special needs. Children could also have participated in inclusive classroom settings where all children were educated together regardless of their needs. The classroom activities were adjusted according to their individual needs so that each child was able to participate at their own level. It was difficult to compare the parental perceptions of inclusion when their experiences with it may have been very different. This was apparent when comparing results from different research studies. It was documented in several of the research articles that parent's

Chapter IV

POSITION

In reviewing the research that has been completed on preschool mainstreaming several limitations frequently appeared. First there does not appear to be a clear, consistent definition of mainstreaming. This could have affected the validity of the results of the surveys. The preschool programs integrated children with disabilities in different ways. Some children with special needs may have only been included with typically developing peers for a portion of their school day while others remained for the whole day. Mainstreaming could also have been varied in the ratio of children with special needs to children without special needs. The classrooms could have ranged in numbers from one or two children with special needs to a classroom consisting of a few typically developing children in with the children with special needs. Children could also have participated in inclusive classroom settings where all children were educated together regardless of their needs. The classroom activities were adjusted according to their individual needs so that each child was able to participate at their own level. It was difficult to compare the parental perceptions of inclusion when their experiences with it may have been very different. This was apparent when comparing results from different research studies. It was documented in several of the research articles that parent's

opinions were based on their experiences with inclusion. If the parents had based their opinions on their personal experiences with their own child's preschool inclusion situation, and the settings were different than those of the other parents that were surveyed, then their perceptions could have been different. It was difficult to draw accurate conclusions from the research. This caused the validity of the results of each individual study to come into question. The parents within the individual study often attended different typed of programs. As with the difficulty in comparing different studies, this added variable could affect the conclusions that are drawn from the surveys. Research documenting how mainstreaming is actually being done in classrooms needs to be compared with best practice to form universal definitions for mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion so when parental perspectives are surveyed this can be consistent.

Another limitation of the research surveyed for this paper was often a low return rate for the surveys. The authors reported return rates ranging from 44% to 73%. The majority of the studies cited in this paper had return rates under 50%. A return rate was unavailable in some studies due to the surveys having been sent to the preschool programs to distribute to the parents. The researchers then did not have an exact number of surveys that were actually given to parents to compare with the number that were returned. This low return rate did not give an accurate picture of how a random sample of parents regard inclusion. Peck et al. (1992) suggested that the parents that returned the surveys might have a common element that affects their perception. The authors gave the example that if parents had strong opinions in favor of inclusion they may have been

more likely to take the time to complete the questionnaire and return it than a parent who does not have strong opinions either way. Parents that have a strong opinion against inclusion may not return the survey due to feeling uncomfortable in expressing an opinion that goes against popular educational practices. It could have been difficult for a parent who does not support full inclusion to freely express their perceptions for fear of being perceived as not having been supportive of families of children with disabilities. This could also come into play for parents of children with disabilities. They may not feel comfortable expressing concerns with placing their child in a situation where they were placed at risk for being teased or not feeling that the teachers have enough training to effectively educate their child. Another common element that may have affected the perception of the parents of typically developing children is that by placing their children in preschool programs that are inclusive for children with a variety of special needs they demonstrated that they are accepting of the idea of integration. Their perceptions may change with their individual experiences with inclusion, but they may have been initially more receptive to the concept of inclusion. Parents of children who are not in inclusive programs may have chosen a program based on this factor. These parents may not have held supportive attitudes toward inclusion and have not been included in a sufficient number of studies to document their perceptions. Another parental factor that could have affected the perceptions was the income level. Green and Stoneman (1989) concluded that parents with higher income levels had more positive perceptions regarding inclusion and the acceptance of children with special needs in general. The parents of the typically developing children who are paying tuition for their children to attend preschool may then

hold more positive perceptions of inclusion than a parent who has a lower income. The lower income may have affected the parent's decision not to send their child to preschool. This may affect the outcomes of the study since the majority of the parents surveyed held positive perceptions of mainstreaming.

The differing abilities of the children with special needs may have come into play when interpreting the results of the surveys. It was documented in several of the studies that the parents of the typically developing children were less supportive of mainstreaming children with behavior problems. The parents were more supportive of the children with developmental delays, physical disabilities, hearing impairments, and vision impairments being integrated into the preschool classes. This aspect of inclusion may have altered the perceptions of the parents of the children with disabilities as well. A parent of a child with a mild to moderate developmental delay or a hearing impairment may have been more receptive to having their child in an integrated preschool class than a parent of a child with more severe needs. The child with more severe needs most likely needs more teacher attention, which they may not receive in an integrated class. The children with severe physical disabilities may also have been perceived to have been too vulnerable for injury to have been placed in a classroom with larger numbers of children and lower teacher ratios. Another limitation that may have affected the parents' perception of inclusion may have been whether or not they were given a choice as to their child's placement. In one study by McWilliam et al. (1995), only 45% of parents reported that they were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted their children in an integrated or segregated classroom. It is a possibility that the parents would have seen

that by not having been given a choice as to where their child would have been placed, that this was the environment where their child would have been most effectively educated. While this could have been true, in a small district where integration options are limited a parent may not have been offered the option of integration. The parent may assume they were not offered the mainstreamed classroom as an option because it is a less desirable choice than a nonintegrated setting for their child. They may then have been less supportive than a parent who was presented with different mainstream opportunities and made the choice on what they felt was best for their child.

There were limitations in the designs of the studies as well. The low return rates and the lack of data in order to calculate an exact return rate as mentioned earlier may have affected the reliability of the conclusions that were made based upon the survey results. The studies were often based upon a small number of respondents. Blanchard and Turnbull (1982) based their conclusions on a sample of 18 parents. Meyers and Blanchard (1987) had 99 parents return their surveys and Peck et al. (1992) distributed surveys to 281 parents and had a return rate of 44% (125 surveys returned). The broad generalizations that were made based upon these surveys may not have been an accurate representation of perceptions of parents regarding integration in our society as a whole. An example of this was found in Blanchard and Turnbull (1982) who concluded that, based upon their research, the majority of parents of children with special needs were supportive of mainstreaming. Their research sample consisted of 18 parents. This is too small of a sample on which to base such a strong statement.

Along with the studies basing their results on extremely small samples of parents, the results were reported in nonspecific manners. None of the articles provided percentages of how many parents actually responded to each statement on the surveys. The authors presented the results nonspecifically. An example of this was seen in Blanchard and Turnbull (1982) who reported their results in statements such as, most parents agreed with the statements regarding the value of preschool mainstreaming and the parents showed a high degree of similarity in their perceptions regarding the social benefits of mainstreaming. It was difficult to accurately compare the results of this research to another study, where the results were reported by statements such as the parents with higher levels of education were more positive in their perceptions of mainstreaming than the parents with less education as found in Green and Stoneman (1989).

Research has documented that one aspect of successful inclusion program has been the perspectives of the parents. The parents must feel that the needs of their children are met in order to support the program (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994). McWilliam et al. (1995) reported that one measure of the effectiveness of an early intervention program is the extent to which the consumers (families) are satisfied. It is for this reason and for the fact that parents have a substantial affect on their child's development that their attitudes on inclusion need to be studied. The teachers as well as the school administrators must examine the results of these and similar studied to ensure the effectiveness of children's education.

The teachers must find ways to address the concerns that parents have. For example, parents were concerned that their child may not receive sufficient attention in the classroom, or that their child will be teased. Classroom teachers could encourage parents to become involved as much as they can to help alleviate these fears. Other concerns that parents had such as the lack of teacher training and the teachers attitudes toward inclusion could also be addressed by increasing parent involvement and maintaining open lines of communication with the parents. The parents need to be confident in the training that the teachers receive. This could be done by the teachers continuing their education so that they were confident in their own ability to incorporate all children into the classroom activities regardless of their abilities. The teachers then need to convey to parents the training that they do have and resources that they may use when new situations arise.

It is important that definitions for mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion are formed in order for parents and teachers to have a similar understanding of the options for educating children with disabilities and typically developing children together. Special education and regular education teachers are in direct contact with the parents of the children and are in a position to emphasize the benefits of inclusion and address the areas that parents gave as drawbacks. The research states that in order for mainstreaming to be successful parents need to be supportive. Teachers need to find ways to gain their support.

The past experiences parents hold in regard to mainstreaming affects their perceptions. If the parents have not have any experience with integration then the

teachers need to ensure that the parents feel this experience is a positive one for their child. Addressing the parents concerns and increasing their understanding of what inclusion is and how it can work can do this. Hopefully the teacher can create an environment to encourage parental support. Some parents may come in to an integrated setting already holding negative opinions and the teachers need to be sensitive to these attitudes and help the parents feel confident in their child's experience with integration. The parents support is crucial to the success of integration and the teachers need to be aware of their impact on their classrooms.

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