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English 104
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Research proposal: Special Education
Group VS One-On-One Setting

Introduction:

Over the semester I have collected information covering the topic of special education in America and Finland. More specifically I have been collecting information about the special education of children with mild interventions; such as dyslexia and ADHD. I looked into qualifications and IEP's and then the special education itself represented in a group and individualized setting.

Which learning environment is better for special education—a group setting or individualized? Special Education is “specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Watson). Special education provides additional services such as, support, programs, specialized placements or environments to ensure that all students' needs are accommodated for. Support though will vary based upon the needs and educational jurisdictions. Every country, state or educational jurisdiction will have their own specific policies, rules, regulations and legislation that makes up what special education is. Students though must qualify for special education given that goes beyond what is normally offered or received in the regular school/classroom setting.

As a future educator and future parent, I want to make sure that my future students are receiving the help that they need, in the least restricted environment. Every child is different and has different needs to meet. It is important to learn how to connect and how to teach to a child with a disability especially for a learning disability like

dyslexia or ADHD. However, for me the significance of this is because I was in special education classes; I have both ADHD and dyslexia: I have had those one on one class times, I had IEP's made, I had testing done, and I had specific accommodations to help me be the best student that I could be. I plan to talk about the history, the accommodations, and requirements of special education.

Literature Review and Field Research

Education will always be a topic on every persons mind—getting an education is one of, if not the most important things a human has to do. In the journal article *Integrating Tutor Training into Faculty Mentorship Programming to Serve Students with Disabilities* written by David F. Adams and Shawna G. Hayes from Ball State University. Participants in the present study were undergraduate and graduate students working as peer tutors in a Learning Center on the campus of a midwestern university. The goal of the program is to enhance the learning experience for students with disabilities by assigning faculty mentors to each student participating in the program. The faculty mentors then meet with students on a regular basis and assist students in academic tutoring sessions. This individualized tutoring session was found to be very successful. It was then recommend that future programs examine current attitudes towards students with disabilities in general education classroom settings, in hopes the student will become more independent.

This is just a small portion of information I collected for the literature review; however, it is what connects my interviews to this research study.

For my first aspect of the field research I chose to do an observation of Northside Middle School in Muncie, Indiana, where I am placed in for my Special Education 266

class every Tuesday and Thursday. My placement teacher is Mrs. Allison Jackson, who teaches the special education program for seventh- and eighth-graders—students with mild intervention learning disabilities, health problems and mild behavioral problems. At Northside, the resource room is treated as a structured and guided study hall. Mrs. Jackson is responsible for making sure the students are on track and are completing their work in a timely manner. Since this is a study hall, the students are able to work on any subject they need or want to work on. One of the problems I see with this is that not every child gets the proper amount of work done. Since no one is standing beside them, making sure they understand or are completing their work, it takes some students two days to finish an assignment. However, when the students are working with one of the adults in a one-on-one setting, asking questions and receiving individual help, the students are easily able to finish multiple assignments in one 50-minute help period.

My second activity was an interview with Mrs. Jackson, which I also used for my SPCE 266 class. Mrs. Jackson is the special education teacher for 7th and 8th grade. She sets high expectations and is always straightforward with her students. Many of her students need a strict, even harsh, style because they are not used to being held accountable, she said. She never takes work that is anything less than their best. She is going to tell them the truth no matter what. She told me that even though her students do not like being in a resource class, it helps them in school. A student who averages F's can bring his or her grades up to C's with help in the resource room.

Mrs. Jackson says that the best form of support is through co-teaching in a classroom. This is a general-education classroom with a special-education co-teacher. She says that every child benefits, whether they need extra help in the classroom or not,

although she emphasizes that co-teaching works best if the two teachers match well with one another. It is more difficult when two teachers have very different styles of teaching and discipline. In a situation like that, you just have to step back and let the other teacher do things her way as you do things your way, she said.

Her goal, she said, is to find the style that helps the student complete better work. What incentives will work for a particular child? Once her students have done their work, she has no problem with rewarding them. And the reverse is true, too: If they do not do their work, then they lose privileges. If that does not seem to affect them, she will keep them after class. She uses this strategy to encourage students to push themselves further whether they want to do the work or not.

My second interview was with Mr. Cameron Huffman, who is the Environmental and Earth Space Science teacher at Bishop Chatard High School. In this interview I learned many life lessons, a huge one being the ability to adapt—to a class, the individuals in that class, and their learning styles and ability level.

Every year for the professional development side as a teacher (or in any career) you take a look at what you did and are doing, and try to make it better. Mr. Huffman said: “You can’t show up in your ivory tower, expecting each of your students to preform at grade level. You may have students who perform below grade level, and you can’t fail those students by skipping over them to focus on those who are on track. You have to balance your time with students, and realize that every day you will not reach every student. As a teacher, you have to adjust to make the student who performs below grade level feel as if they are improving—and those students who perform at grade level feel as

if they are improving and pushing themselves. If a student sees that his teacher does not care, he will shut down, Mr. Huffman said.

He believes that teachers need to be teachers for the right reasons. For example, last year, one of his 9th-grade science students was diagnosed with a cognitive learning disability and could not read past a 2nd- or 3rd-grade reading level. He says that reaching out to that particular student was difficult, since he was backtracking six years. But Mr. Huffman, along with academic resource teachers Mrs. Brogan and Mrs. Kowal, worked with this student on multi-sensory skills, hands-on activities and color-coding. They soon understood that if you gave this student a science article to read, he was able to interpret the words, but he could not think critically like the other students. He was still able to conceptualize things and had the ability get his ideas across. He was still learning and proficient, but needed an adjustment to fit his needs. This student was given the same assessments and was expected to perform at the same level as other students. He was seated in the front row of the class and was willing to put forth effort. Soon he showed improvement, especially with being able to make a logical and coherent sentence.

However, you will always have students who do not want to learn—and you cannot force a student to *want* to learn. But as a teacher you can put all tools in place. Mr. Huffman recently gave a test to his students—they reviewed in class for 2½ periods, and then he made an objective sheet for them to look at and say, ‘Yes I am able to do that.’ The student who doesn’t care won’t download or look at that sheet, he says. Then you have to find a way to show them how it relates to what they are interested in—make it relevant to them. —This year, students wrote a resume for environmental science, and he

was able to “spin” things to apply to a student interest and then make them see that the skills are transferable, he says.

And in addition to the abilities of the students, there is also the matter of the ability of the teacher, Mr. Huffman said.

If you are a teacher and a master in a subject, you might get into the classroom and find that you are way above the students’ level of understanding. It is your job to break it down, he said. “If you cannot explain something simply, then you do not understand it well enough,” Mr. Huffman said.

He is a fan of small-group projects, because, he said, sometimes the best teacher is another student. In an ideal world, he said, every group project could be based on both a team grade and also an individual grade. It all depends, he said, on the lesson, what you want students to get from it, and what you want them to do. In this classroom, teams for group work are never larger than three students, and each student is assigned a different responsibility or role. Students might be the writer, the timekeeper, the reader, or the speaker. This way, he said, group work will be evenly distributed. Each student is responsible for his or her own work but is still performing work that is beneficial to the group. In groups, students are able to discuss and bounce ideas off of one another. The theory is that if they don’t understand from his point, maybe another student can use the vernacular to get a point across that makes sense to a peer. The other alternative is sometimes that an individual student has work that doesn’t make sense to him, and is embarrassed to ask a teacher for help.

Another important point from Mr. Huffman: “As a, not every student will like you, want to work with you, or care about the class you teach. You don’t have to get

them to like you. That isn't your job. Your job to make them feel a connection to you so they are comfortable asking you questions about the coursework."

Sometimes, Mr. Huffman said, a student will even feel safe confiding in you. Maybe a student's parents are going through a divorce and they are in your class in tears every day; or maybe a student who was sexually abused confides in you. This can't happen until a teacher is able to form appropriate but safe relationships with his or her students. Some situations are beyond most teachers' ability to handle. In those cases, he said, you help the student feel safe, and then make the situation known to the right person or people who can help the student and his or her family. This is a whole side to education that isn't about teaching—it is about being a trusted resource for your students, Mr. Huffman said.

My third interview was with Mrs. Beth Brogan, who is the academic resource teacher at Bishop Chatard High School. She has been working in special education since 1990 and has had many students—including me. She wants every student to work hard and achieve their potential no matter their age. She worked with me from kindergarten through my senior year of high school.

Mrs. Brogan previously worked at St. Matthew School in Indianapolis, helping students in grades K-8th. When asked about those middle schoolers who are struggling, and how to help them, she answered that sometimes results aren't seen right away. Sometimes they are not seen until the junior or senior year of high school. Educators need to be honest with the students and parents that the only way that student can come to Bishop Chatard (which is a private college-prep high school) is if they are on a behavior or academic contract—agreeing to tutoring and specialized classes. They have to know

coming in that they will have to work harder than they would at a public school. Those children do have a choice: If they choose not to receive help they are on their own—they willingly came in and said they don't want any help. However, they still will be watched because they have to keep to the contract.

When asked about IMAST, which is a revised ISTEP test for some students who have mild interventions, Mrs. Brogan said she believes that after 4th grade, students really should not take IMAST. She said that every student should be writing and being tested against the same standards as other students. This can also be done through the DIBLES or WEA testing. By 7th and 8th grade, she said, they should not take IMAST but ISTEP, and teachers should be prepping all of their students in timed writing and using a similar rubric that ISTEP uses. The more comfortable they feel with it, the better they will perform. They may not like it, she said, but they can still do it. In her opinion it is a disservice to those who are on the borderline to hold them to a lower standard in middle school.

Each student is different, Mrs. Brogan said. To get to know her students, she usually asks for a one-on-one meeting either before school, after school, or during SRT (student resource time, or homeroom). She says even with this meeting it still takes time and help for students to see the value of getting their work done. Those who take advantage of this help have the built-in incentive of getting to play sports and earn a high school diploma. She says it is difficult to determine whether those students who don't want to learn ever come around later. "Students with learning disabilities are still in school to go to college and get a diploma," she said. "So, if anything, you have to encourage and engage those students—they might be angry and frustrated that the work

is taking twice as long as it does for other students. However, the goal is still the same—the student is going to go to college.” Occasionally she hears from students who have been told by parents or other teachers that they won’t be able to go to college, or won’t get their dream job. In those cases, she said, she tells the students to “go out and disprove them—find some skill or knowledge and capitalize on that.”

Even with all the right skills, every student learns differently—whether that is in a classroom or a one-on-one setting. Some students prefer to work in a group because it involves peer collaboration. Other students prefer to be left alone to get something finished, even if they know they could accomplish it in a group. A mixture of group studying and individual studying is what is best, Mrs. Brogan said. This is because students understand and can learn from other students—but they still have to study by themselves because they have to take the test by themselves.

The teacher with a student, who is struggling and can’t seem to understand the material at all, needs help taking a step back and figuring out the root of the problem. Is it motivation, or is it the student not knowing or wanting to know how to do something. Whatever it is, they need to go back and figure out what they don’t know and find a way to fix it. One aspect of this is that if the students don’t understand the teacher, it will be easier for them to get one-on-one help; they still have to be in the teacher’s class and be respectful. But the student can still recognize that a huge large lecture is not how they learn, getting a tutor is how they fix the situation.

A teacher who has a connection with his or her students has an easier time reaching out to them, Mrs. Brogan said. “Students cannot be forced to learn. Teachers

who are too strict don't get the students to work. The most successful way is to find out what pushes the student to do their best," she said.

This is just the start of my planning. I plan to get a parent perspective as well as a student's perspective. However, from the research I have done so far the conclusion is leaning toward more of an individualized plan rather than the group method. I don't know yet if one is better than the other it may rely on what is best for each child.

International view

Intensified support is provided when general support is not sufficient. Is planned based on the individual called an IEP. An IEP is an individual educational plan. The plan must indicate provision of education and other support in accordance with the decision on special support issued for the student. The purpose of an individual educational plan is to provide persistent support for the individual learning and growth process. During a period of intensified support, each student's learning and school attendance must be monitored and assessed regularly. In the event that a student's situation changes, the learning plan will be revised to match his or her need for support.

Special support is also provided for students who cannot adequately achieve their growth, development or learning objectives through other support measures. Special support may be provided as part of either general or extended compulsory education. Special support consists of special-needs education based on a decision on special support and of other forms of support available in basic education. The whole range of support measures available in basic education can be used.

Support measures may include factors relating to teaching and counseling staff, pupil welfare services, assistants and other necessary services, teaching methods and working approaches, learning methods, as well as materials and equipment

Methodology:

Throughout the semester I used reliable databases such as the Ball State's library website. I also used the best articles that I was able to find that related to my topic. I conducted 3 sets of interviews: interviewed two special education teachers Mrs. Beth Brogan who works at Bishop Chatard High School as well as Mrs. Allison Jackson who works at Northside Middle School here in Muncie, my third interview was with Mr. Cameron Huffman who works at Bishop Chatard High School as a Earth Space and Environmental Science teacher.

RESULTS

Most of the Research focused on the type of special education offered in schools as a whole. I found many differences between the United States and Finland. For example in Finland they work on early detection as opposed to the U.S. which works when the problem has already risen and been diagnosed. Finland actually considers emotional, academic, health and medical problems are all part of what can put a child in special education. Something interesting that Finland does and the U.S. doesn't is that the classroom teacher will call the special education teacher before the first intervention to come into the classroom, and observe the student. In Finland the students start out in a group setting, however if that is not working they will immediately be put in a one-on-one setting. Unlike the special education programs in the U.S., where it all depends on school funding. This is why if you have a student who requires special education you

must look into the special education program in the school, to find which area is the best for your child. The results I have found are that individual setting is what is best for the children. It will give them the opportunity to work at their own pace, ask questions, receive help specific to them, and help them become more independent on their work.

CONCLUSION

Special Education is something that is continuously changing and being modified, to help reach out to every child who needs extra help. From what my results have helped me gather I have come to the conclusion having individualized approach is more appropriate. Due to the fact that your education is individual, and that having the one-on-one setting, is the best environment making sure the student is receiving the most help they can. This is because every student learns differently. It is really important though that those children, who need and qualify for special education, receive those accommodations, because it really does make a difference in understanding as well as performance level.

LIMITATIONS

Even though I was able to find a lot of information about Special Education in the US. I was unable to get much information about Special Education in Finland. Another challenging aspect of this paper was finding article based on a specific topic of special education. Most of the journal articles were a generalization of what special education is in every country. It was hard to judge which setting was the best because it depends on the child. Although I do believe that the interviews were the most beneficial, in helping to fill in the gaps

Citations

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Cameron Huffman Interview at Bishop Chatard High School. On March 14,2014

Beth Brogan Interview at Bishop Chatard High School. On March 14,2014

Allison Jackson Interview at Northside Middle School. On February 24, 2014

Observation of a 7th and 8th Grade Special Education (resource room) at Northside

Middle School. Every Tuesday and Thursday of Spring semester 2014