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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings from three studies on attrition of special education teachers, with particular focus on teachers' responses concerning their own preservice preparation in both general and special education and evaluations of their levels of preparation to perform various components of their jobs. Major findings were: (1) the four skill areas in which teachers rated themselves the least well-prepared included responding to linguistic diversity, interfacing with the core curriculum, dealing with severe behavior disorders, and collaborating/consulting with general education teachers; (2) teachers felt ill-prepared to work with general education teachers, manage disruptive behaviors, and work effectively with consultants; (3) the skill areas in which teachers felt the least well-prepared are those typically associated with operating effective inclusion/mainstreaming programs; (4) recent graduates reported a higher level of agreement between their philosophy of special education and that of their districts; and (5) teachers who had left special education or were considering doing so tended to feel at odds with district policies and directions toward mainstreaming/full inclusion. Comparison by California respondents of their preservice preparation for the required general education credential with that of their special education preparation revealed that teachers rated the quality of their special education training higher in all areas than their general education training. Special education teachers reported feeling isolated from, and unappreciated by, their general education colleagues. The degree of teacher satisfaction with principals was found to be highly correlated with decisions to remain in special education. (DB)

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WORKING PAPER # 7

Personnel Preparation: Relationship to Job Satisfaction

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEVELS OF PREPARATION: RELATIONSHIP TO JOB SATISFACTION

This paper reports on findings from the three studies that have implications for the preservice and inservice personnel preparation of special education teachers, for general education teachers relative to their evolving roles in providing instruction to special education students, and to site principals and other administrators who so strongly influence the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities. The SDSU/AIR project specifically probed respondent perceptions of their own preservice preparation in both general and special education. Both the SDSU/AIR and ERI projects asked specific questions relative to respondent ratings of their current levels of preparation to perform various components of their jobs. All three projects probed respondent perceptions of administrator support, acceptance by and or relationships with general education teachers, other special educators, parents, and teachers.

Preparation of Special Education Teachers

In the SDSU/AIR study, the current teachers were given several opportunities to rate their level of preparation for the special education teaching positions that they currently held. Charts and tables are attached that reflect teacher ratings relative to their preparation across specific job components and credential programs. These data are summarized below:

- The four skill areas in which the teachers rated themselves the least well-prepared at the current time included (beginning with the area receiving the lowest preparation rating): responding to linguistic diversity, interfacing with the core curriculum, dealing with severe behavior disorders, and collaborating with/consulting with general education teachers.
- Relative to current levels of preparation, current and former special education teachers felt ill-prepared to work with general education

teachers, manage disruptive behaviors, and work effectively with consultants.

- Teachers who were fully credentialed rated their professional skills more highly than did teachers who were not yet fully credentialed.
- Generally, teachers who had left or were strongly considering leaving special education teaching tended to agree with the move toward increased consultation roles for special educators, but felt unprepared to perform effectively as consultants. ⁴ They tended to both disagree with, and rate themselves as poorly prepared to implement, district policies toward greater mainstreaming/inclusion of students with severe handicaps, sensory impairments, and serious emotional disturbances. Retirees were particularly unaccepting of policies and practices relating to the mainstreaming/inclusion of these students.
- Overall, the skill areas in which special education teachers tend to feel the least well-prepared are those typically associated with operating effective inclusion/mainstreaming programs.
- Overall, the skills about which special education teachers reported feeling the most confident are those that are closely aligned to the operation of traditional special education programs (providing effective instruction, organizing classroom environments, and implementing special education curriculum), not those expected of educators serving in consultant or co-teaching roles.
- The special education teachers rated the quality of their preservice preparation as quite low relative to those skills that support working with special education students in the mainstream.
- The focus of pre-service special education preparation appears to be shifting. Teachers who completed their pre-service preparation 1 - 5 years prior to the study gave higher ratings to the preparation they received in several key areas than did teachers who completed their pre-service

preparation programs 10 or more years prior to the study. Among the pre-service preparation areas rated more highly by newly minted special education teachers as opposed to more experienced teachers were working with general education teachers; serving as, and working with. consultants; and working with parents.

- The California special education teachers, for whom general education credentials were pre-requisites to special education credential, rated the quality of their special education preparation higher for all skills identified. The skills for which there were the highest discrepancies, and which were rated lowest for their general education preparation, are skills associated with more inclusive education practices (developing alternative instruction, working with special education teachers, working effectively with consultants, and assessing students to plan instruction).
- The more recently prepared special education teachers (1 - 5 years of experience) reported a higher level of agreement between their philosophy of special education and that of their districts. They rated mainstreaming as more important than did the teachers prepared 10 or more years ago. They also reported feeling more confident of their skills in areas associated with more inclusive education. They rated their pre-service preparation in the areas of serving as consultants, working with consultants, and working with parents more highly than did their colleagues whose pre-service preparation was completed 10 or more years ago.
- Teachers with 10 or more years of experience rated themselves as having grown more in their professional skills than did their less experienced colleagues. The only area in which the experienced teachers rated themselves lower than the newly minted teachers was in the area of working with general education teachers.
- Special education teachers who had either left special education teaching, or were considering doing so, tended to feel at odds with district policies and directions toward mainstreaming/full inclusion.

- Teachers who had left special education teaching, or who were strongly considering doing so, reported that their special education positions provided them with little opportunity to grow professionally, learn new skills, and respond to interesting challenges. Leavers and probable leavers rated these items significantly lower ($p < .05$) than did current teachers with intentions to remain as special education teachers.

General Education Teacher Preparation Variables

In California, the general education or "basic" credential is a prerequisite to the special education credential. Hence, the respondents in the California study were able to compare their general education and special education preservice preparation. Findings were as follow:

- The dually-credentialed teachers rated the quality of their special education training higher in all areas than their training in general education, regardless of their current status with the district.
- The four areas in which the teachers felt least well-prepared when completing their general education training are all areas seem critical for successful inclusive education: (1) Developing alternative instruction; (2) working with special education teachers; (3) working with consultants; and (4) assessing students to plan instruction.
- The three areas in which they felt their general education preparation had best prepared them were (1) providing appropriate instruction; (2) planning appropriate instruction, and (3) working with other general education teachers.
- Special educators' perceptions of the **attitudes** and **skills** of their general education colleagues appear to influence the decisions of special educators regarding their continuation as teachers in special education.
- Special education teachers frequently feel that much of the mainstream curriculum is appropriate for their special education students.

- The special education teachers also tended to feel that there was conflict between the way they and general education teachers believe lessons should be taught in mainstream classes. This was particularly true for leavers and for special education teachers with more than 10 years of experience.
- Special education teachers reported feeling isolated from, and unappreciated by, their general education colleagues.

Variables Relating to Administrator Training and Preparation

While no attempt was made in any of the studies to address the preparation of administrators directly, a number of findings suggest areas of dissatisfaction on the part of special education teachers relative to interactions with and support from their site administrators and central office special education administrators. Such variables can play an important part in influencing the operation of special education programs and in the modification of the attitudes and skills of principals and general education teachers. Among these findings are the following:

- The degree of special education teachers' satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with their site principals is highly correlated with their decisions to remain in or leave special education teaching.
- Special education teachers tend to give low ratings to the support provided by district-level personnel to special education. They note a lack of support relative to special education placement decisions, IEP development and monitoring, dealing with behavior problems, selecting and implementing curriculum, and interacting with parents.
- Special education teachers who were dissatisfied with special education teaching reported low levels of agreement between their site administrators and themselves relative to (1) how special education students should be taught, and (2) main-streaming practices.

- Special education teachers' perception of their principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming/ inclusion play an important role in the overall job satisfaction of special education teachers.
- Dissatisfied special education teachers felt they received little appreciation or respect from their site administrators. Nearly one-fifth of all former special education teachers in the SDSU/AIR study reported dissatisfaction with the level of respect received from site administrators.
- Teachers who were dissatisfied with their special education teaching roles did not feel their district provided either the quality or amount of support needed to work effectively with their students. They did not feel supported by district administrators in decisions relating to students or parents, and they did not feel they received appropriate recognition from district administrators for their efforts. Over one-fourth of all former special education teachers in the SDSU/AIR study reported dissatisfaction with the level of respect received from central office special education administrators.
- Not surprisingly, special education teachers tended to rate the quality of district-level special education staff as "low" and to question the job design of these staff.

Recommendations

- States need to examine the effect of their credentialing structures on the quality and supply of special education teachers. Structures that are cumbersome may lead to higher numbers of non-credentialed teachers in special education programs, a situation which has serious implications for the quality of education available to students with disabilities.
- Both in-service and pre-service special education teacher preparation programs need to incorporate skills required for more inclusive educational delivery if this emerging model is to be a qualitative option for students with disabilities.

- Personnel preparation efforts in general education, special education, and school administration must identify and address the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This should be done for both pre-service and in-service efforts.
- State credentialing requirements in general education and school administration should develop standards relating to the acquisition of the requisite knowledge and skills for providing an array of qualitative educational opportunities, including inclusive education, for special education students. These should be reflected in both the pre-service and continuing professional development requirements for general education and school administration credentials.
- Educational agencies should take care to provide the inservice preparation needed by teachers as school sites move from one type of service delivery system into another. This preparation should address the philosophy/rationale of the evolving model as well as the skills required to implement it.
- Administrator preparation programs at both the preservice and inservice levels should incorporate standards and competencies that address (1) the provision of various types of support and recognition to teachers, and (2) the full inclusion of special education programs at the individual school site level.