RUNNING HEAD: Student Teacher Perspectives on Inclusive Education

Student Teacher Perspectives on Inclusive Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discover Florida International University student teachers'
perceptions and experiences about inclusive education during their student teaching
internship. A total of 271 student teachers (all those enrolled in Spring 06 and Fall 06
student teaching) participated. A mixed methods design was utilized to analyze the
impact of participation in a mandatory one-day hands-on seminar related to inclusive
education instructional strategies. At the end of their student teaching semester, interns
completed a specially designed survey to assess perceptions about their student teaching
experience with respect to inclusive education. Differences related to gender, major,
linguistic and ethnic diversity, prior experiences with inclusive education, awareness of
children with disabilities in their student teaching classrooms, student teacher classroom
settings, inclusion strategies implemented by student teachers, attitudes and beliefs about
inclusion were identified through Chi Square analyses. Qualitative interviews validated
and instantiated the survey results. Implications for action in teacher preparation and
further research are discussed.

How can we move from vision to action so that teacher education candidates are more likely to be prepared to meet the diversity they face in today's classrooms? Teacher education preservice candidates at Florida International University (FIU) have reported that they are under-prepared to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (e.g., Personal Communication, J. Cohen, spring & fall 2005 student teacher evaluations). The majority complete their student teaching experience in the local Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS), one of the most diverse urban areas in the nation. In addition to the increased likelihood that student teachers will be required to teach students with disabilities, there are an increased number of students who speak languages other than English, an increased number of students who are at-risk for school failure, and an increased number of students from culturally and ethnically diverse heritages.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the current study was the opportunity to make a difference in the school experiences of the culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities in the student teachers' classrooms. The majority of the schools in the county have participated in the *All Students All Schools (ASAS)* Program (Manten, 2003), a 5-year plan for training activities that targeted administrators, families, general and special educators, and paraprofessionals. Over the past 3 years, the district has reported more and more students with disabilities who are being included in their general education classrooms for 80% or more of the day (Manten, 2003; Gordillo & Orlando, 2005): nearly doubling, from 23% in October 2002 to 45% in May 2006. Thus, student teachers placed at schools where the ASAS program has been implemented are likely to be exposed to role models who are practicing inclusive education.

The larger study is devoted to identifying the skills, knowledge and dispositions that student teachers need to practice inclusive education. However, in this paper, the following research questions are explored: a) Are there significant differences in ratings on survey items related to inclusive education for student teachers in elementary education, special education, early childhood education, and secondary education? And b) What successes and challenges do student teachers encounter when student teaching in inclusive classrooms?

Eight empirical studies published between 1999-2006 emerged as a result of a search of the ERIC system using the following descriptors: student teachers, teacher preparation, and inclusive education. Six studies focused on elementary preservice education; one study reported secondary education (Richards, Hunley, Weaver & Landers, 2003) and one focused on middle school education (Sprague & Pennell, 2000). The importance of changing attitudes was studied by Hutchinson and Martin (1999) and Henning and Mitchell (2002). Changes in student teacher actions related to successful inclusive education were studied by four researchers (Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Oyler, 2006; Sprague & Pennell, 2000; Richards et al., 2003; and Agran & Alper, 2000). Jordan and Stanovich (2004) developed a model that predicted differences in classroom practices within the following constructs: teacher beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for students with disabilities, teacher efficacy, and the school norms about inclusion and inclusive practices). In one of the few studies in which student teachers participated as co-equal researchers, Oyler (2006) described a model for supervision of student teachers in inclusive classrooms. In summary, the research indicates that preservice teachers can

be influenced to view inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom settings as part of their responsibilities.

Inclusive Education Defined

Stainback and Stainback (1990) are two renowned experts in the field of special education who defined inclusive education this way: "…everyone belongs and is accepted and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met" (p. 3). However, as noted by Villa and Thousand (2005), "inclusion is still an elusive term. Part of the confusion arises from the varying assumptions that people associate with inclusive education—for example, that it is a 'program' or that it is a research-devised strategy. The underlying assumption, however, is that inclusion is a way of life, a way of living together, based on a belief that each individual is valued and does belong" (p. 3).

In this study, inclusive education is defined in terms of the practices and procedures in effect in Miami-Dade Public Schools with respect to including students with disabilities, students learning English as a second language, and students with gifts and talents to the maximum extent possible within their general education classrooms with supports from related service personnel (http://inclusion.dadeschools.net/).

Method

The combined mixed-method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), selected for its potential in yielding a deeper understanding of the student teacher experiences in inclusive settings, was conducted in two phases: the survey phase followed by the interview phase. Descriptive statistics were analyzed in terms of frequency distributions

and chi square analyses. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed

according to the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Setting

Florida International University (FIU), a public research-extensive institution, is

the top producer of Hispanic graduates in the US and the third largest producer of

minority graduates (52% Hispanic, 12% African-American, and 4% Asian). Since its

inception in 1972, FIU's College of Education has graduated more than 24,000 students

and was the first to develop a program in multicultural and multilingual education.

Approximately 50% of all teachers in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools hold a

degree from FIU (Blanton, COE Annual Report, 2004). At FIU, those admitted into the

COE teacher education programs and graduated as certified teachers include a substantial

proportion of Hispanics and increasing proportion of African Americans.

The demographic profile of FIU teacher graduates matches the student

demographic distributions of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools: 10% White Non-

Hispanic, 58% Hispanic, 29% Black-Non-Hispanic, and 2% Asian/Indian/Multiracial. As

an indicator of the relatively low socio-economic status of the schools, 61.7% of all

students in the district and 71.1% of the elementary-aged students receive free/reduced

price lunch. Over the past 3 years, the district has reported that more and more students

with disabilities are included in their general education classrooms for 80% or more of

the day (Manten, 2003). Specifically, Gordillo and Orlando (2005) reported the impact of

the district's systematic program for responsible inclusion by describing the changes

since October 2002 when 23% of the students with disabilities were educated in general

education classrooms 80% or more of the day, increasing to 27% in 2003, 34% in 2004, 43% in 2005, and 45% in 2006.

Sources of Data

Data collected for this study included the following sources: survey responses, interviews, and field notes about what the interviewers noticed while in the field (Bogden & Biklen, 1998).

Survey, Interview, and Lesson Plan Evaluation Protocols

The surveys were completed anonymously during a regularly scheduled meeting of student teachers in the spring of 2006 and, during fall 2006, as part of the paperwork submitted at the end of the semester. The survey was comprised of items that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The interview protocol was open-ended to capture both expected and unexpected perspectives and information.

Participants who completed the survey were invited to volunteer to be interviewed. Interviewees were selected to account for a) major (early childhood, elementary, special education, secondary); b) setting (for example, volunteers from low *vs.* high socio-economic neighborhoods); or c) differential ratings (for example, volunteers who consistently rated the items as low, or high). Selected interviewees were assured that their interview results would be reported in aggregate as a cross-case analysis that allowed their anonymity to be protected. They signed letters of informed consent to participate in accordance with human subjects review board guidelines (FIU IRB approval # # 020706-00).

Student Teacher "Jump Start for Inclusion" Workshop

All student teachers participated in a 1-day workshop on inclusive education practices. The trainers, Curriculum Support Specialists, served as inclusion facilitators for the school district. The content of the workshop represents evidenced based practices reported in the literature on differentiated instruction (e.g., Hall, 2002; Kagan, 1992); Nunley, 1998); Prater, Sileo, & Black, 2000; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). Student teachers participated in classroom based activities that allowed them to experience inclusive differentiated instruction, with an emphasis on classroom routines, classroom structures, cooperative learning groups, strategies to increase active participation, and strategies differentiated by learning styles. Workshop facilitators, experienced inclusive educators themselves, demonstrated the differentiated instruction strategies and ensured comprehension of the strategies through procedures such as, upon completion of the session, showing facilitators their completing guided lecture notes (e.g., Top Ten "To-Do's" in Inclusive Education) and commitment statements (e.g., "Strategies I observed in this session that I want to implement in my classroom include….) as they were leaving the classroom.

Data Analysis

Given that both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in this study, there were two types of data analyses. Demographic information about the student teachers who participated in the survey and the interviews were analyzed as frequencies and percentages. The survey items were rank-ordered from highest-rated to lowest-rated. *Chi Square* tests of significance were conducted on the highest and lowest rated survey items to determine if statistically significant differences existed according to major (early childhood, elementary, special, or secondary education) and setting (low vs. high socio-economic setting). The *Chi*

Square analysis was selected because of its usefulness with samples of small size and its sensitivity to frequency-by-category data. Although it does not imply any direction or cause-effect relationship, the *Chi Square* analysis can indicate whether or not two variables are statistically independent. The following assumptions of *Chi square* test appear to be met in this study: the observations (respondents' ratings) were independent; the status variables (major, gender, etc.) were logical and mutually exclusive; expected frequencies greater than 5 were anticipated for all cells in 2x2 contingency tables; and the sum of expected frequencies equaled the sum of observed frequencies.

The qualitative data were analyzed in accordance with grounded theory methodology, where the data are compared using a "constant comparative" process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As the data were collected from the student teachers, the survey and interview results were continuously analyzed using a recursive process. The results were turned back to all members of the research team so as to continuously verify emerging hunches or hypotheses. The process of constant comparison of data can lead to the gradual emergence of tentative hypotheses that explain the data. In turn, the tentative hypotheses can influence decisions about further data collection which can test and extend the emerging hypotheses.

Validity

To ensure internal validity, the researchers used multiple data sources (surveys and interviews). Through triangulation, it was possible to identify converging conceptualizations and relations related to the development of trends emerging from student teacher practices. In addition, divergent views were captured by analyzing the

outliers. Thus any findings or conclusions were based on several different sources of information that corroborated each other.

Results

Results are reported in two sections. First the quantitative data from the surveys are reported in terms of frequencies and percentages and appropriate statistical analyses (e.g., Chi Square tests of significance). Then the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews are reported.

Quantitative Results

Demographics. As shown in Table 1, a total of 271 student teachers participated in this study (144 in the spring and 127 in the fall). There were 159 elementary educators, 44 special educators, 43 early childhood educators, 22 secondary educators,

Table 1.   Demographics

	Spring 2006	Fall 2006	Total
	144	127	271
Elementary Majors	77	82	159
Early Childhood Majors	18	25	43
Secondary Majors	14	8	22
Special Education Majors	32	12	44
Other (e.g., art, music)	3	0	3

and 3 others (art, music) who completed the anonymous survey. Not surprisingly, females dominated the early childhood, elementary and special education student teaching ranks and proportionately more males were secondary educators (*Chi Square* = $p \leq .05$). Intuitively, it makes sense in that secondary education is known to include more males.

They were a linguistically versatile group who spoke many languages other than English. The majority of both cohorts spoke Spanish: 17% of the Spring 06 and 22% of

the Fall 06 cohorts spoke only English. Other languages included American Sign Language, Arabic, Chinese, Creole, French, French Haitian Creole, Hebrew, and Portuguese. Given that the majority of student teachers reported that their classrooms included students who spoke English as a Second Language and that Spanish was the most dominant language, this versatility served them well.

In addition, the student teachers were an ethnically diverse group. The majority of student teachers were Hispanic (over 75% for both cohorts) followed by white, black, and Asian. The *Chi Square* test of significance was calculated and revealed a statistically significant difference due to ethnicity ($p \leq .05$) where proportionately fewer early childhood majors were black (0%) compared to secondary, elementary, or special education majors.

In this study, a higher proportion of special education and early childhood education majors indicated experiences with formal coursework compared to their colleagues in elementary and secondary education (*Chi Square* $= p \leq .05$), emphasizing the importance of coursework in inclusive education. The most frequently named setting was a general classroom with no known students with disabilities, especially for secondary teachers. Other settings that were described included inclusion classes for students for speakers of other languages, general education inclusion where special educators co-taught during reading and language arts, early childhood inclusion for part of the day, classes for students labeled trainable mentally handicapped, classes at a school for students identified as gifted, and classrooms where students work at an accelerated pace.

Awareness of Children with Disabilities in the Student Teachers' Classrooms. For elementary, early childhood, and special educators, the number of students in their classrooms ranged from as few as 7 (in a classroom devoted to children with severe autism) to 58. Several special educators reported being responsible for between 42-58 pupils due to assignments to teach students with disabilities in both resource room and general education classrooms. After 0 (reported by 1/3 of all respondents), the most frequently reported number of students with disabilities was between 1 and 3. Secondary educators and others (music, art, or physical education) reported higher numbers: 100-228 pupils. The percentages of students with disabilities ranged from 0 to 100% of the class, depending on the setting. For example, special educators tended to explain that 100% of their classes included students with disabilities.

Classroom Settings. A variety of settings were reported. The most frequently named setting was a general classroom with no known students with disabilities, especially for secondary teachers. Other settings that were described included inclusion classes for students for speakers of other languages, general education inclusion where special educators co-taught during reading and language arts, early childhood inclusion for part of the day, classes for students labeled trainable mentally handicapped (TMH), classes at a school for students identified as gifted, and classrooms where students worked at an accelerated pace. The socio-economic status (SES) of schools in which the majority of respondents completed their student teaching were from middle SES neighborhoods (55% for Spring 2006 cohort, 68% for Fall 2006), followed by low SES neighborhoods (41% for Spring, 27% for Fall 2006) and then high SES neighborhoods (4% for Spring and Fall 2006).

Inclusion Strategies Implemented by Student Teachers. Previous researchers indicated that actions of student teachers can be influenced by their preparation experiences (Agran & Alper, 2000; Richards, Hunley, Weaver, & Landers, 2003; Sprague & Pennell, 2000). Similar results were noticed for the FIU student teachers and may be related to their exposure to specific inclusion strategies during the *Jump Start for Inclusion Workshop*. Overall, as shown in Table 2, the highest mean rating emerged for peer tutoring (3.9 on a 5-point Likert scale), followed by cooperative group learning (3.4). The lowest mean rating was for discussion cards (2.3). Early childhood educators also rated discussion cards as low. Ratings from secondary educators were substantially lower compared to ratings from early childhood, special, and elementary educators. However, secondary educators agreed with their colleagues with respect to the importance of peer tutoring.

The *Chi Square* test of significance was calculated. Ratings on the cooperative learning group strategy yielded a statistically significant difference according to major ($p \leq .05$). Inspection of the cross tabulations indicated proportionately more majors in early childhood education (50%) rated 5's for this strategy compared to special education (43%), general education (41%), and secondary education (7%). The null hypothesis that there are no differences between the majors must be rejected. This implies that the populations are not similar. Intuitively, it makes sense that Pre-K-grade 3 teachers would be more likely to arrange cooperative learning groups due to the nature of the curriculum for young children with its emphasis on social interaction in both play and learning groups.

Table 2.   Ratings of Strategies Used by Student Teachers: Highest to Lowest

	Mean Rating*	Mean Rating*
Strategy	Spring 06	Fall 06
Peer Tutoring	3.9	3.8
Cooperative Learning Groups	3.4**	4.1***
Think-Pair-Share	3.2	3.3
Carousel Feedback	2.4	2.8
Discussion Cards	2.3	2.5

*Note: Likert scale ranged from 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal
Chi Square for Major X Strategy $p \leq .05$; * Chi Square for Major X Strategy $p \leq .008$.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Inclusion and Students with Disabilities. The literature on student teacher success in teaching in inclusive settings indicates that beliefs and attitudes about inclusion and students with disabilities change as a function of their exposure to and successful experiences in interacting with students with disabilities (e.g., Richards, et al., 2003) and seems to be corroborated with this group of student teachers where they reported the presence of students with disabilities in their student teacher classrooms. As shown in Table 3, the highest rated item was "*I can use different classroom routines to help meet diverse needs of my learners*" (4.5 for both cohorts) followed by "*I know how to use flexible grouping when I teach my lessons*" (4.3 for both cohorts). Two items represent the lowest rated items: "*My ability to meet students' diverse needs improved over the semester*" and "*I think that not all students must do the same activity in the same way*".

The *Chi Square* test of significance was calculated and yielded no statistically significant differences due to major. A visual inspection of the data indicated, however, that the secondary majors tended to rate all items lower than their colleagues in early

childhood, elementary, or special education. Many secondary student teachers reported they were not aware of any students with disabilities enrolled in their student teaching classrooms. Similarly, many elementary teachers did not report the presence of students with disabilities. Special educators, not surprisingly, rated these items higher than their colleagues in secondary, elementary, or early childhood education.

Table 3.   Ratings of Student Teacher Attitudes: Highest to Lowest

Survey Item	Mean Rating*
	Spring06 Fall06
I can use different classroom routines to help meet diverse needs of my learners.	4.5 4.5
I know how to use flexible grouping when I teach my lessons.	4.3 4.3
I think that a student who has trouble learning is an instructional challenge rather than a student challenge.	4.1 4.2
I accessed support when I wanted to further differentiate my lessons.	4.1 3.4
I think that not all students must do the same activity in the same way.	3.7 4.3
My ability to meet students' diverse needs improved over the semester.	3.7 3.8

*Note: 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal

Accessing Support to Further Differentiate Instruction. Perhaps the most salient outcome regarding the attitudes towards inclusive education expressed by the student teachers is the fact that the majority indicated they asked for support (72% for spring 2006 and 68% for fall 2006). In addition, the majority mentioned support from cooperating teachers and FIU supervisors, followed by specialists (e.g., special educators, ESL teachers, and counselors), a book on differentiated instruction that was distributed during the *Jump Start for Inclusion* workshop, peers, other interns at their school site, and

members of the faculty in their teacher preparation programs. The notion that inclusive education is possible when adequate support and collaboration is provided is well documented in the literature (e.g., Villa, et al. 2004; Thousand, et al. 2007).

Qualitative Results

A total of 29 student teachers (21 for spring 2006 and 8 for fall 2006) volunteered to be interviewed. There were 15 elementary educators, 4 early childhood educators, 8 special educators and 2 secondary teachers. Four interviewees (5 females and 1 male, all 4 Spanish speakers) were selected on 'outlier patterns'--high and low raters on the 'use cooperative learning groups' item as it is the only strategy that achieved a statistically significant difference due to major) who completed their student teaching at low-middle SES neighborhoods at 3 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school. Using a constant-comparative approach to analyze the interview results, five themes emerged, as displayed in Table 4. Representative verbatim quotes from the interviews are provided to substantiate each theme. Where present, a contrasting opinion is included so as to attest to both sides of the issue.

Table 4:   Themes

THEME 1:	Interviewees described the types of disabilities of the children who were in their classrooms.
THEME 2:	Interviewees valued autonomy
THEME 3:	Interviewees emphasized the importance of support from cooperating teachers.
THEME 4:	Interviewees articulated the types of accommodations they were making for individual differences.
THEME 5:	Interviewees identified important barriers.

THEME 1: Interviewees described the types of disabilities of the children who were in their classrooms.

Overall, this theme provides strong evidence that the interviewee responses matched the survey ratings. All the interviewees expressed their awareness that students with disabilities were part of the planning and teaching activities in their respective classrooms whereas some elementary and secondary student teachers who completed the survey did not seem aware of their students with disabilities.

> [Code 45], *I am teaching students with different levels of English speaking skills. I do have mostly levels 1 and 2 (ESL) in this room; but I do have a Level 3 and a Level 4. There are 2 sets of twins whose parents didn't want to separate them, even though one was ESOL 1 and the other was ESOL 4. There are no specific children with disabilities in my class. My cooperating teacher has started the process of identifying 2 of the students—one who was retained last year but she doesn't think he should be retained again due to age and maturity; instead he should receive supports with the next grade's teacher. The other student is similar in that although he isn't low enough to be retained, he will need supports to continue his progress in 2nd grade.*

> [Code 86] *I had mostly LD [labels—i.e., learning disabilities], but I had several students who were [labeled as] EH [emotional handicaps]. At the school we had a TMH [label—trainable mentally handicapped] group-I observed them a couple of times-they were downstairs from me. I popped in and watched them for some of their lessons and interacted with the kids a lot. I had one who was [labeled] SED [seriously emotionally disturbed], who was actually removed from the school and put into an institution. I had one kid…we don't know, he wasn't labeled as EH or SED but he was extremely violent. He was actually arrested on my last day. He was labeled LD, on the last day of school he was arrested for hitting the A.P. [assistant principal] during a conference. I had some really interesting kids. I had a couple who had developmental issues, one who had a severe medical issue.*

> [Code 126] *The four children that are labeled at the present time in the classroom are labeled with a specific learning disability. It seems that one of them is autistic and ADHD. Then there is one child who is also autistic, but does not have a one-on-one. He is very calm. He tries to work and is more independent. And then one child who was retained, and has learning disabilities. But he was just retained last year. He still barely knows no letters and is just learning sounds.*

> [Code 107]: *I worked with kids who had EMH [label—i.e., educable mentally handicapped], physically disabled, learning disabilities, regular ed students, honor*

students, and gifted students. And I've even worked with profound, not in my internship but prior to that I did. It's been a broad spectrum.

THEME 2: Interviewees valued autonomy

Overall, this theme provides evidence that the survey ratings matched interviewee responses. For example, survey items related to attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and students with disabilities indicated that student teachers who completed the survey rated classroom routines and flexible groupings as strategies to ensure inclusion of students with disabilities. It is clear that the interviewees also utilized these strategies.

[code 107]: *it was wonderful because in my practicum, I only had reading and language arts. It was great, and I learned reading/language arts but it was in an ESE setting. In my internship I had an inclusive setting and it was wonderful. Turns out that the teacher that I had was an ESE teacher for many years and she had recently been certified to teach regular ed also. So because she had both certifications, she was literally running the whole class. Of course, because we're strategy people, we can handle anything. I had a wonderful, wonderful experience. I really did.*

[code 126]: [I liked…] *Coming up with alternative assessments. I like creating books with kids. I think that it's important and it's fun. Playing games with them so that they learn; it's not just straight from the book (exactly what the book says). Story reading - I love books - I love reading to them. Art- I like the kids painting and coming up with creative ideas to help them build on (whether it be fine motor or reading, phonics;) just coming up with different individual activities for them to do to build on these needs that they have.*

In contrast, [code 86] mentioned, *I didn't get to do anything interesting-it was all what the school had planned out, what the teacher has set up in their scope and sequence. We couldn't really modify the plans or the scope that much. So we couldn't do anything interesting.*

THEME 3: Interviewees emphasized the importance of support from cooperating teachers.

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of their cooperating teacher in making the student teaching experience successful. For example,

[code 45] said, *"My cooperating teacher's always saying, "How many opportunities do you give them to show what they know?" Do I just let them answer*

randomly? Well, I use several methods. If I call on a person with her hand raised, and she doesn't answer right away (I know this is a stage in 2ⁿᵈ language development and extra wait time is important), I ask the partners to whisper to each other (this gives a chance of oral rehearsal).

[code 107] explained, "*My cooperating teacher was an excellent teacher. I loved going through her stuff and I loved seeing things that she had collected through the years--valuable information.*

In contrast, [code 86] remarked, "*My CT [cooperating teacher] was basically gone a lot of the time. She was working on her national boards.*"

THEME 4: Interviewees articulated the types of accommodations they were making for

individual difference.

[Code 45] explained, *I provided a structure to scaffold their writing (she points to a model on the newsprint). This is important for them when they are learning to write in English. I helped them complete a concept map for what the paragraph would include. Then I gave a sentence structure with an open ended section for them to fill in the blank. I didn't do the rest because at this point in the year, they know they have to include First, Next, and Conclusion. I try to make it different. For example, I had the students practice their 'y' sounds (e.g., cry, happy—two different ending sounds but the same spelling). First I explained it so they could hear the differences. Then I modeled it by writing the words. Then I asked them to take a '-y' word on 3x5 card and place it in the correct column for the ending sound. This added a spark to the lesson because they had to do something active in addition to hearing and seeing. (She points to a chart on the other side of the room.*

[code 107} provided the following details: *I worked with the regular ed standard benchmark and I accommodated my ESE [label used in South Florida, i.e., exceptional student education] students. I had nine students – I had 25 total and nine were ESE. Kids who have learning disabilities, kids who have emotional handicaps, it's basically breaking it apart as much as I can. Not giving them too much, but just giving them a little bit at a time. I was in inclusion in my internship and it worked wonderfully because I was the only teacher there. I lessoned planned for my regular ed kids and what I did was, based on those lesson plans, I strategized [sic] on how I could teach my ESE kids the same content. That to me is inclusion.*

[code 126] said, *I'll start with a story and then they'll sit in the group and they'll participate in the questioning. … . And then, when they go back to their seats, if they can't (if the specific child is not able to do exactly the work I assigned for the assignment, for the activity -- I'll modify it). Like if they are supposed to be filling*

in blanks from the worksheet, well then I'll have one just write the words. Or maybe start the sentence and then draw the picture rather than writing a word.

In contrast, others were not so articulate.

[code 86] explained, *"Grouping the kids. It took trial and error a lot. In thirteen weeks, it's really hard to figure out their personalities and who would work well together. My group of five, I couldn't do anything with because there's so few of them and the kids didn't like each other* <he laughs, sardonically>. *So I just had to do them as one big group.*

THEME 5: Interviewees identified important barriers.

The 'paperwork' barrier was mentioned by one.

[Code 45] explained, *FIU requires a lot. But so does my cooperating teacher. She wants to know why I set up my lessons the way I do. Say, for example, when I wanted to change the learning centers: she had me prepare paperwork that showed what the students' test scores were for AR, STAR Reading, and that type of documentation. I showed why I wanted to change the centers based on the data."*

Working with paraprofessionals who are not prepared was another barrier. For

example,

[code 107] said, *"we don't have quality paras [sic]. I think you can't just put anybody to work with these children. They need to be knowledgeable. They need to know what they are doing – what to do. Every child is different so even if you train the para to work with "autistic" children, autism is a spectrum.*

Lack of information to parents was mentioned as a barrier. For example, [code

107] emphasized,

"Early intervention is so important. I don't think parents are being informed of that. Just because their child has a problem now, doesn't mean that that's going to be a major problem forever. The earlier you catch it the better." [code 45] emphasized, *"constant communication with my parents. The student-parent communication sheets help explain to the parents the concepts that were covered that day. Every day these messages are placed in the mailboxes. That little triangle of communication is so important. All of the messages have to be in Spanish because only maybe two who can speak English."*

Post-Hoc Analysis: Student Teachers Attitudes towards Inclusion Pre-Jumpstart

All student teachers are required to provide a statement of their educational philosophy as part of their application for student teaching placement. The following focus question guided the text analysis of the philosophy statements.

> "Prior to participating in the *Jumpstart for Inclusion* workshop and student teaching experience, to what extent do the philosophy statements reveal pro-Inclusion attitudes, skills and strategies to meet the needs of learners with differing abilities?"

For each philosophy statement, two readers independently searched for verbatim phrases that could be construed as matching the themes that are shown in Table 4 which emerged from the *Jumpstart* interview process with student teachers who had participated in the *Jumpstart for Inclusion* workshop and who had completed the semester student teaching internship. The data are reported as simple frequency counts for each occurrence. Percentages were calculated by dividing the total (N) for each group by the frequency, multiplied by 100. A total of 140 statements were reviewed. As shown in the table below, evidence of 2 of the 5 themes emerged for those who majored in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Special Education, Secondary Education, Physical Education, and Counseling Education.

As shown in Table 5, prior to experiencing the *Jumpstart for Inclusion* workshop or student teaching, the evidence suggests that approximately 34% of the population entered the experiences with a favorable attitude towards inclusion as well as an ability to articulate how they operationalized their approach to meet needs of diverse learners. Moreover, the average should be interpreted by also looking at the range—0%-65% range of differences according to major: 65% of the early childhood education majors, 50% of the special education majors, 40% of physical education majors, 38% of

secondary education majors, 27% of education majors, and 0% for counseling education

majors.

Table 5.   Frequency of Pro-Inclusion Attitudes & Strategies Evidenced in Text

Analysis of Philosophy of Education Statements

Major	Total N	Frequency Theme 4	Frequency Theme 2	Frequency Other	% of Total
Early Childhood Education	23	15	0	0	65%
Elementary Education	84	18	3	1	27%
Special Education	12	5	1	0	50%
Secondary Education	8	1	0	2	38%
Physical Education	5	2	0	0	40%
Counseling Education	8	0	0	0	0%
Totals	140	41(29%)	4(3%)	3(2%)	**34%**

In what ways might we interpret these data? One way would be to point out that

post-*Jumpstart* and student teacher experiences, there emerged a more varied set of

themes. Overall, the philosophy statements revealed the presence of only 2 of the themes,

albeit the most prevalent theme that emerged was related to articulating specific strategies

to individualize and accommodate learners' needs. This means that the experiences

involved in the combination of *Jumpstart for Inclusion* workshop and student teaching

seemed to broaden participants' understanding of the range of activities involved in

individualizing education: varied instructional modifications, accommodations, or

teaching strategies; collaboration with parents as well as their cooperating teachers; more

specific knowledge of the types of disabilities and what might be involved in designing

strategies; recognizing the value for autonomy in making decisions about lessons; and

articulating the barriers that can exist to implementing one's educational philosophy and

knowledge of good instruction.

Another way would be to compare to the percentages of respondents by major for select items on the survey. For example, if a reader looked for specific references in the philosophy statements (submitted prior to the workshop), how many of the specific strategies listed in Table 2 were mentioned? Predominately, the strategy most often referenced is that of using cooperative group learning. No philosophy statement mentioned think-pair-share, carousel feedback, discussion cards, or peer tutoring (strategies specifically demonstrated during the *Jumpstart* workshop.) Therefore, one conclusion that could be made is that the workshop seemed to help the student teachers articulate more specifically how they would operationally define their philosophies, especially when they wrote only generalized statements like the following randomly selected verbatim remarks:

> *My philosophy of education is a student – centered one. … It is my belief that individual differences need to be recognized, respected, and even celebrated.* (Elementary Education Philosophy Statement #9)

> *Of course their educational needs need to be met but students also need an environment where they can feel they could be themselves...* (Special Education Philosophy Statement #86)

> *I believe that children learn best by constructing their own knowledge of the world around them ..... Children also benefit from experiencing meaningful learning and building on their prior knowledge.* (Early Childhood Education Philosophy Statement #98)

> *I intend to use my position as a counselor to become an advocate for education, academic and social.* (Counselor Education Philosophy Statement #127)

> *In my opinion, education is not about one way of learning in particular. I believe that it is molded around the students and their differences.* (Secondary Education (Science) Philosophy Statement #130)

> *My beliefs and favored teaching strategies come from the school of pragmatism.*   (Physical Education Philosophy Statement #137)

Discussion

The results and conclusions of the study must be evaluated in the context of the following limitations. The findings may be relevant only to particular groups of teacher educators and University professors who are working in culturally and ethnically linguistic diverse urban schools with a predominance of schools in neighborhoods characterized as low to low-middle socio-economic status. Although FIU's structure of student teacher practice and supervision may be found in other areas of the nation, it may be true that the degree of collaboration between university and county's public school personnel is unique to this setting.

Another consideration is the developmental and flexible context of the study. Student teachers are novice professionals who are in a stage of development which can show leaps of competence due to opportunities for them to put theory into practice. However, it is also rife with opportunities for facing challenges to instruction and lesson planning as well as failures in classroom management. The fact that the survey and interviews were conducted near the completion of the semester may have skewed results in the positive direction as shown in the relatively high ratings for implementing teacher actions to individualize instruction. Had the study been conducted half-way through the semester, there might have been greater variability.

Finally, the survey instrument itself was created *de novo*; although an attempt was made to corroborate the survey ratings with interviews, the validity and reliability of the instrument were not assessed. Moreover, there is no way to know that the itemized list of actions and attitudes towards inclusive education represents an exhaustive list sufficient to truly individualize instruction for students with disabilities, students learning English

as a second language, and students at risk for school failure due to low SES and poverty. Thus, the results should be viewed with caution. However, the mixed methods design may increase the believability of the results of the study because this design can avoid some of the criticism that occurs for statistical methods alone. In particular, the probability of obtaining a statistically significant relationship by chance needs to be well-anchored in a meaningful relationship or effect. If only qualitative methods were used, then the generalizability of the results may be questioned. However, the benefit is that the qualitative in-depth interviews greatly enrich the believability and validity of the survey results.

In addition, it is important to note that teacher educators have not been silent about the need for more specific preparation in inclusive education. Although many universities have documented collaborative experiences for general educators and special educators in their teacher preparation programs, there are few empirical studies related to the topic (e.g., Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997; Blanton, L, Blanton, W., & Cross, 1994; Patriarcha & Lamb, 1990). Blanton et al. (1997) and Villa, Thousand, and Chapple (2000) delineated how faculty at several universities retooled their professional preparation programs to better ready graduates for meeting the challenges of inclusive 21st century education . As noted by Villa et al. (2000), it is important for teacher educators "to create new and innovative initiatives that model faculty and community collaboration and depart from traditional ways of inducting educators into their profession" (p. 536). Moreover, standards for beginning teachers recommended by professional teaching organizations and state teacher certification agencies clearly call for documentation of competencies related to knowledge of diverse learners, instructional

strategies and environmental arrangements to accommodate differences, collaboration

skills that student teachers in this study demonstrated. For example, the inclusive

strategies student teachers reported they used in their classrooms included peer tutoring,

cooperative group learning, think-pair-share, carousel feedback, and discussion cards.

These strategies can be considered documentation of relevant standards set by the

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) as well as the

standards established by the Florida Department of Education (*Florida Educator*

Accomplished Practices) as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Student Teacher Inclusive Strategies, INTASC, and Florida Standards

Relevant National Standard Interstate New Teacher Assessment & Support Consortium	Relevant State Standard State Department of Education Florida Educator Accomplished Practice
Principle 4: The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.	Standard 10: [The teacher candidate] Recognizes the importance of setting high expectations for all students, the pre-professional teacher works with other professionals to design learning experiences that meet students' needs and interests. The teacher candidate continually seeks advice [or] information from appropriate resources (including feedback), interprets the information, and modifies her/his plans appropriately. Planned instruction incorporates a creative environment and utilizes varied and motivational strategies and multiple resources for providing comprehensible instruction for all students. Upon reflection, the teacher continuously refines outcome assessment and learning experiences.

Although the results of this study may be generalizable only to those settings with

similar demographic characteristics, the results show some similarities and some

differences when compared to recent research. The results of the survey and interviews are corroborated with other literature in inclusive practices for student teachers (Agran & Alper, 2002; Henning & Mitchell, 2002; Hutchinson & Martin, 1999; Oyler, 2006; Richards et al., 2003). Overall, the results of this study indicate that student teachers can accept responsibility for teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. There are indications that the *Jump Start for Inclusion Workshop* was an effective method of increasing student teachers' awareness of students with disabilities in inclusive settings and in increasing their ability to teach those students.

Nevertheless, there is still much more to be learned. For example, what might need to be arranged in terms of increasing the representation of blacks in the early childhood program? How might elementary and secondary teachers in training be better prepared to recognize students with disabilities in their classrooms? What might be arranged to ensure more interactions between district and regional inclusion specialists and the student teachers? These and other questions are inspiring personnel at FIU's office of field experiences as well as the Curriculum Support Specialists for the district to implement another round of *Jump Start for Inclusion* training for the next cohort of student teachers. The authors note that this study may provide encouragement to other teacher education faculty who attempt to respond to the lack of studies of inclusive education in teacher preparation noted by Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005), "Despite the trend toward preparing prospective teachers to work with students with disabilities, few studies of program effects have been studied" (p. 25). Because the student teachers at Florida International University represent a richly diverse population of emerging professional educators, reports of their experiences can enrich the entire profession.

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About the Authors

Ann Nevin is Visiting Professor at Florida International University (Professor *Emerita* at Arizona State University) who is the author of books, research articles, and numerous chapters as well as a scholar - teacher educator who graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Minnesota with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology with advanced degrees in special education and educational administration. Her research with colleagues in the Vermont Consulting Teacher Program used single subject designs to document the impact of various interventions to increase the academic and social progress of children with disabilities in general education classrooms as well as interventions to teach self-determination as part of an undergraduate program to prepare beginning special educators (with Dr. Malian at Arizona State University). Dr. Nevin has co-authored several well-recognized books (e.g., *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Facilitating Student Learning*, published by Corwin Press in 2004, co-authored with Thousand & Villa). Her advocacy, research, and teaching spans more than three decades of working with a diverse array of people to help students with disabilities succeed.

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Liliana Salazar is an advanced doctoral student in the Exceptional Student Education program at Florida International University. She has earned a Masters degree in Special Education, a Masters degree in Early Childhood Special Education, and a Specialist degree in Pre-Kindergarten/Primary Education. She recently held the position the Assistant Principal at South Miami Elementary School, and was the project director of a Florida Inclusion Network Co-Teaching grant award. Currently she is on special assignment as Principal at a nearby elementary school in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Ms. Salazar's research into the impact of co-teaching on the achievement of students has been published in *Florida Educational Leadership* as well as presented at peer-reviewed national conferences (e.g., *American Educational Research Association, Council for Exceptional Children*).

Deidre Marshall describes her goal this way, "*I would love to teach preservice educators in helping them be more prepared to educate students that are not only culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse, but who also have various disabilities.*" A graduate from Florida State University where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and Masters of Education degree (2000) in emotional disturbances and learning disabilities, she has been a special educator and chair of a middle school special education department. Currently, Ms. Marshall is a Curriculum Support Specialist for Inclusive Practices in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Student Teacher Perspectives on Inclusive Education

American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education
January 24, 2007

High "5"--Success for ALL

Who are We?

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Purpose of the Study:
Add to the empirical research on student teaching in inclusive classrooms

What did the review of the literature reveal to us?

1. 8 empirical studies were found (1999-2006)—
   6 at elementary school, 1 middle school, 1 high school
2. Changes in attitudes and student teacher actions
3. New models tested/described--
   *Jordan and Stanovich (2004) model --predicted differences in classroom practices within 3 constructs—
   teacher beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for students with disabilities,
   teacher efficacy,
   school norms about inclusion and inclusive practices).
   *Oyler (2006) –Teachers College inclusive supervision model --
   student teachers as action researchers→"authentic voices"

Research Questions

- Are there significant differences in ratings on survey items related to inclusive education for student teachers in elementary education, special education, early childhood education, and secondary education?
- What successes and challenges do student teachers encounter when student teaching in inclusive classrooms?

Who Are the Student Teachers?

Demographics*

	Spring 2006	Fall 2006	Total
N	144	127	271
Elementary Majors	77	82	159
Early Childhood Majors	18	25	43
Secondary Majors	14	8	22
Special Education Majors	32	12	44
Other (e.g., art, music)	3	0	3

*Linguistically versatile group--the majority of both cohorts spoke Spanish (17% of the Spring 06 and 22% of the Fall 06 cohorts spoke only English).

*Ethnically diverse group--the majority of student teachers were Hispanic (over 75% for both cohorts) followed by white, black, and Asian.

*The majority indicated they asked for support re inclusive practices-- (72% for spring 2006 and 68% for fall 2006).

FEATURES OF THE JUMP START FOR INCLUSION WORKSHOP

*Trainers were curriculum specialists who served as inclusion facilitators and trainers for the school district.
*Content of the workshop represents evidenced based practices reported in the literature on differentiated instruction.
*Participants directly experienced classroom structures, strategies, routines that are used by teachers in inclusive classrooms.

High "5"

Success for All

HIGH "5"
SUCCESS FOR ALL

Strategies* I want to implement in my classroom ...

Inclusion 101	Think about a student who has trouble learning as an instructional challenge rather than a student with a problem!
Access through Accommodations	I want to use both adaptations and accommodations for my high school students… should help most of my teens.
Differentiating Instruction	Remember: scaffolding!
Procedures and Routines	Important: ALWAYS rehearse a routine—set up class for success!
Cooperative Learning	I think I can use "think-pair-share" for many of my lessons!
Remember Lecture Guides!	* I love this Example of the "Notes to Self" Lecture Guide (Everyone received this so we could keep track of key strategies we learned!]

Table 2. Ratings of Strategies Used by Student Teachers: Highest to Lowest

	Mean Rating*	Mean Rating*
Strategy	**Spring 06**	**Fall 06**
Peer Tutoring	3.9	3.8
Cooperative Learning Groups	3.4**	4.1***
Think-Pair-Share	3.2	3.3
Carousel Feedback	2.4	2.8
Discussion Cards	2.3	2.5

*Note: Likert scale ranged from 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal
Chi Square for Major X Strategy $p \leq .05$; * Chi Square for Major X Strategy $p \leq .008$.

Table 3. Ratings of Student Teacher Attitudes: Highest to Lowest

Survey Item	Mean Rating* Spring06	Fall06
I can use different classroom routines to help meet diverse needs of my learners.	4.5	4.5
I know how to use flexible grouping when I teach my lessons.	4.3	4.3
I think that a student who has trouble learning is an instructional challenge rather than a student challenge.	4.1	4.2
I accessed support when I wanted to further differentiate my lessons.	4.1	3.4
I think that not all students must do the same activity in the same way.	3.7	4.3
My ability to meet students' diverse needs improved over the semester.	3.7	3.8

*Note: Likert scale: 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal

---

On Site Interviews

Convenience of the Student Teacher

Opportunity to Experience the Classroom

Observation of the Non-Verbal Messages (such as bulletin boards, posters, rules)

Direct Experience of the Student Teacher's and Students' "Path"

Anchored/Substantiated the Survey Responses

Themes*

THEME 1:	Interviewees described the types of disabilities of the children who were in their classrooms.
THEME 2:	Interviewees valued autonomy
THEME 3:	Interviewees emphasized the importance of support from cooperating teachers.
THEME 4:	Interviewees articulated the types of accommodations they were making for individual difference.
THEME 5:	Interviewees identified important barriers.

*Based on constant-comparative method of theme analysis of the verbatim follow-up interviews of 5 student teachers (4 females and 1 male), all were Spanish Speakers) who worked in 3 elementary, 1 middle schools, and 1 high school.

Slide 1

Post-Hoc Text Analysis of Pre-Semester Philosophies of Education Statements*

Major	N	Theme #4	Theme #2	Other	%
Early Childhood	23	15	0	0	65%
Elementary	84	18	3	1	27%
Special Education	12	5	1	0	50%
Secondary Ed	8	1	0	2	38%
Physical Education	5	2	0	0	40%
Counselor Ed	8	0	0	0	0%
Total	140	41	4	3	34%

Were student teachers at FIU pre-disposed to have positive attitudes and knowledge of Inclusive strategies?

Slide 2

Interpretations

- *Jumpstart for Inclusion* Workshop & Student Teaching → **broadened understanding** of what it takes to differentiate and **provided specific concrete experiences of DI strategies**
  - Pre-experiences philosophies of education statements mentioned *cooperative group learning* -- did not refer to the other 4 that were emphasized in the *Jumpstart and which received high ratings on the survey*
- Student teachers **can and do accept responsibility for teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms**

Slide 3

Still to Discover….

? How might elementary and secondary teachers in training be better prepared to recognize students with disabilities in their classrooms?

? What might be arranged to ensure more interactions between district and regional inclusion specialists and the student teachers?

? **YOUR Questions, Comments, Concerns**

Slide 4

Thank you for your attention…and

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….. we want to hear from you!