

## Attitudes of Pre-Service Teachers toward Individuals with Exceptionalities and Inclusive Practices:

A Baseline Analysis of Students' Attitudes Enrolled in the Introductory Course

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## Literature Review: Historical Perspective - Resounds in 2008

Reginald J. Jones (1984). *Attitudes and Attitude Change in Special Education: Theory and Practice*:

- "We can legislate physical access and the provision of educational opportunity as we have done, but we cannot legislate acceptance; and it should not be surprising to any informed observer that meaningful implementation of legislative acts will require that we give as much attention to attitudinal barriers as we have given to the elimination of barriers of physical access, barriers of employment access and barriers of education access" (p. vii).

## Lit Review: Attitudes toward inclusion can be influenced . . .

- Culture
- Staff roles
- Experience with inclusion
- Teacher gender
- Severity of the students' disabling conditions
- Sensitivity training
- Pre-service special education courses – number completed
- Core subjects taught by teachers
- Perceived lack of experience and knowledge
- Teachers' self-confidence
- Support services - availability
- Field experiences with students who have disabilities

## Purpose of Research: Question 1

Are there significant correlations between

- a) student demographic variables (i.e., gender, age),
- b) the frequency of these interactions (time and category)
- c) types of personal experiences with individuals with disabilities (i.e., babysitting, camp counselor),
- d) familiarity variables (training, legislation, confidence, and teaching),

AND Bloomsburg University pre-service students' attitudes toward inclusive practices?

## Demographics of Participants

- N=421 BU undergraduate students enrolled in 12 different sections of: Introduction to Individuals with Exceptionalities (7 faculty)
  - Gender (M = 89, F = 331)
  - Age (18-22 = 309, 23-39 = 31)
  - Highest level of education (HS=403 B.S. or B.A. = 18)
  - Credits completed: 0-30=240, 31-60=107, 61-90=46, 90+=28
- Participation in study had no impact on grade of student

## Purpose of Research: Question 2

Are there student attitudes of majors enrolled in various disciplines (i.e., early childhood, elementary education, secondary education, special education, non-education programs) similar or significantly different?

- Academic Major
  - 9 categories, plus 4 generated from "other"
  - Dual Special education (N = 58)

## Method - Materials

- Standardized course syllabus
- Common Blackboard structure
- *Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (SACIE Scale)*
  - Validity established (Loreman et al., 2007)
  - Reliability, Inter-Rater Reliability (BU Intro Team)
    - Script for administration of survey
    - Eight people trained in pairs to cross check coding using a master coding sheet
    - 9% of surveys randomly recoded (98% accuracy)

## Method - Procedures

- Phase One: Current Research
  - Survey administered during second week of class
  - Participation did not impact grade in any way
  - Surveys scored and coded
  - Data entered into SPSS for analysis
- Phase Two: Future Research
  - Survey administered at end of course
  - Personal belief Statement assigned
  - Quantitative data analyzed
  - Qualitative data analyzed

## Results

Demographic information of significance was evaluated based on the factors of gender, age range, credits completed, highest level of education, and major.

- Analysis of variance assessing the relationship of the basic demographic variables and total score indicated significant effects only for the category of **major**,  $F(15, 341) = 2.123, p < .01$ .

\*Results answered Question 1 (a) & Question 2

## Results

Analysis of variance was conducted on the two measures of **frequency of interactions** (time and extent of interactions) and total *SACIE Scale* score.

- The **time measure** indicated if the students had interactions *daily, weekly, monthly, or very rarely* with a person with disabilities.
- With the **extent of interactions** item, students characterized their experience with individual having disabilities as *none or relatively limited, some-moderate amount, extensive-a close friend or family members has a disability, or I have a disability*.
- A significant effect was found for the extent of interactions measure,  $F_{(3,405)} = 6.441, p < .001$ . Mean scores increased with experience.
- Contrast coefficient analysis indicated that students reporting *I have a disability myself* had higher total scores than students in other categories.

## Results

Analysis of variance was conducted on the four **familiarity** variables: training, legislation, confidence, and teaching, compared to the total score.

- Students indicated their **level of training** relevant to the education of individuals with disabilities as *none, some, or high-at least 40 hours*.
- Items measured their **knowledge of legislation** and or policy as it pertained to individuals with disabilities.
- Level of confidence** in teaching individuals with disabilities were rated as *none to very good*.
- Level of experience teaching/tutoring** an individual with a disability was identified as *none, some, and high-at least 30 full days*.
- A significant effect was found for the level of **confidence** question,  $F_{(4,80)} = 2.610, p = .035$ .
- Contrast coefficient analysis indicated students with high confidence levels reported significantly higher positive attitudes on the *SACIE Scale* than students in other categories.

## Results

Analysis of variance was conducted on the **types of experiences** with individuals with disabilities (i.e., babysitting, camp counselor, service clubs, helping friends, no experience, and other experiences).

- The only significant effect on types of experiences was found for babysitting,  $F_{(1,384)} = 3.818, p = .051$ .
- Students with **babysitting** experience ( $M = 51.849, SD = 6.241$ ) reported higher total scores on the *SACIE* scale than students with no babysitting experience ( $M = 49.286, SD = 5.452$ ).

## Results

To confirm the results of a previous study completed by Loreman, Earle, Sharma, & Forlin (2007), an analysis of variance for attitudes was conducted by comparing the total score for the *SACIE Scale* and the three separate factors of **sentiments, attitudes, and concerns**.

- The three factors of the scale significantly correlated with the total score.
- Within the factors of sentiments and concerns, all items correlated as expected. However, item 2 (*I am grateful that I do not have a disability*) within the attitude factor did not correlate with scale items 3 (*I feel comfortable around people with disabilities*) and 4 (*I am afraid to look a person with a disability straight in the face*) and correlated negatively with scale item 1 (*It is rewarding when I am able to help people with disabilities*).

\*As a result of these findings, a revised scale has been developed by Loreman et al that eliminated item 2. This revised scale will be used by this research team for further studies.

## Discussion

- Results relating the SACIE Scale with the student's major were strong, demonstrating a relationship between student career choice and attitudes toward individuals with disability.
- The strength of the relationship between attitude and inclusive practices was hoped for but not necessarily expected.

## Discussion

- The connection may be due to the fact that individuals choosing the field of special education may already possess an empathetic predisposition and sensitivity for individuals with disabilities.
- This could be seen as a logical conclusion since students who plan on working with individuals with disabilities should have a positive attitude regarding this population.

## Discussion

- An additional strong correlation existed with types of experience and comfort levels when students provided babysitting with individuals with disabilities.
- Volunteer group experiences cannot be assumed to be as valuable as one-on-one care. It is unknown what variables within each of these types of experiences influenced the results.

## Discussion

- Self-reported disabilities provided the strongest relationship with the *extent of experiences* as these students live with disabilities on a daily basis.
- There is not enough information to determine why this relationship is so strong, beyond the fact that if a student lives with a disability and is in an inclusive setting, such as a college classroom, then they may feel very positively about inclusive practices.

## Discussion

- Positive correlations were found between the SACIE Scale and factors of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns.
- This registration of thoughts and feelings should then be able to be translated into strategies within courses that can be taught to students preparing to work in the field of special education.

### **Limitations**

- Convenience Sample (Bloomsburg University Students/Northeast Region of PA)
- Espoused beliefs may differ from actual beliefs
- Voluntary participation might limit number of negative attitudes
- Qualitative data confined by parameters in the writing assignment
- Beliefs and ethics held by instructors may impact developing perspectives

### **Implications**

- Research will provide recommendations to universities for developing quality and effective coursework
- Findings will provide a description of the impact of the Introductory course on attitudes
- Comparisons will reveal attitude variations
- Research will allow faculty to identify variables that impact attitudes

### **Implications**

- Five years of research should enable faculty to make comparisons of attitudes of pre-service teachers upon completion of the nine credits of coursework that will be required as a result of a new policy

### **Future Research**

- Is there a significant difference in students' attitudes toward inclusive education prior to and after the completion of the course, Introduction to Exceptional Individuals, at Bloomsburg University?
- What reasons or factors are stated in the students' essays (Personal Belief Statement on Inclusive Practices) to support their opinions and/or attitudes toward inclusion?