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Attitude Change of Educators Utilizing Best Practices in Education

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Attitude Change of Educators Utilizing Best Practices in Education

Thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist
in the School Psychology Program

By

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ABSTRACT

Attitude Change of Educators Utilizing Best Practices in Education

By Sonya Christian

It is purported that educator attitudes are highly important in many areas of education. This study examined if educator attitude change occurred as a result of teaching in a six-week summer school enrichment program that implements research-supported best practices in education. Participants were predominantly white female education students enrolled in a graduate school in West Virginia. Sixty-seven of them responded to a pre-post Likert-type survey developed by professors at the institution. Data was collected over two summers. Analysis of the data included bar graph comparisons and a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test ($p < 0.05$). The conclusions from this study yielded changes in educator attitudes on three questions in the survey. Implications for future study in this area are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the establishment of recent federal laws such as No Child Left Behind (Pub. L. No. 107-110) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Pub. L. No. 94-142), teachers are now required to integrate research-based, best practices and least restrictive environment (LRE) procedures in their classrooms. After years of teaching children with special needs in isolated classrooms, teaching what they wanted to teach and how they wanted to teach, educators are now required to include special needs children in their regular education classrooms per these federal directives. Additionally, teachers are being required to design instruction in their classrooms based on mandates handed down by policy-makers and officials that often seem to change their minds about educational practices or may not understand fully what it means to implement the practices (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). As a result, teachers are becoming frustrated, skeptical, and resistant to the utilization and implementation of such practices (Boardman, Argüelles, & Vaughn, 2005).

In light of the plethora of educational changes and reform, why is teacher attitude so significant with regards to research-based, best practices? Attitudes are important because they are functional; they express fundamental values and beliefs that mediate or guide a person's behavior (Brock & Shavitt, 1994; Cook, 2002). The word "attitude" has been defined as "the sum of a person's inclinations and feelings, prejudices and bias, preconceived notions, ideas, fears, and convictions regarding any specific topic" (Mueller, 1986). Attitudes can be characterized as containing three related components: cognitive (i.e., the idea or suppositions upon which the attitude is based), affective (i.e., feelings about the issue), and behavioral (i.e., a

tendency toward an action that corresponds with the supposition or belief) (Wood, 2000). The attitudes held by educators about current educational policies and best practices may be reflected in how they teach, the expectations they have for their students, and the overall achievement of their students (Cook, 2002). A teacher's belief system actually serves as an organizing framework that guides their decisions regarding curriculum and instruction (Romanowski, 1997). When an educator assumes a position on an educational issue, it is depicted in terms of their attitude (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996) which will then translate into specific classroom and instructional practices that subsequently affect behavioral and learning outcomes (Cook, 2002). Given this definition of attitude, particularly its influence on a teacher's behavior, attitudes of teachers within the contemporary classrooms of the twenty-first century then may very well have an impact on the learning environments they manage. Educator attitudes, therefore, are an incredibly important factor in the education of children in today's classroom (Weisman & Garza, 2002).

Currently, teachers are encountering increased pressure as their roles diversify when compared to previous generations; and many have varied in their responses to these challenges (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). They are being called upon to adjust their teaching styles in accordance with the multiplicity of learning styles they face (Peterson & Beloin, 1992) as well as being asked to adopt a more expansive vision about many academic aspects, including the subject matter they teach, their students, and classroom practices – reflective of a new, constructivist approach to teaching and learning as well as due to an outgrowth of the federal mandates.

Age and Stage Related Phase Theories

In an effort to better understand teachers' attitudes in general, consider a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association that examined teachers' responses to change and the stereotypes maintained by older teachers in a school district in Oregon that was undergoing major restructuring with different schools in various stages of implementation – an initial stage, an early stage, and an advanced stage (Rusch and Perry, 1993). The study highlighted various reasons that teachers may not get on board with change, or become resistant. Two theoretical factors that influence attitudes toward change with educators were outlined. The first was *age-related phases*, which are supported by the work of Erikson (1968) and others (Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978 as cited in Rusch and Perry, 1993), arguing that age is a critical personal factor that shapes attitudes in that there is a definable pattern of events linked to a person's age. Essentially, what may seem like resistance due to age is actually the manifestation of characteristics of people in general as they move through phases of their lives. *Individual growth stages* for differing attitudes among educators is another explanation offered, with support gained from the work of Piaget (1950's) as well as other theorists in the field (Loeveinger, 1976; Steffy, 1989 as cited in Rusch & Perry, 1993). These theorists do not necessarily believe that age is the independent factor in how people think or act, but instead they believe that people move and progress systematically through growth stages. Take, for example, a career stages model that teachers supposedly move through during their careers: anticipatory, expert, renewal, withdrawal, and exit (Steffy, 1989 as cited in Rusch & Perry, 1993). While the first and last stages refer to entering and leaving the profession, the middle three stages depend on the teachers' motivation and competence level. As a result, at each of these stages, teachers' beliefs and attitudes may change.

Emotional Factors

In addition to the age and life stage of the teacher, emotional factors may also play a role in resistance to change when it comes to best practices implementation in the classroom. Anxiety due to fear of discomfort can lead to resistance. People often insist on maintaining familiar patterns of behavior and the possible need for change makes them uncomfortable (Ellis, 1985 as cited in Rusch & Perry, 1993). Moreover, teachers may be resistant because they fear their own imperfections may be revealed which could cause them to feel embarrassed and even defensive. Fear of success might also lead to resistance in attitude change in that success could lead to them being given students or responsibilities within the school that they cannot handle. Finally, Ellis also asserts that resistance can be motivated by rebelliousness. At a time where federal mandates dictate so much of how educators must work within their classrooms, including what and how they teach, they may feel they are being controlled, therefore refusing to accept best practice approaches and subsequently not keeping with the integrity of the approach in promoting its success (Albert Ellis, 1985 as cited in Rusch & Perry, 1993).

Life Experiences

In addition to age and phase theories and teachers' emotional feelings, it is also held by others that attitudes are also influenced through a person's direct and indirect life experiences. If teachers' attitudes are created and shaped through their direct and indirect learning experiences (Zimbardo & Lieppe, 1991) it is then understandable that teachers may enter into the education profession with a set of beliefs about the nature of teaching based upon their own experiences as students that could possibly hinder their movement toward more progressive attitudes (Gregoire, 2003; Lortie, 1975). Regardless of what theory one adheres to, many will agree that change is a highly complex phenomenon and attitude development is a related complicated process with

many offering up answers as to how beliefs develop and are maintained over time (Rusch & Perry, 1993).

Traditional and Progressive Viewpoints

There are often two oppositional mindsets at play with teachers: first, there are traditionalists who tend to espouse the belief of “what has been done in the past has been done well and so we should continue on with the same practices in the future” (Doll, 1996). They believe the needs of the student are relatively constant and therefore may be more reluctant to revise, modify, or redesign the schooling process (Morris, 1961). Progressives, as they are often referred to, alternatively advocate for careful and critical examination of past actions and practices to determine what can be done differently and more effectively (Doll, 1996). They are more willing to match school programming to contemporary needs in order to make education meaningful and relevant to student interests and abilities (Morris, 1961). Those teachers with the traditionalist attitude then would likely be the group that may be less willing to change and truly work to align their actions through cooperation and commitment to research-based classroom methods and practices. What then does it take to change attitudes and beliefs when it comes to educational research-based best practices in education?

The Effect of Teacher Preparation Programs

There are those who have suggested that teacher preparation programs should include a focus on teacher beliefs so that when teachers enter the profession they are more likely to be amicable to changes that are sure to occur (Richardson, 1996). One study in particular examined developments in the general educational beliefs of entry level education students over the course of one semester of an introduction to education class (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James,

2001). The content of the class was centered on course objectives that included, for example, different issues in education, characteristics of effective schools and teachers, factors that influence curriculum, instruction and learning, and assessment. The participants were asked to complete a Likert-type survey designed to assess educational beliefs in the first and last weeks of class to determine if their attitudes would become more progressive regarding educational practices after participation in the course. Data analysis revealed a statistically significant, although moderate increase in belief scores indicating a shift toward progressivism. These findings are important because they suggest that the type of instruction received by students entering into the teaching profession has the potential to change beliefs from traditional to more progressive ways of thinking in the educational field, particularly when presented by a progressive-oriented instructor, as was the case in this study. Helping teachers develop open minds while in training when it comes to research-based decision-making seems to be a way to start when it comes to attitude change.

Therefore, it appears that teachers' attitudes can be influenced by any number of factors – from the age or stage of life they happen to be in, to their emotional response to educational issues, to their own experiences as students in school, to whether or not they view teaching from a traditionalist or constructivist perspective, to participation in progressive teacher preparation programs. Educators have been asked to break out of traditional roles and mindsets to implement practices that are innovative and may require more work (Prawat, 1990). Whether or not they are willing to adopt progressive attitudes will likely depend on any one or a combination of the aforementioned attitude influencing factors. Further, teachers are not likely to complicate their lives with more demanding work and effort unless they possess a progressive attitude toward teaching and learning (Prawat, 1990).

For the purposes of this review, inclusion, team teaching, and multiage classroom grouping will be discussed in more detail as these are some of the major practices associated with the current study.

Inclusion

Shifting now to more specific research-advocated practices, inclusion is a topic that has generated various opinions in education over the last several years (Johnson, 2001). Inclusion education has been defined in the literature as “the provision educational services to students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support” (Schroth, Moorman, & Fullwood, 1997). With IDEA mandating that students be placed in the least restrictive environment, which translates into the regular education classroom for a majority of them, teachers that once taught only “regular” education students are now being required to teach students with various disabilities as well. The intent of inclusion is that all students attending a school, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, become a part of the school community so that they feel a sense of belonging among peers, teachers, and support staff (Burke and Sutherland, 2004). Inclusion is considered a researched-based best practice because studies have indicated better success for students with disabilities in regular education environments (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007).

While some teachers have welcomed the challenge that inclusion presents, other teachers have not always willingly accepted the requirement in their classrooms. Many have not felt qualified to teach children with disabilities, believing that they need much more in the way of professional development as well as other supports to implement inclusion successfully (Burke and Sutherland, 2004). In addition to lack of support and professional development, the nature of the student’s disability is a factor, too, as to why teachers may not have positive attitudinal

support towards inclusion, especially students with diagnosed behavioral or emotional disorders that have a tendency to become disruptive (Hastings & Oakford, 2003 as cited in Burke & Sutherland, 2004). Inclusion then becomes a more serious challenge unless the proper supports are in place in these classrooms.

Successful implementation of an inclusion program is directly dependent on teachers' attitudes because they are the ones that will work most closely with the students involved (Burke & Sutherland, 2004) and because their acceptance of the policy would have an effect on their commitment to implementing it (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). With inclusion, teachers may feel "challenged, hopeful, and desirous of what can be accomplished, but they may also feel frustration, burden, fear, lack of support, and inadequacies about their ability to teach children with different kinds of problems" (Shade & Stewart, 2001). The present emphasis on inclusion has uncovered diverse feelings from teachers in general (Johnson, 2001). Some research has revealed that many teachers remain undecided or disagree with the benefits of inclusion and therefore results (success or failure for the student and the teacher) will be impacted (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Teachers are saying they require more professional development as well as school-wide and classroom-specific supports in order to experience success with this practice (Idol, 2006; Burke & Sutherland, 2004).

However, encouragingly, there are studies that indicate that as teachers have more practice with inclusion and as their skills develop, their acceptance and tolerance of students with disabilities in their classrooms seems to improve (Idol, 2006). One study designed to ascertain teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education practice found that although teachers considered inclusion to be a challenge, they still appeared to hold relatively positive views toward children with disabilities educated in a regular education classroom (Subban & Sharma, 2005).

Team Teaching (Co-teaching)

Team teaching has been defined as “the practice of including two or more teachers of equal status in a classroom to provide instruction to one group of students” (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Traditionally, teachers have taught in isolation from other adults. However, now, due to recent federal mandates such as *No Child Left Behind* instruction by highly qualified personnel becomes a necessity and schools are finding that this is best accomplished through team teaching (often with a regular and special education teacher working together in the same classroom) (Kohler, 2006). Team teaching allows for opportunities for teachers to get away from isolation in a self-contained classroom, collaborate on meaningful curriculum development projects, share teaching philosophies, mature professionally, and better assess student learning outcomes (Loeser, 2008). Some studies have demonstrated that for high-risk students (Dieker, 1998) as well as those students with learning disabilities (Rice & Zigmond, 1999; Welch, 2000), co-teaching is an effective practice (Kohler, 2006). Different models exist on team teaching, but in the most effective model two or more teachers share responsibility for instruction for the entire class at the same time (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Many teachers have reported ambivalence (or internal conflict) with the idea of teaching in a classroom with someone else; on the one hand they like the opportunity it affords them for more contact with colleagues and possibly the other benefits mentioned above, but at the same time they are reluctant to surrender the freedom they have in their self-contained classroom (Seyfarth & Canady, 2001). Additionally, team teaching is often perceived as a challenge to the status quo and contrary to the established traditional cultures that already exist in schools (Murata, 2002).

Another factor that may affect teachers' attitudes toward team teaching is simply frustration. They often get discouraged when trying to implement any innovative practice, with their attitudes deriving from the experiences they have in attempting to implement an innovation such as team teaching (Gross, 1971). It is necessary to help teachers understand and anticipate possible problems they may encounter when trying to incorporate new practices into their own classrooms in order to prevent frustration and loss of interest (Gross, 1971). For team teaching to be successful, certain conditions are necessary. These include: "common planning time, clear expectations and roles, symbiotic relationships, consistent communication, accommodating schedules, and a genuine willingness to work collaboratively with a partner" (Loeser, 2008). Because team teaching comprises many intricacies and differing degrees of human behavior and interaction, careful consideration must be given to the many different factors that will help create successful partnerships with this practice (Loeser, 2008). Otherwise, the risk of combining incompatible teaching styles, personalities, and priorities exists, thereby creating an unhealthy and unproductive teaching and learning environment (Brenan & Witte, 2003). If team teaching and its benefits are to gain acceptance by teachers then, many dynamics must be considered.

Multiage Classrooms

Traditional graded classrooms group students in accordance with age criteria and utilize specific grade level distinctions such as 1st grade, 2nd grade, etc. Multiage classrooms, on the other hand, discount age distinctions and group children of differing developmental levels together. These classrooms are commonly referred to as non-graded classrooms due to this lack of grade level division (Loeser, 2008). In graded education, the assumption is that children who are the same chronological age are relatively analogous intellectually (Aina, 2001). However, students are not always closely related intellectually and in graded education classrooms those

that do not meet grade level criteria may be retained a year in order to help them catch up. The goal of the multiage classroom is to overcome this time limit imposed on children when it comes to learning. It takes into consideration that different children learn at different rates and allows them the needed extra time (Aina, 2001).

Research studies concerning age and ability grouping, promotion, and retention are now demonstrating that these practices are academically ineffective as well as damaging to children's self-esteem and motivation (Aina, 2001). Further, it has been purported that as a result of educator frustration when some students do not grasp curriculum concepts and materials they may be erroneously labeled as learning disabled or as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a way of attempting to define why they are having problems (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Multiage grouping it seems can help eliminate these outdated, ineffective practices.

One study on multiage classrooms found that classes with a student age range of around three years demonstrated consistently positive results on their achievement [a +0.50 correlation] (Lloyd, 1999). Additionally, the I.Q.'s of third graders that had spent three years in a multiage program increased significantly (+0.91) in reading achievement. This particular study also revealed no negative social or emotional effects for multiage grouping, and found that the diversity of the multiage classroom could actually more greatly benefit underachievers because a teacher that decided to commit to this type of grouping arrangement would be more likely to know how to teach students at varying developmental levels (Lloyd, 1999).

Teachers are required to break out of tradition in a multiage classroom, according to Loeser (2008). In this type of classroom they cannot rely heavily on whole-group instruction and much of the daily routine necessitates cooperative and peer-based learning (flexible grouping

strategies). They must employ differentiated instructional strategies, thereby adopting the belief that all students are different. They must learn to act more as a facilitator as opposed to the traditional director of the classroom (Loeser, 2008).

Some research has concluded that teachers tend to respond negatively to multiage classrooms and prefer not to teach them (Mason & Burns, 1995). Generally, the reasons provided for wanting to teach in single-grade classrooms as opposed to multiage classrooms is that with multiage classrooms there is significantly more planning and effort in classroom management required (Mason & Burns, 1995). Essentially, until they are able to develop a workable and consistent schedule, teaching in this type of classroom can be very difficult and overwhelming (Addington and Hinton, 1993; Chapman, 1995; Mason & Burns, 1995). One study explored the development of multiage program in a New York City public school and part of the study assessed teacher attitudes toward this practice. Overall teachers reported that they liked this type of grouping because they could see the benefits of children learning from each other; however, some of them also expressed concern about lack of administrative support and integrated curriculum planning difficulties (Springsteen, 1996).

Multiage classrooms that are to be successful must have “care, implementation, and maintenance” (Stone, 1996). Teachers must be given proper planning time, practical training, flexibility, and there must be an ongoing communication plan. If teachers are to change their mindsets toward multiage classrooms, they will need to have professional development and know that they have administrative support (Addington and Hinton, 1993; Aina, 2001).

Changing Attitudes

To further understand teachers’ feelings regarding best practices in education, consider a study that examined special education teachers’ views on research-based practices in an effort to

gain better understanding of how classroom practices are adopted and sustained as well as to improve teachers' use of research-based practices (Boardman et al., 2005). Results indicated that many teachers did not feel obligated to utilize certain methods or practices, even when they perceived that they were being required to do so by the school district. Still others felt that they should implement research-based programs in order to do their jobs most effectively. Many barriers to utilization of research-based practices stood out in particular with special education teachers. Because many of them have students at various levels represented in their classrooms as well their requirement to teach a number of subjects, special education teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by student needs and an extensive range of teaching responsibilities; these feelings and student needs often take precedence over the implementation of a new program or practice regardless of who selected it or its supposed benefits. Teachers also frequently noted lack of time and training, lack of access to materials and resources, and programs that did not meet the unique needs of their students as other reasons they would not be able implement best practices into their own classrooms. Methods or programs they tended to keep or sustain over time were those that engaged and motivated their "difficult-to-teach" students. Essentially, this study revealed that without giving attention to the fundamental needs of teachers even research-based methods that are supplemented by high-quality professional development are not likely to make their way into the classroom (Boardman et al., 2005). It also supports the need for professional development and access to resources if teachers are going to implement and sustain research-based practices.

An overall theme appears to be repeated when looking at the accumulation of the abovementioned studies: teacher's attitudes toward the implementation of new practices

(particularly those that require more effort and work) can improve through appropriate administrative support, proper communication and planning time, and professional development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the current study is to determine if participation in a six-week summer school enrichment program will yield a change in educator attitudes regarding best practices in classroom instruction procedures and student learning, seeking to find out if actual experience with the practices will demonstrate a significant difference in beliefs. Assessing whether or not change occurs in teacher attitudes will help not only in evaluating the program's effectiveness, but it may also lead to changes in procedures or the general practices in program implementation. The results of this study will provide those stakeholders involved in the program with valuable information in regards to program efficacy as well as information on whether the best practices approach to instruction and learning actually creates a positive change in educator attitudes.

Statement of Hypotheses

Teacher attitudes inevitably play a role in determining their classroom behavior, according to Azjen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. It is therefore important to ascertain the factors that shape the attitudes of teachers when participating in classrooms that implement best practices because teacher behavior and attitudes will ultimately affect their students and the success of the programs. In this current research, the hypotheses are posited as follows: The null hypothesis is that pre and post surveys will yield no significant change in attitude scores

regarding utilization of best practices in classroom instruction by educators who participate in a summer school enrichment program. The research hypothesis is pre and post survey results will yield a significant change in attitude scores regarding utilization of best practices in classroom instruction by educators who participate in a summer school enrichment program.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Participants

The participants included students enrolled in a graduate college in southern West Virginia pursuing master's degrees in special education, literacy, school psychology, and school counseling. Attendance of the graduate students in the summer school program as a practicum experience was required for completion of their programs. Participants were divided into teams by the administrators of the program. Each team consisted of students from each program represented, and every team member, regardless of the program they were in, was required to be involved in the education/teaching instruction of the attending K-8 students. Sixty students participated in the summer school program in 2007; fifty-four participated in 2008. Of the participants, the majority of them were white females. Of the data collected over these two summers, sixty-seven total pre-post surveys were matched out of the one hundred fourteen total participants

Instrument

The Educator Attitudes Summer Enrichment Program Survey was chosen with the intent of examining the change in teacher's attitudes concerning inclusion, team teaching, student grouping, multiage classrooms, and instructional strategies. The survey was designed by professors of the graduate college for this purpose. Survey questions were structured in a five-point Likert-type rating scale with 1 as an indicator of "Strongly Agree" and 5 as "Strongly Disagree," and included statements such as "Students should be grouped by ability" and "Special needs students should be in rooms with a small number of students and an aide." (A copy of the survey is available in Appendix A.) The test instrument was tested for validity by a

panel of experts that reviewed the items for content validity. A Cronbach's alpha analysis was also performed in order to obtain a measure of test instrument internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's alpha resulted in a reliability coefficient of 0.627. This indicates a relatively low measure of internal reliability. Nagel (2006) asserts that "as a rule of thumb, a proposed psychometric instrument should only be used if a value of 0.70 or higher is obtained on a substantial sample. However, the standard of reliability required varies between fields of psychology: cognitive tests (tests of intelligence or achievement) tend to be more reliable than tests of attitudes or personality."

Procedure

This study followed a pre-test post-test design and it examined whether or not there was a significant change in educator attitudes with regards to implementation of best practices based on survey responses before and after their participation in a summer school program. Participants were pre-tested before the program and tested again following completion of the program (post-test) in order to ascertain if attitudes changed as a result of program participation.

Data was collected from two groups of participants over two summers. Graduate students in 2007 and 2008 taking part in the summer school enrichment program were asked to complete a copy of the survey prior to their participation in the program during the initial group meeting without being told they would receive it a second time; surveys were then collected immediately after they were completed. Each group participant was then given the same survey following the end of the summer school program on the last day of participation to assess whether or not their attitudes changed toward the best practices strategies they were required to implement by a supervised staff of professors of the graduate college. There were different

participants in each group; however, the program was essentially the same over both summers, and therefore, the program experience was approximately the same for each group.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Data

Data was collected through distribution and collection of a Likert-type survey. The survey questions were structured in a five-point Likert-type rating scale with 1 as an indicator of “Strongly Agree” and 5 as “Strongly Disagree,” and included statements such as “Students should be grouped by ability” and “Special needs students should be in rooms with a small number of students and an aide.” The level of measurement of the data was therefore treated as ordinal data. The survey was administered using a pre-test post-test design in order to examine participants’ attitude changes concerning educational best practices.

Statistical Procedures and Data Analysis

Each test instrument survey question was treated as a separate variable. Although separately analyzed, the questions were grouped according to types of best practices implemented in the program. Because the teachers underwent nearly the same summer school experience (same program structure, professors, curriculum demands, etc), the data from the two groups (2007 and 2008) were aggregated rather than left separate. Bar graphs were then constructed with the combined data (See Figures section for bar graphs). Additionally, because the data was ordinal, for each question the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between pre-test post-test results. The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test applies two-sample designs involving repeated measures, matched pairs, or “before” and “after” measures. It is often used to test the difference between scores of data collected before and after an experimental manipulation.

The statistical analysis was examined at the $p < 0.05$ level. Statistical significance was not found in questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18. However, statistical significance was found in questions 4, 11, and 16.

<i>Co-Teaching</i>	Mean Rank Pre-Test	Mean Rank Post-test	Wilcoxon	Significance
Question 1	16.83	21.56	0.238	0.812
Question 7	18.30	15.92	0.112	0.911

* *Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Questions one and seven were intended to gauge participant's opinions on co-teaching. In the summer school program, each classroom includes five to eight educators, made up of a mix of students from the four previously mentioned graduate programs. Every participant, regardless of discipline, took part in planning lessons for and teaching the students in their classroom based on a best practices approach. With regards to co-teaching, the Wilcoxon Sign-Ranks Test revealed no significance with either of these questions. Bar graph comparisons indicated that the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the practice of co-teaching prior to the summer experience (see Figures 1 and 2).

<i>Inclusion</i>	Mean Rank Pre-Test	Mean Rank Post-test	Wilcoxon	Significance
Question 2	20.11	26.29	0.592	.554
Question 11	17.64	19.58	2.499	0.012*

* *Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Each summer school classroom is comprised of a variety of children that include a myriad of disabilities, ranging from mental impairment, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Down's syndrome, physical handicaps, learning problems, etc. Classrooms also are

mixed with “regular” education children as well. Questions two and eleven pertained to the issue of inclusion, and while question two showed no significance on the Wilcoxon test, question eleven was significant, indicative of a shift in educator attitudes toward this practice. In analyzing the bar graphs, over one third of the participants on the pre-survey reported that they were “neutral” with regards to their beliefs about placing special needs children in a classroom with a small number of students and an aide. However, after participation in the summer school, post-survey bar graph results indicated a more equal distribution of responses across rating options (see Figure 4).

<i>Student Grouping</i>	Mean Rank Pre-Test	Mean Rank Post-test	Wilcoxon	Significance
Question 4	21.15	17.69	2.303	0.021*
Question 5	20.76	18.64	1.842	0.65
Question 6	19.89	18.16	0.101	0.919
Question 10	19.00	21.73	0.945	0.345
Question 13	22.94	20.56	1.532	0.125
Question 16	20.62	18.77	2.129	0.033*

* *Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Throughout the five weeks of classes, students are grouped and regrouped frequently based on assessment data and progress monitoring results. Grouping students frequently can be a cumbersome task, requiring more work on the part of the teachers. With regards to student grouping, only questions four and sixteen resulted in significant change from pre to post (see Figures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10). Participants’ attitudes changed with regards to grouping students based on data, with more of them agreeing more strongly with this practice in the post-test

survey (Figure 5). The educators' attitudes also changed toward grouping children by skill (Figure 10). Nearly half of the respondents identified that they were "neutral" with regards to grouping children by skill during the pre-test survey; however, the overall general attitude trend shifted to agreement with this practice in the post-survey.

<i>Multiage Classrooms</i>	Mean Rank Pre-Test	Mean Rank Post-test	Wilcoxon	Significance
Question 15	21.48	26.13	0.210	0.833
Question 17	17.85	15.69	1.445	0.148
Question 18	18.86	21.33	0.087	0.930

* *Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Following best practices research, the concept of multiage classrooms is promoted in the summer enrichment program. Classrooms are comprised of two to three grade-levels oftentimes depending on the varied demographics of the K-8 enrollment each particular year. In examining the change of attitudes for multiage classrooms, no significance was found in any of the three questions, demonstrating that attitudes generally remained the same pre and post for participants with regards to this practice (Figures 11, 12, and 13).

<i>Instructional Strategies</i>	Mean Rank Pre-Test	Mean Rank Post-test	Wilcoxon	Significance
Question 3	17.31	15.06	0.471	0.637
Question 8	16.89	11.71	0.627	0.531
Question 9	19.88	19.30	1.701	0.089
Question 12	14.21	19.75	1.035	0.301
Question 14	12.26	17.95	0.130	0.896

* *Significant at $p < 0.05$*

Instruction of students in the summer enrichment program includes limited teacher lecture, with a major focus on small group, hands-on learning stations. Results of the Wilcoxon Test yielded no significant change in teacher attitudes from pre to post with regards to this educational practice. Bar graph results indicated that most participants agreed with small groups and learning stations as effective teaching strategies prior to and following the summer school experience (Figures 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18).

Summary of Qualitative Comments

Although the Educator Attitudes Summer Enrichment Program Survey did not provide an area for additional comments by participants, many of them wrote out their comments and beliefs about the survey questions. Some participants included statements concerning individual questions while some made comments about the survey overall. It is recommended that future use of the survey include a section for such comments. Overall, comments seemed to convey that many of the questions were vague and not relevant to all children. For example, on inclusion, question number eleven that stated, "Special Needs Students should be in rooms with a small number of students and an aide." Some participants commented that this statement was too general and that how they were inclined to respond to this depended on the nature of the disability. Their explanation for this was that it is easier to include children with "milder" disabilities such as a learning disability in regular classrooms than it is to include children with moderate mental impairment. Therefore, more specific questions on "special needs" may be warranted in future use of the survey.

One participant commented that with regards to the questions on learning strategies that response to the survey statements "largely depends on the objective that is being taught." Others also commented that they felt grouping students also "depends on the activity" or "learning

objective.” Statements such as these seem to imply that participants felt that the questions were not quite specific enough at times and were unsure about how to respond. Many of them simply responded with the opinion of “neutral” followed by their comments when they felt a question was not clear or specific enough.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in a six-week summer school enrichment program would yield a change in educator attitudes regarding best practices in classroom instruction procedures and student learning, seeking to find out if actual experience with the practices would demonstrate a significant difference in teacher beliefs. Sixty-seven participants completing education-oriented graduate programs at a university in southern West Virginia responded to the pre-post Likert survey over two summers (2007 and 2008). Results of pre-survey bar graph comparisons indicated that the majority of participants held progressive views toward best practices in education prior to the summer school enrichment experience. Therefore, post-test results did not yield great change, with only three questions indicating significance when analyzed with the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test.

Participants' initial positive attitudes toward best practices could be the result of the progressive-centered educational programs and professors at the university. Additionally, even though demographics were not obtained from the participants, the majority of them were estimated to be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, with five or less years experience working in a classroom setting. When referring back to the age and growth stage related phase theories (Rusch and Perry, 1993) and the effect of progressive teaching programs (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James, 2001) on teachers' attitudes discussed in the literature review, the progressive attitudes held by participants prior to participation in the program appear to be congruent with these studies. Finally, because the summer school program is only six weeks in duration and participants only spent five of those weeks with the attending students, it may be questionable if true attitude change had sufficient time to occur in such a short length of

time, and may explain the lack of significant change in responses across the majority of survey questions. This concept may require further consideration and research in future studies in this area.

Implications for Future Study

It is recommended that this study be replicated based on the following observations during this study:

- Demographics would have been helpful in better understanding participants' viewpoints and possibly in breaking down data further in an attempt to match specific attitudes to the participant. For example, would participants' attitudes towards best practices be as progressive if they were older and had more experience in traditional classrooms?
- The effects of team cohesion may also have an impact on teacher attitudes toward best practices from pre to post. This factor was not considered in the present study; however, it is recommended that any further studies in this area take teaming into consideration.
- The Educator Attitudes Summer Enrichment Program Survey requires revisions on certain questions, as indicated by the Cronbach's Alpha result. Participants wrote comments out from many of the questions stating that certain ones were too broad and not specific enough with regards to certain practices, particularly student grouping and inclusion.

Conclusion

The summer school enrichment program is certainly not a traditional classroom experience. Classrooms are comprised of six to eight educators that share responsibilities for lesson planning, instruction, and positive classroom behavior management implementation. The primary instructional strategies involve small groups and learning stations, as opposed to

traditional teacher lectures and worksheets. Full inclusion is utilized and multiage classrooms are common. Participants receive support from university professors as well as each other.

The university's educational training programs prior to participation fully prepare participants for involvement in the summer program. The summer school experience affords participants the opportunity to try out what the research demonstrates is working with regards to best practices in the classroom, allowing them to experience for themselves what it is to be a part of a classroom that is fully progressive and to witness firsthand the positive results for the students in their care for that summer.

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FIGURES

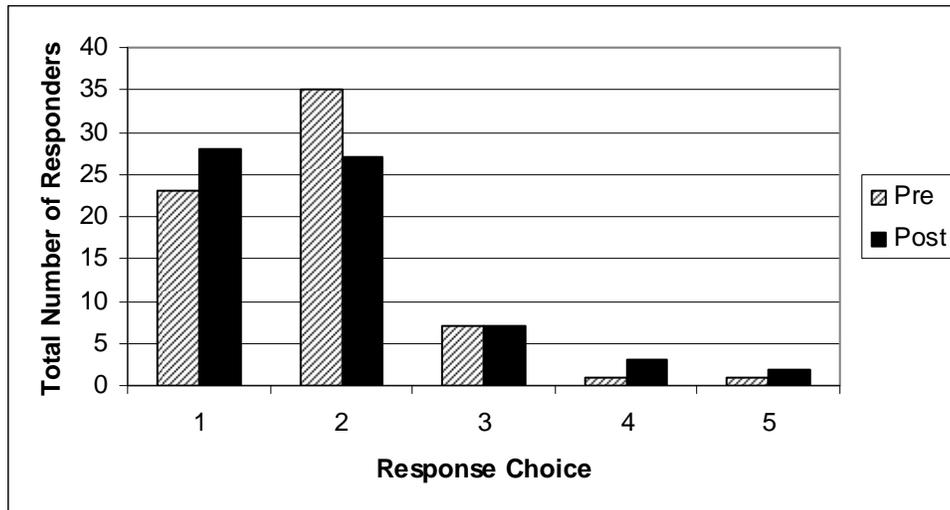


Figure 1. Total number of responses for Co-teaching Question 1 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

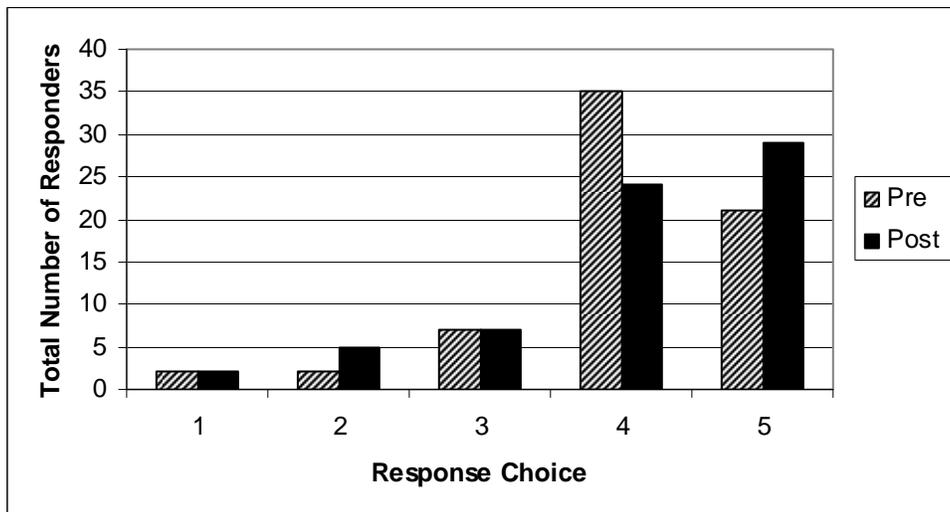


Figure 2. Total number of responses for Co-teaching Question 7 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

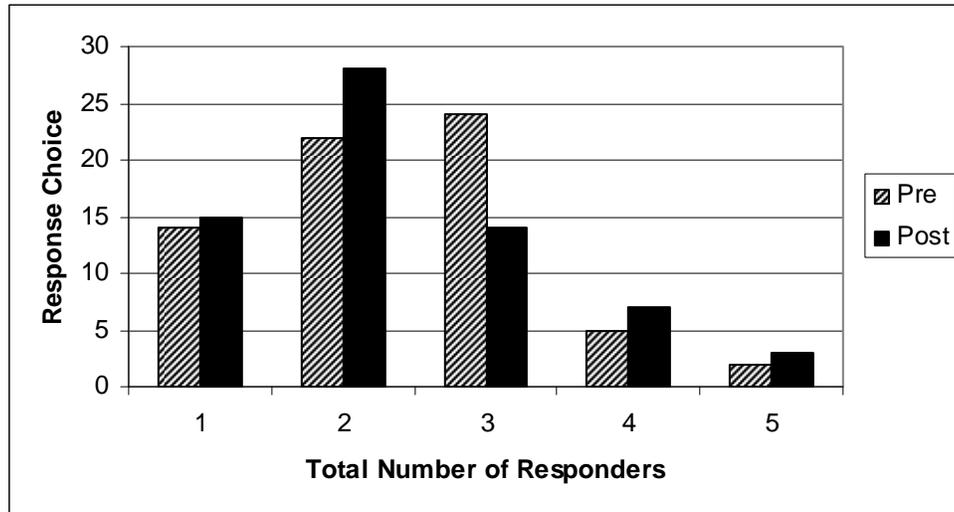


Figure 3. Total number of responses for Inclusion Question 2 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

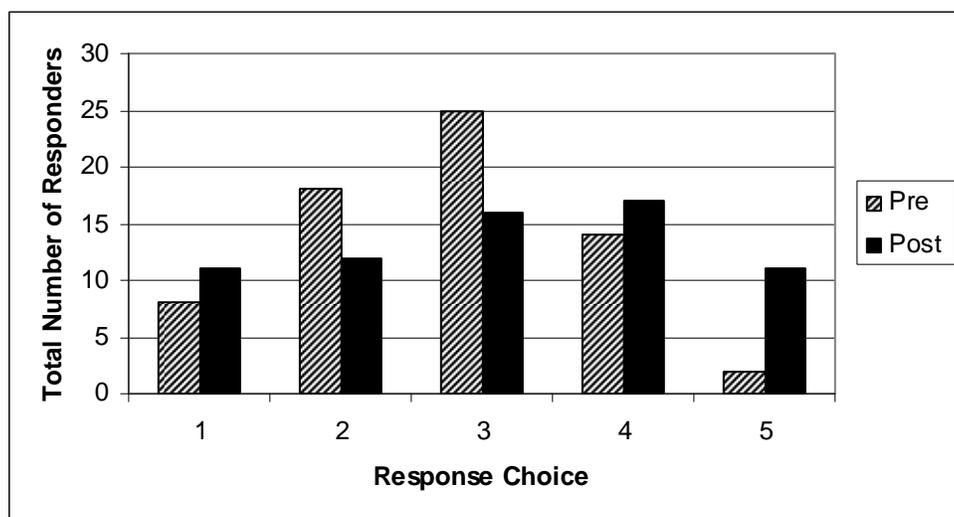


Figure 4. Total number of responses for Inclusion Question 11 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

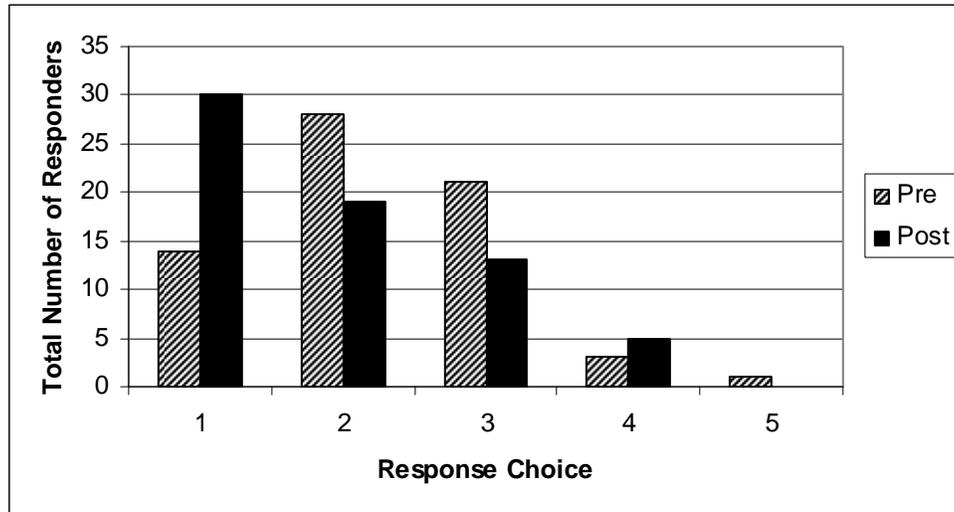


Figure 5. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 4 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

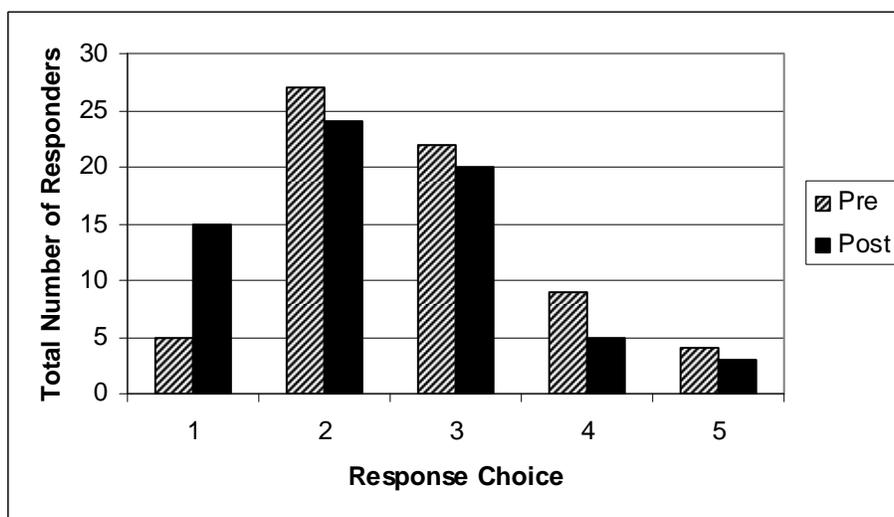


Figure 6. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 5 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

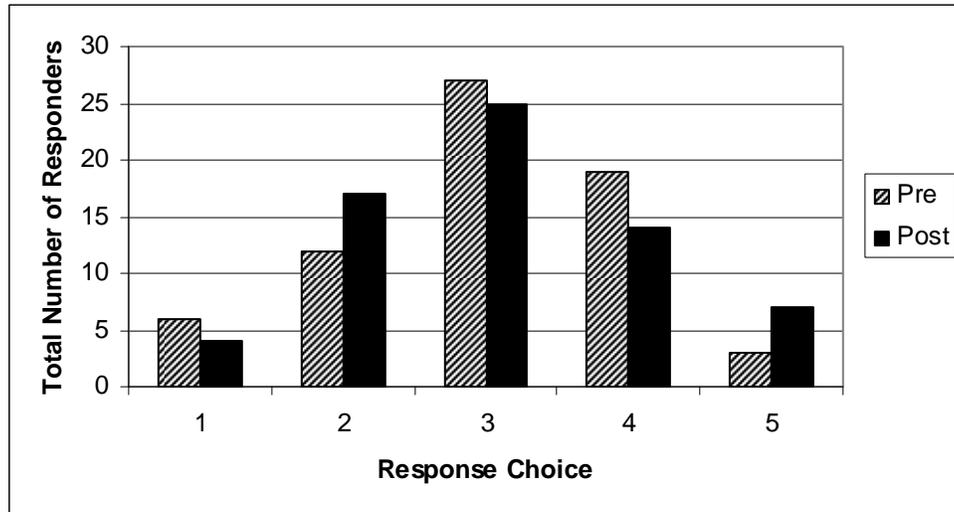


Figure 7. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 6 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

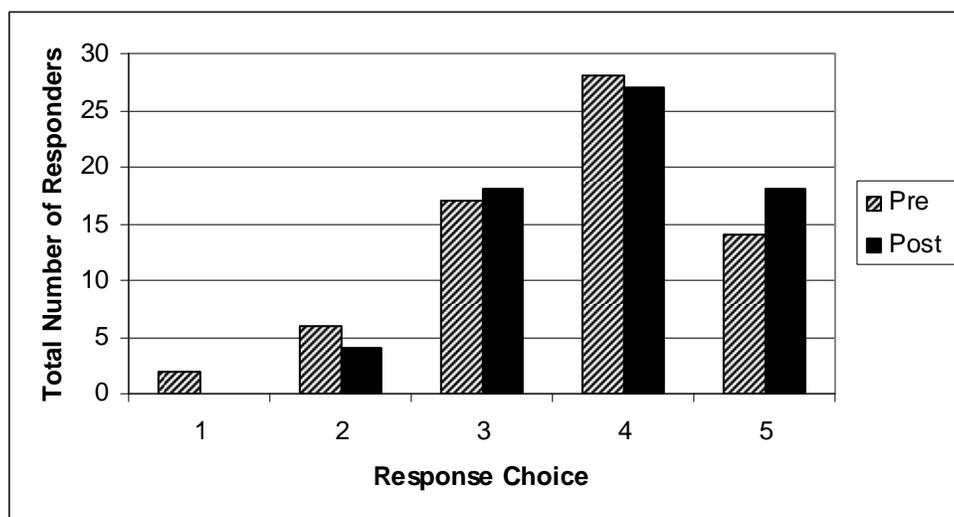


Figure 8. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 10 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

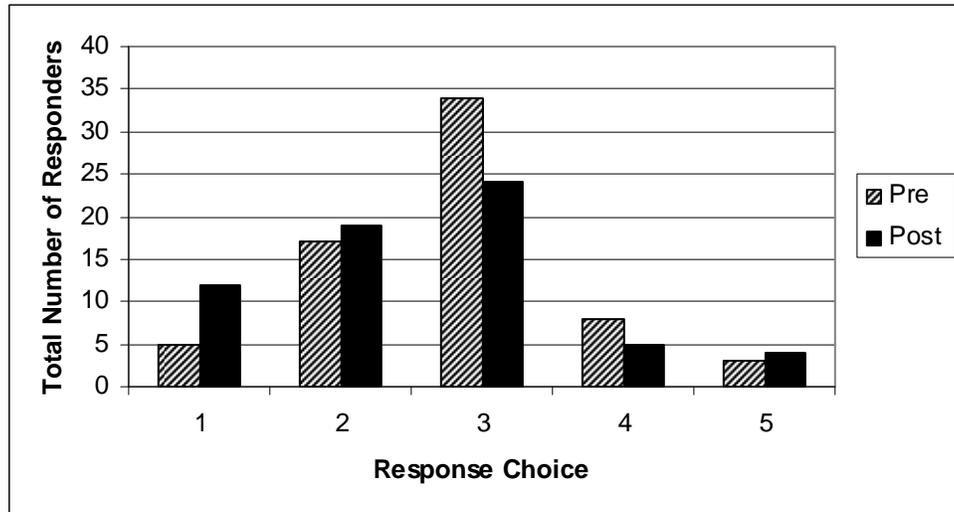


Figure 9. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 13 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

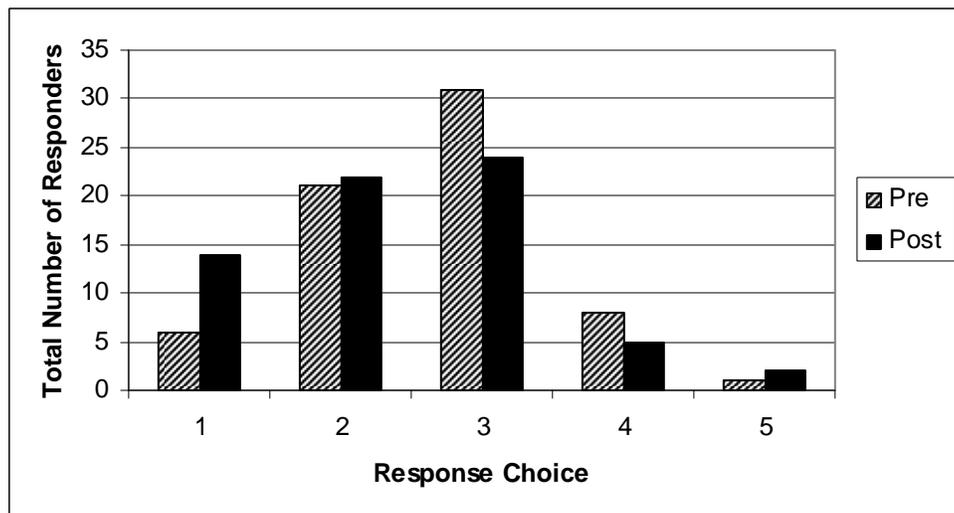


Figure 10. Total number of responses for Student Grouping Question 16 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

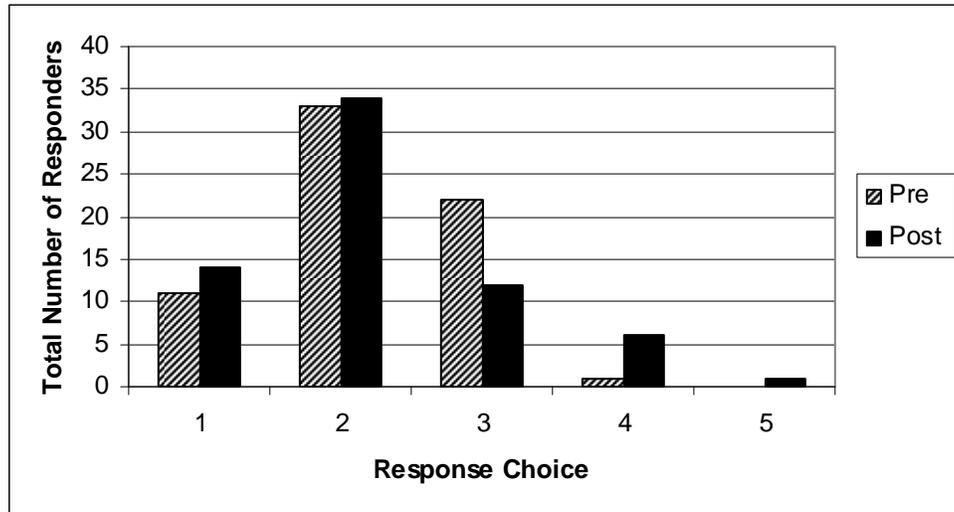


Figure 11. Total number of responses for Multiage Classrooms Question 15 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

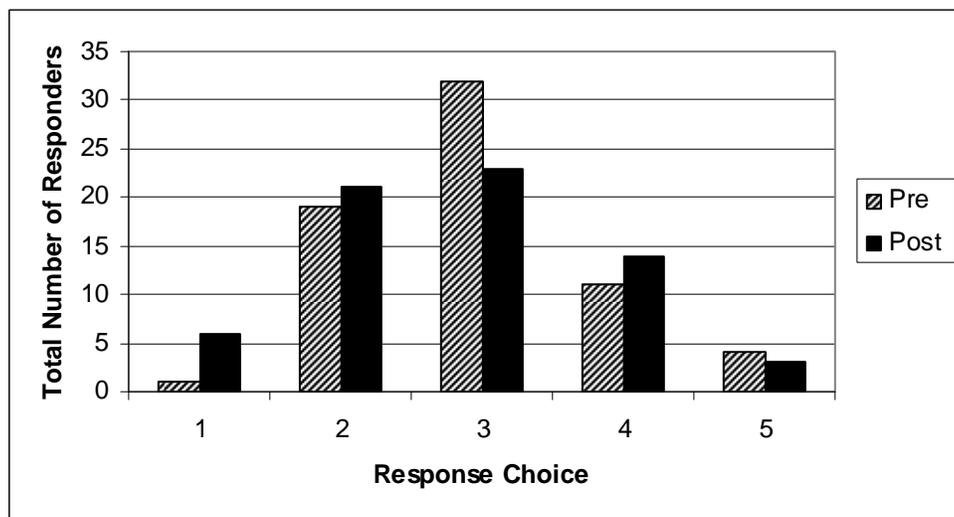


Figure 12. Total number of responses for Multiage Classrooms Question 17 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

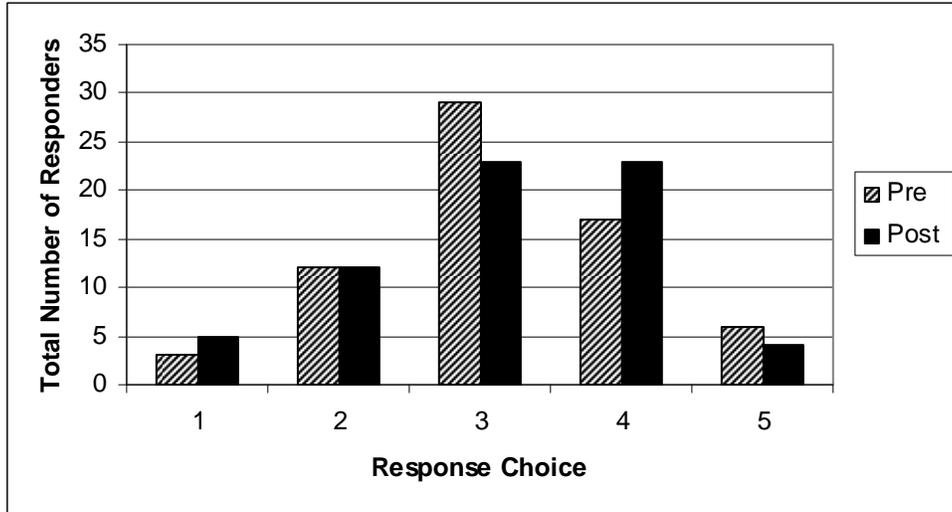


Figure 13. Total number of responses for Multiage Classrooms Question 18 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

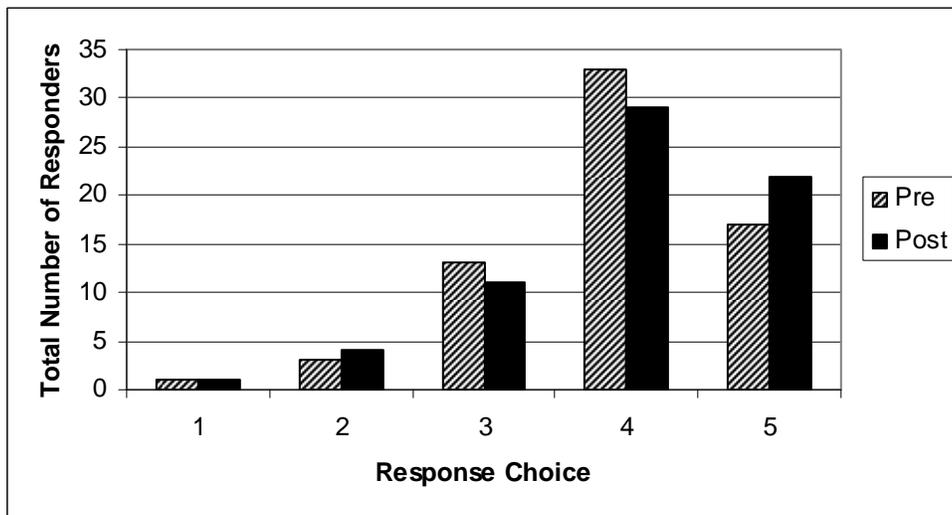


Figure 14. Total number of responses for Instructional Strategies Question 3 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

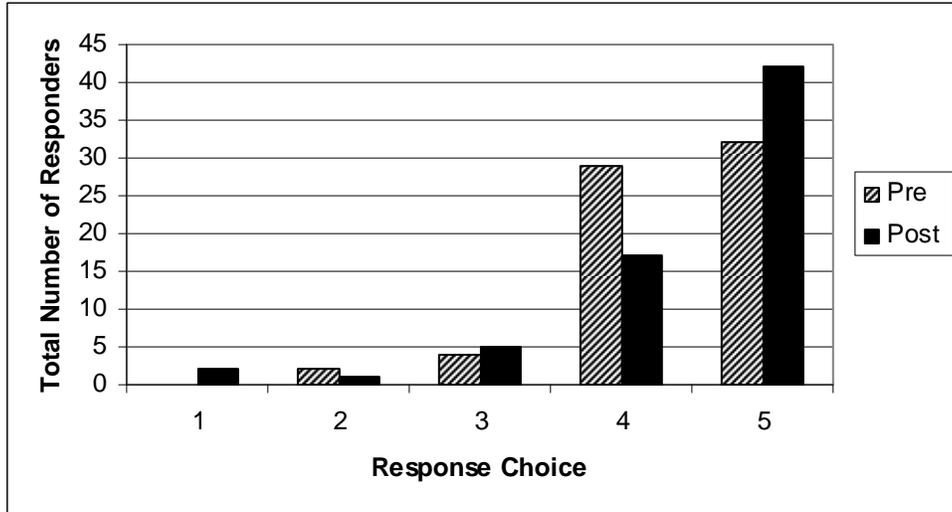


Figure 15. Total number of responses for Instructional Strategies Question 8 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

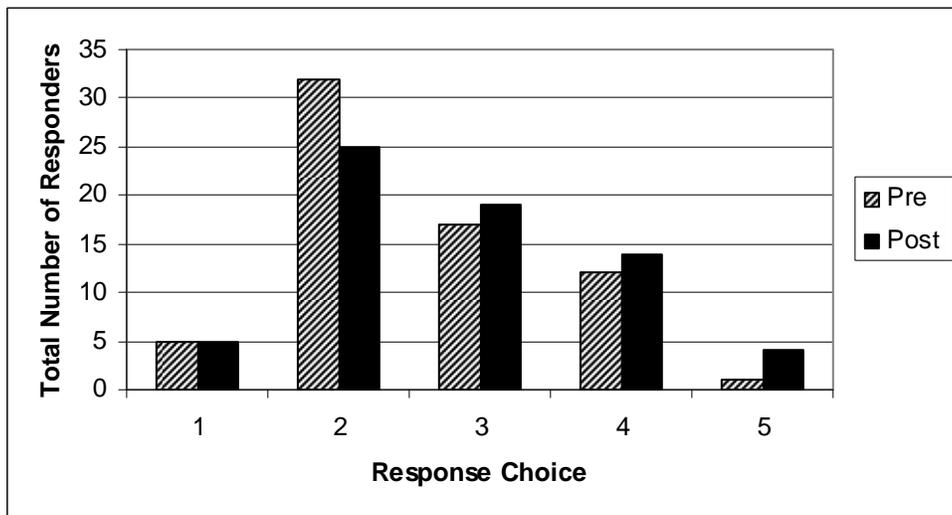


Figure 16. Total number of responses for Instructional Strategies Question 9 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

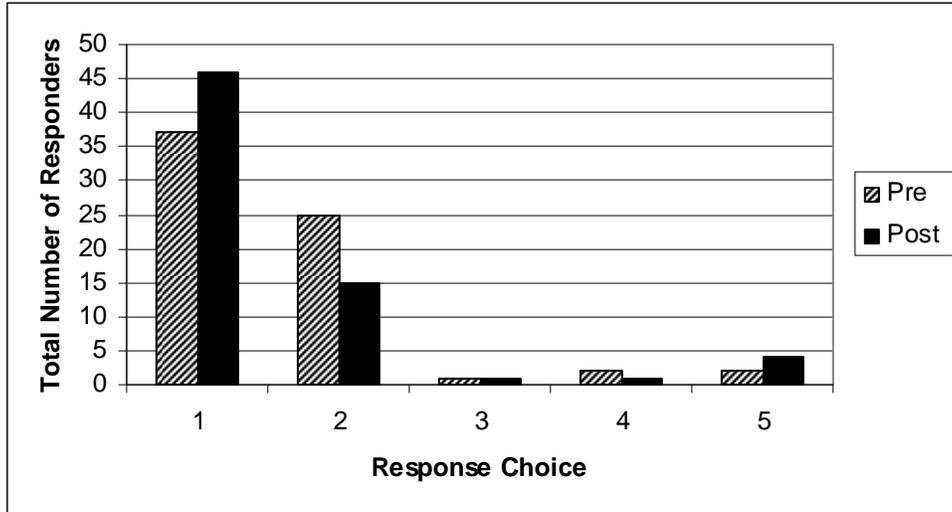


Figure 17. Total number of responses for Instructional Strategies Question 12 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

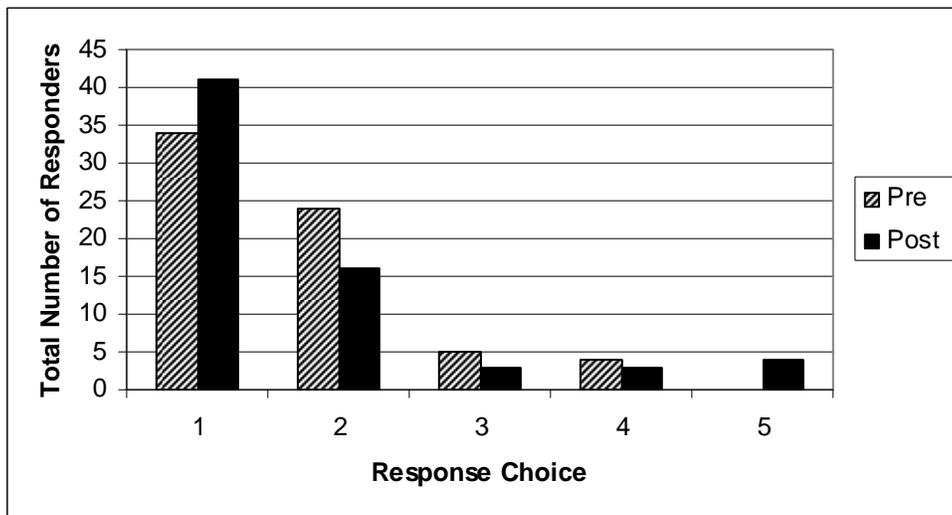


Figure 18. Total number of responses for Instructional Strategies Question 14 on a 5-point Likert rating scale utilizing a pre-post survey.

APPENDIX A

**Marshall University Graduate College
Educator Attitudes Summer Enrichment Program Survey**

Name: _____

We are interested in your opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your responses to this will not affect your grade. **This is only used for Program Evaluation.**

Please use the ratings below to answer the following questions.

Ratings:

1-Strongly Agree 2- Agree 3-Neutral 4-Disagree 5-Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Co-teaching gives support to the teacher and provides better instruction to the students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Inclusion (providing services to special education students in the regular classroom) is an optimal way to teach students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Students learn more when information is presented through lecture. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. It is best to regroup students based on data. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Students should be regrouped each semester. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Students should be regrouped weekly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Having two teachers in a room is confusing for students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8.	Learning stations should only be used in Kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Independent seat work is an important tool in learning.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Grouping children is wrong; students need role models in class.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Special Needs Students should be in rooms with a small number of students and an aide.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Students learn best by doing.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Students should be grouped by ability.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Learning stations are an effective learning strategy at all age levels.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Students of similar ages should be in a class together.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Students should be grouped by skill.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Multi-age grouping (having more than one age group in a class) in a positive classroom arrangement.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	It is too difficult to teach to different ages within the same classroom.	1	2	3	4	5