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Attitudes between Students with Disabilities and Typically Developing Students

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Attitudes between Students with Disabilities and Typically Developing Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes between students with disabilities and typically developing children as well as factors that may influence them. Ten students participated in the study. Five of the students had disabilities, and the other five students were considered typically developing. All participants were interviewed by the researcher. Interview results showed that students with disabilities and typically developing children are isolated from each other in the school environment despite the efforts of inclusion. Although, most students reported generally positive attitudes, responses indicated that two student groups are not offered enough opportunities to interact for students to make informed decisions regarding their opinions and attitudes.

Keywords: attitudes, students with disabilities, typically developing students, friendship, interaction

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Within the past few decades, the shift in educating students with special needs has turned in the direction of inclusive education. This has led to rapid growth in the practice of inclusion within public schools. Inclusion places students with disabilities in classrooms with peers who do not have disabilities. Inclusive classrooms are generally limited to students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

Before the inclusion movement, interactions between typically developing children and children with disabilities were limited. Most often, the only exposure to individuals with disabilities a typically developing child might have would be through that of a family member. In today's public school, typically developing children and students with disabilities interact on a daily basis.

The amount of time and contextual situations in which students interact go a long way in shaping the attitudes of the two distinct populations of students toward one another. For example, if a typically developing peer has never spoken with or spent time around a student with a disability, he or she may not have had enough exposure to form an attitude toward individuals with disabilities; whereas a typically developing student with a considerate amount of exposure to individuals with disabilities most likely has a well-formed opinion and attitude.

This study investigated the interactions, attitudes, and friendships between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers through the use of student interviews. A discussion of psychosocial development in children with disabilities will explain the importance of developing and maintaining friendships on the self-esteem of children. Also, strategies and interventions suitable for improving social skills for students with disabilities are presented.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the inclusion movement in education, students with disabilities are attending public school with typically developing peers. These students are also attending general education classes together. In the past, students with disabilities were taught in separate classrooms, and in some cases separate schools. The transition to inclusive education has not been easy for these two diverse groups of students, both academically and socially.

For many reasons, students with disabilities have socialization issues. Many have behavior problems or act inappropriately in social situations. These types of behaviors are disconcerting to typically developing children who do not have experience interacting with individuals with disabilities. This can make having peers with disabilities in the classroom an uncomfortable experience for many students.

This experience can be equally uncomfortable for students with disabilities who are lonely and depressed because they are unable to make friends in their classes. Many of these students do not understand why they have so much trouble socializing. Unfortunately, they do understand what it feels like to be rejected. The emotional pain from rejection and friendlessness can have damaging consequences on the psychosocial development of children. These consequences can perpetuate throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

This study will presenets multiple interventions that are useful for teaching social skills to students with disabilities. However, due to increasing demands on teachers to raise achievement scores on statewide testing, little time remains to provide social skills instruction. Life skills and social skills training programs have been placed on the backburner in special education and have been replaced with an emphasis on raising test scores. While student academic achievement is a crucial component of special education, life skills and social skills training are two areas that are necessary to promote a healthy and successful life after the school years are over.

Research Topic Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of students with disabilities and their typically developing peers toward each other through the use of student interviews. Each group of students were asked a series of questions that will reveal their attitudes, as well as factors that may contribute to them. Some questions required a yes or no answer, while some questions required an open-ended response.

For example, typically developing students were asked how often they interact with students with disabilities. The same question was asked to students with disabilities in regards to their typically developing peers. Typically developing students were asked if they have a family member with a disability. They were also asked to describe what they know about disabilities, as well as to explain how an individual gets a disability. The answer to this question may have a connection to their attitudes toward disability. An example of an open ended question during student interviews was: How does having students with disabilities in your classroom affect your ability to learn?

In replace of the previous question, students with disabilities were asked to describe their academic performance in the classroom. They were also asked to choose a best friend in one of their classes. It was interesting to discern if they identify a fellow peer with a disability or a typically developing peer. Students with disabilities were also asked questions that revealed information about the amount of time they spend with typically developing peers, including time outside of school. They were asked if they participate in extra-curricular activities, such as athletic teams or clubs. They were also asked to describe their favorite hobbies.

Research Question

What are the attitudes of students with disabilities and their typically developing peers toward each other? This question was answered through the use of student interviews. As discussed previously, typically developing children and students with disabilities were asked different questions. Questions were designed to explore areas of attitudes, interactions, friendships, and academics. The interviews were conducted in a one-on-on format. Many of the questions were open-ended so that the participants have the opportunity to be descriptive and thorough in their responses.

Responses were compared and contrasted with a focus on the background information of the participants. It was expected for the attitudes between the attitudes of typically developing students toward students with disabilities to be influenced by the amount of time they spend with them. It was also expected that the amount of knowledge typically developing peers possess about disabilities will influence their attitudes toward their peers with disabilities.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Attitudes, friendships, and interactions

The attitudes of typically developing students toward students with disabilities is becoming a heavily researched topic due to the momentum of the inclusion movement in education. These attitudes can have life-long impacts on children with disabilities. Negative attitudes can have damaging consequences for students with disabilities, such as loneliness, few friendships, and the potential for becoming victims of bullying (de Boer, Pijl. & Minnaert, 2012).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), the number of children receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) comprises approximately 13% of all public school students. Students with specific learning disabilities account for about 36% of all students receiving services, which is higher than any other type of disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Approximately 95% of students receiving services under IDEA in 2011-2012 were enrolled in regular schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The percentage of students with disabilities who spend at least 80% of the school day in general education classes is about 60%, a figure that has doubled in size since 1990 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These statistics reflect the growing trend of inclusive education in the United States.

Research has consistently shown that there are multiple factors that affect the attitudes of typically developing children toward students with disabilities. Children younger in age tend to hold more positive attitudes (Swaim & Morgan, 2001), while older children express more negative feelings (Tang, Davis, Wu, & Oliver, 2000). Gender also plays a role, as girls have been found to be more positive than boys (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012). de Boer et al. (2012) explain that students with behavior problems are more likely to garner negative attitudes

from peers. However, all students with disabilities do not exhibit negative attitudes. Ladd and Troop-Gordon (2010) found that children who are aggressive are likely to be friendless and experience rejection from peers, as well as victimization. Both outcomes can lead to internalizing and externalizing psychological problems (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003).

A 2011 study by Litvack, Ritchie, and Shore examines the attitudes of high and average achieving students, as well as students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom, toward disability. The study yielded interesting results. Based on the finding that 16.7% of the students (10 out of the 60 participants) were not aware of any classmates having disabilities, the researchers inferred that students with disabilities that are not visibly noticeable may be perceived as lazy, inept, or disruptive (Litvack, Ritchie, & Shore, 2011).

Litvack et al. (2011) found that 50% (15) of the high achieving students participating in the study reported learning less because of the presence of students with disabilities in their class. The following quote from a high-achieving male student in the study describes the frustrations many gifted students experience in inclusive classrooms:

> It's kind of annoying if you really understand…and you have to wait for everybody else to learn it and [the teacher] already repeated it seven times…If you get bored, you don't really want to pay attention and you might start going down in school. (Litvack et al., 2011, p. 483)

Oppositely, most average achieving participants in the study reported that having classmates with disabilities did not affect their learning, and very few students reported that their learning increased as a result of being in an inclusive classroom (Litvack et al., 2011).

According to Vitaro, Boivin, and Bukowski (2009), at least one close friendship is constructive to a person's welfare. Therefore, the quantity of friendships a child has is not as

crucial as the quality of those friendships. Emotional consequences from negative social experiences such as bullying can be less impactful because of the support and stability from a reciprocated friendship (Vitaro, Boivin, & Bukowski, 2009). In a 2011 study, Reed, McIntyre, Dusek, and Quintero found that fewer than 20% of students with disabilities identified a reciprocal friend, while over 50% of non-disabled peers did. Ladd et al. (2003) found that chronic friendlessness is linked to damaging consequences for children. Chronic friendlessness contributes to negative self- and peer beliefs and also is connected to psychological adjustment problems (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003).

Children with disabilities may have more difficulty than nondisabled peers developing and sustaining friendships (DiGennaro Reed, McIntyre, Dusek, & Quintero, 2011). Solish, Perry, and Minnes (2010) explain that delays in motor, cognitive, language, communication, perceptual, and/or social skills could be contributing factors. Reed et al. (2011) found that disabled students were less likely to be nominated as a first choice to sit with at lunch, play with at recess, or be a part of a small cooperative group.

Another contributing factor to this problem is that students with disabilities may have less opportunities to interact with typically developing peers. Children with disabilities are generally less involved with recreational activities outside of school time (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010). Extra-curricular activities, such as sports or clubs, are an excellent avenue for children to develop and maintain friendships. Since children with disabilities generally do not participate in outside of school activities there are less opportunities for interactions with typically developing peers. According to Smith-D'Arezzo (2003), students' perceptions of peers with disabilities is linked with exposure (or lack thereof) to family members with disabilities.

A major premise of inclusive education is to provide social opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with typically developing peers. However, research shows that even though these students are placed in the same classroom it does not guarantee interactions will take place (Litvack et. al., 2011). Litvack et al. (2011) found that one-third of average achieving and high achieving participants reported that they had little to no interaction with classmates with disabilities.

Psychosocial Development

Psychosocial development during adolescence centers mostly on matters regarding self-esteem and identity (Adamson, 2003). The fifth stage of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory is called identity versus role confusion, which takes place during the years of adolescence (Woolfolk, 2005). It is in this stage that peer relationships become crucial. According to Erikson (1963), peer relationships provide opportunities for adolescents to practice social skills that will help form their identities. If social skills are not obtained, adolescents may experience role confusion (Stephens, Dieppa, & LeBlanc, 2006).

Stainback, Stainback, East, and Sapon-Shevin (1994) acknowledge that the practice of inclusion can have an impact on the ability of students with disabilities to develop a positive self-identity. Stainback et al. (1994) contend that "the goal of inclusion is to create a community in which all children work and learn together and develop mutually supportive repertoires of peer support, the goal has never been to become oblivious to children's individual differences" (pp. 486-487). Schools must embrace individual differences among students and provide an environment conducive for all students to develop positive self-identities (Stainback & et al., 1994).

Children often form perceptions of themselves based on how they believe others view them (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). The perceptions of others impact children when forming a self-identity. Children who experience peer rejection have difficulties obtaining a positive sense of self (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). Undesirable experiences with peers, especially during early and middle childhood, have negative effects on psychological adjustment (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003).

A 2010 study by Dammeyer focused on the psychosocial development of deaf and hearing impaired children, as well as children with cochlear implants. The study also included children with intellectual disabilities and autism. Dammeyer (2010) found that the severity of the psychosocial difficulties of hearing impaired or deaf children depended upon the ability of the children to communicate, whether verbally or using some form of sign language. Children who were not able to communicate effectively have a higher prevalence of psychosocial difficulties (Dammeyer, 2010). Dammeyer (2010) also found that children with multiple disabilities (cognitive, physical, or visual) and boys are at a greater risk for problems in psychosocial development. Children who do not experience psychosocial difficulties generally feel good about themselves, feel comfortable around others, regulate tension and anxiety, and are able to meet goals (Dammeyer, 2010).

In 2003, Adamson's study found that disabled students reported a decidedly more positive self-image than norm groups. Because attitudes to oneself are formed prior to the age of adolescence, children with disabilities may not be as vulnerable to negative attitudes or other damaging social experiences (Adamson, 2003). Adamson (2003) also suggested a low amount of social interaction with persons who are not family members as another reason why the participants in her study maintained a positive self-image.

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Contrary to Adamson's 2003 findings, other research shows that students with learning disabilities do generally hold more negative self-concepts than their typically developing peers (Zeleke, 2004). However, Zeleke (2004) found that students with learning disabilities view themselves differently over different dimensions of self. For example, students with learning disabilities may have a negative self-concept regarding their academic lives when held in comparison to nondisabled peers; whereas, they may feel better about their social and overall self-image (Zeleke, 2004).

Thomas, Butler, Hare, and Green (2011) conducted a study to determine if personal construct theory could be effective in helping adolescents with learning disabilities improve their self-image. The following nine dimensions of self were used with participants as themes for their personal constructs: 1) social, 2)emotional, 3)physical appearance, 4) moral judgment, 5) trying at school, 6) activities, interests, and possessions, 7) normality and difference, 8) maturity, and 9) miscellaneous (Thomas, Butler, Hare, & Green, 2011). Thomas et al. (2011) found that although the participants had low cognitive ability compared to their typically developing peers, this did not hinder their ability to communicate unique and complex self-constructs. This suggests that "cognitive developmental factors influence but do not determine self-image in people with intellectual disabilities" (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 39).

Interventions and strategies

In general, students with intellectual disabilities tend to lack the social skills necessary to maintain positive interactions with others. Avcioglu (2012) defines social skills as "acting appropriately regarding the social environment" (p. 345). Teachers can help combat this issue by using social skills interventions in the classroom. There are a variety of interventions and

strategies, and social skills training programs that can be used to help improve socialization for children with and without disabilities.

Social skills training is a practice that aims to teach age-appropriate social skills and capabilities, such as conflict-resolution, decision making, self-management, communication, and peer interactions (What Works, 2013). When implemented at an early age social skills training has positive effects on psychosocial development and behavior for children with disabilities (What Works, 2013). What Works (2013) also found no significant findings to support positive effects on cognition.

Typically developing children are able to acquire social skills by observing others; however, children with intellectual disabilities need explicit instruction on social skills in a methodical way (Avcioglu, 2012). Avcioglu (2012) also emphasizes the need for early intervention of social skills strategies so that students with disabilities do not fall well behind typically developing peers in socialization. Walton and Ingersoll (2013) agree that early intervention is an important component of social skills intervention. They also suggest that ongoing intervention throughout life is essential to maintain progress.

A 2011 meta-analysis by January, Casey, and Paulson evaluated the effectiveness of classroom-wide social skills interventions from 28 peer-reviewed journal articles. The authors limited their analysis on articles that focused on Tier 1 level of social skills support, which targets an entire age population (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011). This level of intervention would be most often used on all or most students in a school. The authors noted three significant findings. First, social skills interventions are most effective in the early grades of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Also, early adolescence can provide another opportunity for effective social skills instruction due to friendships and relationships becoming more complex

during these years. Second, the amount of time social skills programs last is an indicator of effectiveness. The longer the program, the more positive the outcomes. Lastly, social skills programs that enable students to engage in hands-on activities, such as role-playing, are more effective than programs that only involve only discussion or academic instruction.

Walton and Ingersoll (2013) conducted a literature review for the purpose of gauging the effectiveness of social skills interventions designed for adolescents and adults with autism and severe to profound intellectual disabilities. Overall intellectual functioning with autism can fall in the average to superior range; however, up to 40% of individuals with autism also have intellectual disabilities in the severe to profound range (Fombonne, 2003). According to Stephens, Dieppa, and LeBlanc (2006), autistic children have social difficulties with inferring and communicating human emotions.

Walton and Ingersoll (2013) concluded that video modeling, peer-mediated, behavioral, and structured teaching interventions show evidence of early effectiveness for improving social behaviors among this particular population. Video modeling interventions consist of showing students videos of desired behaviors and social techniques with the hope of the students reiterating those in social situations (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013).   Peer-mediated interventions involve teaching typically developing students strategies for interacting with individuals with autism (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013). Behavioral interventions focus on changing behavior by using positive reinforcement (such as a reward) for desired behaviors and withholding the reward as negative reinforcement for undesired behaviors (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013). Structured teaching interventions call for individual evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of each student that are used to create individualized plans of instruction (Walton & Ingersoll, 2013).

According to Avcioglu (2012), self-management strategies are effective in improving social skills and help students with disabilities refrain from displaying inappropriate behaviors. In 2012, Avcioglu's research found that the self-management skills training program used in his study was able to help students with disabilities express feelings of anger without harming others, as well as solve conflicts through talking instead of fighting. The students also continued using these skills after the program had ended. The program consisted of one 40 minute session each day four times a week. The targeted skills were taught using stories and picture cards. Students managed their own behavior using self-management contracts.

Sebag (2012) presented a self-management strategy for students with disabilities called the self-advocacy behavior management (SABM) model. This model has five steps in which the student leads, while the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator (Sebag, 2010). In the first step, the student and the teacher complete daily conduct forms that highlight areas of concern (Sebag, 2010). In the second step, the student identifies his or her own struggle(s) by reflecting on the conduct forms created in Step 1 (Sebag, 2010). In the third step, the student creates a strategy to address the struggle(s) (Sebag, 2010). In the fourth step, the student has a follow-up conference with the teacher to reflect on the effectiveness of the strategy (Sebag, 2010). In the final step, the student makes necessary adjustment(s) to goal(s) and/or strategy for continued progress (Sebag, 2010).

Sebag (2010) explains that by using this strategy, students become more aware of their actions and begin to form goals based on a greater knowledge of their own sense of self. The ultimate goal of the program is to teach students the ability to effectively manage their own behavior issues. The SABM model can provide students with the skills needed to become self-

sufficient at school as well as at home (Sebag, 2010). According to Sebag (2010), the SABM model has proven to be successful for students with special needs.

This student-centered approach involves the concept of self-determination. Wehmeyer (2005) describes self-determination as "volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to maintain or improve one's quality of life" (p. 117). Self-determination among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities has been associated with positive results during school years and beyond (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). According to Wehmeyer and Abery (2013), endorsing self-determination is best practice for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

de Boer et al. (2012) found that students typically become more understanding and accepting of students with disabilities when they have knowledge of what the disabilities are and how they affect their peers. Equipped with this type of knowledge, instead of becoming annoyed by problem behaviors from students with disabilities, typically developing children could understand why the behavior is occurring. Based on this finding, it can be inferred that interventions geared toward typically developing students may be useful in improving attitudes toward students with disabilities. Children's literature specialists have recommended the use of books with characters that have disabilities as a method of introducing typically developing children to the concept of disability (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010). According to Smith-D'Arezzo and Thomas (2010), literature can be used to teach empathy and compassion for individuals facing prejudice or other adversities.

Smith-D'Arezzo and Thomas (2010) used books with characters that have disabilities in structured book discussion groups. The students participating were fifth graders in an urban school district. Smith-D'Arezzo and Thomas wanted to determine through student interviews if

the perceptions of students with disabilities changed after the intervention of the discussion groups.

After analyzing pre-intervention interview data, Smith-D'Arezzo and Thomas (2010) found that the participants viewed learning disability in a negative light, even though the book discussed portrayed the concept of learning disability in a positive manner. Smith-D'Arezzo and Thomas (2010) explained that the participants felt that "if you have a learning disability, you should work harder, study more and pay better attention in class, in other words, the disability is your own fault" (p. 7). Some students speculated that students with learning disabilities may have been dropped on their head, indicating that the learning disability could the fault of the parents (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010).

Participants also attributed students with learning disabilities having few friends, if any, to being "dumb" (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 9). Only one participant indicated positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the pre-intervention interview. This participant described prior personal experiences with having two cousins with disabilities (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010).   Post-intervention data from the study indicated a that students' perceptions of students with disabilities were not significantly positively affected by the intervention (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010).

Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

As outlined in the previous chapter, there are many factors that can influence the attitudes of typically developing peers toward students with disabilities and vice-versa. This study used student interviews to determine what the attitudes are and identify possible explanations for those attitudes. Parental permission through documentation was obtained prior to approaching students to ask for their participation in this study. Next, each child gave their assent to participate by filling out the necessary documentation. Once all of the necessary consent and assent forms obtained, interviews were conducted with participants on an individual basis.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of ten students ranging from grades 5-8. Five of the students are typically developing children. The other five students all have some type of disability. Table 1 below describes each participant in more detail, including the extent of the disability, if applicable.

Table 3.1 - Participants

Student Number	Grade	Gender	Disability
1	5	Female	none
2	6	Female	none
3	7	Male	none
4	8	Male	none
5	8	Male	none
6	5	Female	Learning disability
7	5	Male	Autism
8	5	Female	Moderate Intellectual Disability
9	7	Male	Mild Intellectual Disability
10	7	Male	Cerebral Palsy & Mild Intellectual Disability

Setting

The students were interviewed in a classroom setting at Chapmanville Middle School in Chapmanville, West Virginia. There are approximately 630 students attending the school. Site approval was obtained prior to any research taking place. Currently, 11.4% of the school population is receiving special education services. Chapmanville is a considered a small and rural community.

Materials

Due to the nature of this study, materials used were limited to a list of questions for the researcher to ask the participants, and pen and paper for field notes.

Procedures

Parental permission through documentation was obtained prior to approaching students to ask for their participation in this study. Next, each child gave their assent to participate by filling out the necessary documentation. Once all of the necessary consent and assent forms were taken care of, interviews were conducted with participants on an individual basis.

Chapter 4: Results

The focus of this study was to examine the attitudes of typically developing students and students with disabilities toward each other in regards to friendship. Interview questions focused on determining what the attitudes are as factors that may shape them. During the interviews, field notes were taken by the researcher based on student responses. The field notes were analyzed to look for common responses from students, as well as other information that could influence the opinions and attitudes expressed by the students during the interviews. For example, students who report having a family member with a disability may report from a different perspective.

The first eight questions during the interviews were identical for each group of students. The most frequent responses to those questions are shown in Table 2 below. The remaining questions were different because they were intended for a specific student group. For example, typically developing children were asked how often they interact with students with disabilities.

Table 4.1 – Most Frequent Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Typically Developing Students (n=5)	Students with Disabilities (n=5)
What is your favorite subject?	Math/History	Gym/Science
Do you do well in school?	Yes	Yes/Kind of
Do you have class with a best friend?	Yes	Yes
Do you have friends that you do not have class with?	Yes	No
How much time do you spend with friends outside of school?	A lot	None
What hobbies do you like to engage in outside of school?	Sports	Watch TV
Do you participate in activities outside of school?	Yes	No
Do you have any friends with a disability?	No	Yes

The information presented in Table 2 reveals that the two distinct student groups answered differently to five major question areas. Typically developing students most commonly identified Math and History as their favorite subjects; whereas, students with disabilities identified Gym (physical education) and Science as their favorites. Both student groups were able to confirm having a best friend in their classes; however, students with disabilities most commonly stated that they did not have a friend outside of students they have class with.

Table 2 also shows a difference between the two student groups in regards to afterschool hobbies, activities, and social habits. Typically developing students reported spending a lot of time with their friends after school. Specifically, three out of the five typically developing students interviewed stated that this occurs at least two days a week, sometimes more. Student 5 indicated that he spends time with friends almost every day after school. Students 1 and 4 stated having sleepovers with friends on a regular basis.

Alternatively, three out of the five students with disabilities interviewed indicated that they do not spend time with friends after school. Student 8 specifically stated that she "had a birthday party once and one of her friends from school came." She also added that she had given invitations to her entire class. Student 9 was the only student who reported spending time with friends outside of school on a daily basis.

When both student groups were asked to name hobbies they like to engage in after school the responses were once again segregated. Typically developing children identified activities that involve socialization with friends, mainly sports. Four out of five students with disabilities listed watching television as a main hobby. Other common hobbies listed by students with disabilities include watching movies, playing on the computer, and playing video games. Student

6 explained that when she gets home she likes to "watch TV, do my chores, pet my cat, and visit family."

Each student group was asked if they participate in any activities outside of school, such as sports or clubs. The responses once again showed higher participation levels among the typically developing students. All five typically developing students interviewed identified being a member of an organized sports team or club. Four out of the five students indicated membership in at least two organized teams or clubs.

Students with disabilities responded much differently to this question. Four out of the five students interviewed stated that they do not currently participate in any sports teams or clubs. Student 7 did mention playing on a soccer team a long time ago. Student 9 explained that he will be trying out for the football team in the fall and that he has been participating in an after school conditioning program.

As shown in the appendices, the remaining questions during the interview were different for the two student groups. At this stage in the interviews, it was important to ask more specific questions that spoke to the experiences of each student group with the other. The responses of each student group are separated into narrative format.

Responses of Typically Developing Children

Typically developing students indicated almost no interaction with students with disabilities at school. All five students mentioned seeing them in passing at school, most commonly in the hallway. Student 5 was the only student to report spending time with students with disabilities. This occurred during a partner reading program. Student 3 did say that he would be interested in getting to know them if he had the opportunity. Students 1 and 4 stated specifically that they see students with disabilities at school but they do not talk to them.

Typically developing students most commonly reported spending no time with students with disabilities outside of school time. Student 2 said that if she did it was because she ran into one by chance. Student 3 did say that he "played basketball against one before." Student 4 cited that the reason he doesn't spend any time with students with disabilities outside of school is because "there aren't really any of them that play sports." Students 1 and 4 identified having a family member with a disability, although they are not immediate family members. Only two out of the five students interviewed identified having a friend with a disability.

Typically developing students were also asked questions concerning their knowledge about disabilities. The students were asked to explain how a disability might affect the lives of students who have them at school. All five students interviewed acknowledged that learning is more difficult for students with disabilities. Some students cited the following possible reasons: it is harder for them to learn because they don't comprehend things as well, it takes them longer to learn, they may be nervous in school, and they don't know as much as the other kids know.

All five typically developing students also acknowledged in some way that students with disabilities may have problems making friends at school. Student 4 explained that some people may not want to be around them, and this may make students with disabilities sad because they are not like everyone else. Student 1 noted that some people may give them weird looks because they don't fit in. Student 3 reasoned that most people talk about them and make fun of them, so it is hard for them to make friends.

Typically developing students offered a variety of responses when asked how having students with disabilities in their class affected their learning. Three of the five students interviewed explained that it slows the speed of the class down because the teacher has to slow down and explain everything multiple times. Students 4 and 5 expressed that they get bored in

class because they have to wait on them to understand or catch up. Student 1 was the only

student interviewed to convey that having students with disabilities in their class really didn't

affect her learning, although she did recall an event in which a student with a disability had a

seizure and urinated on herself. She explained that class had to be stopped to clean everything

up. Student 3 stated that he really did not know how having students with disabilities in his class

affected his learning.

Typically developing students were also asked to explain how a person gets a disability.

Four out of the five students interviewed answered that a person is born with a disability.

Student 5 added that "they might fall and hit their head." Student 1 explained that a person

usually gets a disability from their parents, and added that it may run in their family, depending

on the type of disability.

When asked to describe their overall attitudes toward students with disabilities,

responses of typically developing students were varied. Student 2 expressed that if she had more

opportunities to interact with students with disabilities she would have a better idea of how to

feel. Student 4 explained that he likes them and that if he had the chance he would talk to them,

but he simply does not have time in the hallway because he is on his way to class. Student 5,

who has spent time with students with disabilities during the aforementioned partner reading

program, stated that he likes them, and they are fun to be around. Student 3 expressed that he

feels sorry for them because they don't get to do what others do. Student 1 stated the following:

"I think they are the same as we are, sometimes their body won't let them do what we do."

Responses of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities were asked if they have other friends with disabilities. All five

students answered yes to this question. When asked if they have friends who do not have

disabilities, four out of the five students interviewed answered yes. Student 8 was the only student to answer no to this question. Students 9 and 10 stated that they spend a lot of time with students who do not have disabilities. Students 6, 7, and 8 mentioned seeing them mainly in the hallway or at lunch. Student 6 specified that she sees people who aren't in her classes at lunch, and that they sit on one side of the table while "we sit on the other side."

When asked how having a disability affects life at school, students 7 and 8 seemed to deflect the question. They offered responses such as "school is going awesome" and "school is going great." Three students did offer very candid responses to this question. Student 6 explained that having a disability makes her get low grades in school, that it is hard for her to pay attention to his teachers, and that it is hard to make friends because people ignore her. Student 9 felt that it his disability causes him to make bad grades and that he can't have a good education because of it. Student 10 shared the following: "I don't like to talk about it. I use a Dynavox instead of paper and pencil. I have a wheelchair that I drive."

Lastly, students with disabilities were asked to describe their attitudes toward students without disabilities. In general, the responses from the students were positive. Students 9 and 10 explained that they like them because they treat them well. Student 9 added that they do not make fun of him. Students 7 and 8 also conveyed they have positive attitudes toward students without disabilities. Student 7 added that he wishes he had class with them sometimes, and student 8 said "they talk to me sometimes." Student 6 shared a unique perspective: "I think they are lucky to not have a disability because a lot of people do. People who don't have learning problems think that people who do are weird but that's not true. They are just special and need extra help."

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study was designed to determine the attitudes between typically developing students and students with disabilities. By conducting student interviews, possible factors that may contribute to these attitudes were identified. These factors are discussed in this section. This information was gathered to give insight to educational professionals concerning the socialization of students with disabilities with the general school population.

Interpretation and Implications of Results

The results of this study were consistent with expectations outlined previously in chapter one. It was expected that the amount of time typically developing children and students with disabilities spend with each other could influence their attitudes toward each other. The majority of typically developing students interviewed reported spending very little time interacting with students with disabilities. For that reason, two students were able to conclude that they have not had enough experience with students with disabilities to form an opinion. Those students provided an impressive response that speaks to the nature of the problem. The socialization of students with disabilities with typically developing children cannot improve without opportunities for these students to interact with each other.

According to student responses, the only place typically developing children see students with disabilities is at school. The majority of students receiving special education services at Chapmanville Middle School also come from low-income families. Many of these families only have one vehicle or do not have a vehicle at all. Because of this, the only place many of these students travel is to school and back home by means of a school bus.

Consequently, the majority of students with disabilities interviewed indicated that they do not participate in extra-curricular activities or spend time with friends outside of school.

While these students are at home watching television or playing video games, most typically developing children are forming and sustaining friendships outside of school time through avenues such as sports, clubs, or other social events. This places students with disabilities at an even greater disadvantage when it comes to making friends. It takes time to initiate and develop a friendship. This study revealed that students with disabilities are most likely to only identify friends that they have class with because these are the students they spend the most time with.

Limitations

During the interviews, a few of the students did seem nervous or uncomfortable. This may have caused them to choose responses that were not completely accurate with their true feelings.

Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, future research is needed in the area of participation of special education students in extra-curricular activities. The reasons why special education students are not participating in activities outside of school time need to be determined so that solutions to these problems can be worked out.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the efforts of inclusion in public schools, students with disabilities are still isolated from the general school population. However, if students with disabilities were able to participate in some way in extra-curricular activities they may be able to form friendships with typically developing children. This would in turn provide typically developing students opportunities to interact with students with disabilities so that they could form a more informed attitude.

The partner reading program described by one of the typically developing student participants has provided a small number of students in the school an opportunity to interact with students with disabilities. Some of these students have formed close friendships with a student with a disability. Before the Christmas break, a few of the students purchased gifts to give to their reading partner. The gifts were very specific for each student, which spoke to the amount of time the students got to know each other. For example, one of the students with a disability received a pack of Pez dispensers from her reading partner. She was overjoyed because she collects them. If the partner reading program did not exist, these students would have most likely never formed a friendship. Programs such as these are an excellent way to increase opportunities for the two student groups to interact.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview Questions for Students with Disabilities

What is your favorite subject in school?

Do you do well in school?

Do you have a best friend in your classes with you?

Do you have friends that you do not have class with?

How much time do you spend with your friends outside of school?

What hobbies do you like to engage in outside of school?

Do you participate in any activities outside of school, such as sports or clubs?

Do you have other friends with disabilities?

Do you have friends that do not have disabilities?

Describe how having a disability affects your life at school.

How often do you interact with students who do not have disabilities?

Describe your attitude toward students without disabilities.

Appendix B. Interview Questions for Typically Developing Students

What is your favorite subject in school?

Do you do well in school?

Do you have a best friend in your classes with you?

Do you have friends that you do not have class with?

How much time do you spend with your friends outside of school?

What hobbies do you like to engage in outside of school?

Do you participate in any activities outside of school, such as sports or clubs?

How often do you interact with students with disabilities during school time? Outside of school?

Do you have any family members with a disability?

Do you have any friends with disabilities?

Describe what you know about disabilities – how does it affect the lives of individuals who have

them at school?

How does a person get a disability?

How does having children with disabilities in your class affect your learning?

Describe your attitude toward students with disabilities.