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Importance of Accommodating Elementary School Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

This senior capstone examines the rationale why it is important to accommodate the students with learning disabilities at the elementary schools. Mainstreaming students with disabilities with those in regular general education classrooms remains a very important issue for principals and teachers. Through the use of literature review and interviews with a principal and a teacher from their respective schools in the Monterey County area, the results show that there is a gap between the services provided to students with learning disabilities.

Introduction and Background

There will always be a time when a teacher comes across or experiences a student with a learning disability. As time goes on, the world starts to realize that many students do in fact have some disabilities that can affect their education. Not every student learns the same way. With that being said, teachers and the school system need to always be prepared and be ready to handle students with learning disabilities. During my time at CSUMB, I have found that there is a need to accommodate students with learning disabilities within the classroom. As time has passed, I have been heavily involved in multiple elementary school classrooms. I had come across multiple situations where a student was not placed in the proper classroom or teachers were unable to provide any proper services to them.

From my experience, some teachers are aware that there may be students in their classes that need the extra help. The teachers then either do something about it or they just find a way to help the student. Unfortunately, some teachers have not been able to fulfill student's educational needs due to a lack of knowledge. This is why I found myself to be drawn to students with learning disabilities while I completed my service learning in the classrooms. One noticeable observation is that students need a helping hand from someone who would take the time to help them when they struggle with a learning disability. When students with disabilities are placed in the wrong classes or do not receive the proper help, the teachers do not have time to bring students up to par with their regular students. The consequence would that students with disabilities do not receive any services. My final observation is that there are parents who do not wish to take action in order to help their child with their learning disabilities.

In a bigger context, everyday there are children that go to school without knowing that they have a learning disability. They wonder why they cannot focus in class or why the numbers on their math tests do not make any sense. The dropout rate for students with learning disabilities is at around 40% in the United States. This could be because students are not receiving the help they need or they are receiving the help but they still feel lost and alone. There are many challenges that these students face whether it is emotional or physical. If these learning disabilities are not getting taken care of at a younger age, the problems can become more damaging as these children grow older.

In my experience, I have also seen that there are positives that happen all the time where the school systems, its teachers, and the parents do what is necessary to give the student a very healthy and educational learning environment. There are schools that are well prepared and ready to take action that benefits all of its students. For my capstone project, I have been able to reach out to nearby schools to gather information in regards this issue happening within classrooms.

In order to further help elementary school faculty to better accommodate students with learning disabilities, I felt that it was important to go into detail about the different learning disabilities that can be commonly found in the classroom. Teachers should have a basic understanding of the signs they should look for with their students in order to properly get help. Through my findings and research, I will have brought attention to why and how to properly accommodate students so that their education is positive and thriving.

The primary research question this paper deals with is as following: Why is it important for school to accommodate elementary school students with learning disabilities? My secondary research questions helped me answer my primary research question are as follows: Who are elementary school students with learning disabilities? How could teachers tell when students in

the classroom have some learning disabilities? According to research, why is it important for schools to accommodate elementary school students with learning disabilities? How is placement of students with learning disabilities being implemented in the classrooms in the Monterey Bay area? How does that affect them? What are the most common affects those students with disabilities face in the classrooms according to teachers? What could teachers do to help them in their classrooms? What can teachers do to create an environment that is conducive for students with learning disabilities to learn? What can principals do to help students with learning disabilities have a positive and prospering learning environment? How do they help and guide the teachers?

Literature Review

As previously stated, students with learning disabilities face many challenges, physical and mental. The schooling system and its staff should always be mindful of what can happen if disabilities are not being caught and helped. This literature review goes into details about making accommodations, how placement works in the classrooms, positives and negatives regarding principals and their experience, teacher involvement and how they can have positive and negative attitudes toward children, and the positive and negative student outcomes.

Key Terms: I am creating a key terms section for this capstone because throughout the paper terms such as “RSP” and “IEP” are mentioned frequently. Resource Specialist Program or RSP, is a program to help children who qualify for special education services. The program was created to support those children who have learning disabilities and then give them strategies that can help them become successful in their educational careers. Individualized Education Program or IEP, is a document that is developed for each public school child who may have a learning

disability or who needs special education. It is created by a team and is periodically reviewed. It follows the students as they move their ways on up through their educational careers.

Making Accommodations: Making accommodations for students with learning disabilities is crucial to their education. Accommodations are used in order to help students that may need the extra help they are also seen as “tools to increase participation” and “as a tool for ensuring the fair treatment of students with special needs” (Lovett, 2010, p. 612). There have been laws that have been put in place in order to give students with learning disabilities a fair shot at an equal education. One of these laws is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the IDEA, and it was created in 1997. This act was, “amended to require states to include students with disabilities in statewide assessments and to offer accommodations where appropriate” (Thurlow, 2005, p. 232) also according to this law, “states are also required to develop alternate means of assessment for those students who are unable to participate in standard assessments and to report the performance of these students” (Thurlow, 2005, p. 232). These laws are in place to benefit the needs of the students when it is necessary, not give unfair advantages.

There most likely has been situations where IEPs or accommodations were supposed to be met, but were not. Information like this is extremely hard to find online, I am assuming that many schools make sure that the IEPs are being taken care of so that the school is not seen as a bad school. If schools do get caught, it might possibly be kept hidden in order to not jeopardize the school itself.

The whole goal for accommodations is to make sure that all students are receiving an equal access to their education even though the extra help is only being provided to specific students. Although this may be the case, “individualized accommodations are not designed to

give the student an advantage over other students, to alter a fundamental aspect of the course, nor to weaken academic rigor” (“Academic”, 2012, p. 3). There has been an instance where students want the extra accommodations in order to help them but they do not have a learning disability where these types of accommodations would actually be needed. According to Benjamin Lovett’s research, “extended accommodations are a hotly debated practice. At one extreme of this debate, certain critics have charged that extended time is deliberately sought and obtained by high ability affluent students after receiving dubious disability diagnoses, and that the accommodation leads to an unfair advantage over these students’ classes” (Lovett, 2010, p. 612). Even though it is not extremely uncommon, there are situations where this does occur.

There are faculties that believe that students with special needs should be provided with accommodations. However, “there are other faculty members who perceive accommodations, such as certain examination accommodations and modifying graduation requirements, as unfair to students who do not have disabilities” (Zhang, 2010, p. 277). The main focus is that these students need these accommodations in order to keep up with the students who do not have learning disabilities, if these accommodations are not being implemented the educational fairness is not present.

Placement: Every school has their systems on how to properly place students with learning disabilities in classrooms. The placement team has to take lots of information into consideration and an assessment in order to properly place the student into a classroom that will benefit them the most. The information includes, “the results of aptitude and achievement tests, teacher recommendations, reports on the student’s physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior” (“Student”, 2010, p. 3). Within the assessment to figure out if a student has a learning disability, students are tested on specific skills such as reading, math,

phonics, and digraph words. If the students assessment does not conclude to be at the average level as the rest of their peers or “if the student fails to respond to the individualized interventions, he or she may be determined to have a learning disability” (Maki, Floyd & Robertson, 2015, p. 458).

When the students eventually get placed in the classrooms they are more than likely to be placed with general education students. It should always be considered that, “the inclusion or integration of children with disabilities into regular classrooms deserve consideration, however, none appears more important than how placement decisions affect students’ learning and social relations with classmates” (Thorvilson, 2014, p. 11). The effects of this are discussed later within this paper. In the research done by Elif Polat, (Polat, 2012) “in such classrooms, there no special activities done for such students by the classroom teachers” (P.2). Again, according to Elif Polat’s research, “when no special care is given to such students, their failing reasons at schools even cause them to drop out.... The dropout rate among children with learning disabilities is reported to be 40%” (Polat, 2013, p. 2). It is extremely important to know that while conducting classroom placement that “the decisions and match between teachers and students affect their success” (Thorvilson, 2014, p.18).

Finally, it is important to note that students can have both learning disabilities and visual impairments (Jones, 2015), a dual diagnosis is a possibility. A major con is that not all schools may offer programs for students with learning disabilities. If a school has classrooms full of students with learning disabilities and they are unable to provide for them, that school must get them help to matter what. It is shocking that there are even some schools that do not carry such programs. A pro to this is that students can be referred to another school. The original school the

children attended, “remains responsible for providing the student a free and appropriate education” (“Student”, 2010, p. 3), transportation to that school is included.

Principal Involvement: Principal involvement can make or break the entire functionality of how a school runs. The attitudes of the principal could end up resulting in, “increased opportunities for students to be served in general education or in limited efforts to reduce the segregated nature of special education services” (Milsom, 2013, p. 3). According to Laura Thorvilson (2014), if principals have positive attitudes they are more likely to place students in less restrictive settings” (p. 68). Principals have a duty within their schools, when it comes to students with learning disabilities they are, “responsible for communicating with families and teachers about special education services, promoting disability awareness, monitoring and evaluating special education decisions and services, and ensuring legal compliance” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 9). A con is that even though they have many responsibilities, they may not have all the answers or know all the information. Of course not a single person can possibly know how to run a school and know everything about learning disabilities, or specific programs without needing the extra help. If there are clueless principles then they should educate themselves on possibly situations that can come up and how to solve them.

According to Michael DiPaola, his research suggests that many principals lack the coursework and field experience needed to create learning environments that emphasize academic success for students with disabilities” (Dipaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 9). They do not need to be disability experts but it is fundamental to have some knowledge and skills that can help them perform essential special education leadership tasks (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2013, p. 13). It is shocking that there are principals that hold so much power and make decisions but they may not accurately know what they are making decisions on.

Teacher Involvement: A teacher's involvement within the classroom will have an immediate affect on the student with a learning disability who is in that class. According to Thorvilson (2014), the students need to feel that their teachers feel invested in their education and care for them, therefore building a relationship established a trusting environment and the climate will tend to be positive for learning (Thorvilson, 2014, p. 66). Majority of teachers are not properly trained to work with children who have special needs however, “research has found that attempts to improve trainee teachers’ attitudes only had a small impact” (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015, p. 163). Students with learning disabilities are treated differently than their regular peers; one reason is based on teacher’s attitude toward these types of students.

There have been many recent moves for teachers to include students with needs and how they perceive these students, “what constitutes educational success for children with special educational needs in inclusive classrooms, and the ability of teachers to provide effective instruction for them” (Woodcock, 2013, p. 16). When teachers have negative attitudes toward their students with disabilities, “they tend to expect low achievement and inappropriate behavior from those students” and also, “they view individuals with disabilities as different from and inferior to individuals without disabilities” (Milsom, 2013, p. 2). Teachers should know better than to be judgmental in this day and age. Being negative towards students is a major con. It is the teacher's job to care for their students and give them guidance.

Instead of having negative feelings toward these students, teachers should educate themselves on how to handle these students. In my research I discovered a teacher's guide to help support students with learning disabilities. This guide discusses, “the principles of early intervention and response to intervention (an ongoing cycle of assessment, planning, intervening, and monitoring within a continuum of supports, from school-wide to small group to individual

interventions) to help learners who are struggling” (“Ministry”, 2016, p. 2). This is a quick and easy guide that any teacher can find useful.

Student Outcomes: Students are heavily affected by what happens to them during their early educational schooling. Students who experience dealing with learning disabilities can end up enjoying their educational process or end up hating it. Research done by Shireen Pavri, shows that students with disabilities can be more vulnerable to the experience of loneliness (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2000, p. 1). Loneliness levels can be different depending on a student's situation, research was done and it was found that, “students with learning disabilities reported lower levels of loneliness and increased the numbers of friendships after attending inclusive classrooms” (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2000, p. 1). It is important that a child's self esteem is not affected while they are dealing with their learning disabilities. Parents can play a major role in helping their children cope. There are both positives and negatives, “When children find their parents' communication as supportive and open they develop higher self-esteem than when their parents' communication patterns are perceived as controlling and unsupportive” (Emam & Abu-Serei, 2014, p. 90). No matter parents must be aware on how their actions can affect their children.

This literature review gives background information around my topic without giving specific answers regarding my primary and secondary questions. The goal was to educate as a whole around the topic before breaking it down to get to the personal question I wanted answers to. All research and information was taken from scholarly articles and online sources. In order to answer my primary and secondary questions I used other methods in order to obtain the information I was hoping to receive.

Method and Procedures

In order to answer my primary and secondary research questions I have obtained peer-reviewed research and journal articles from the CSUMB library that relate and further guide my topic. I have also found relevant websites. The information found has been published from 2000 to 2016. I interviewed three elementary school principals, all in the Monterey County area. I also interviewed three teachers as well from the same schools in the Monterey county area. I interviewed these principals and teachers from local schools in order to gain insight as to what schools do to help their students and the process it takes. The paper will go into detail about problems that currently take place within our school systems regarding students with learning disabilities and the benefits of proper classroom accommodations.

In order to get information from real time sources, I had decided to go out and conduct interviews in order to see where principals and teachers currently stand with how to deal with learning disabilities. It was important to see which principals really understood their programs and how they handle the process in which to properly care for a student with learning disabilities in their schools. It was also important to see where teachers turn to if they do not know how to handle situations and what they do within their classes in order to create a safe and positive environment.

Participants

I had a total of six participants that answered my interview questions. Three of the participants were elementary school principals, and three of the participants were elementary school teachers. All but one of the participants was female. The school they work for recruited my participants. I conducted my research by reaching out to three different schools with each from a unique social economic background. The teachers interviewed were pointed in my

direction with the help of the principals; these teachers also have a hand in dealing with students with learning disabilities.

Materials

For my capstone research, I created two different sets of interview questions, one for teachers (See Appendix B - Teacher Interview Questions) and another for principals (See Appendix A - Principal Interview Questions). All questions asked were opened ended questions, so that the interviewee can freely answer as they choose. The data I collected discusses the following questions regarding students with learning disabilities. For the principal interview questions I felt that it was important to focus on the programs in place to help students with disabilities, the placement process into those programs, principal guidance for teachers, advice for new teachers and consequences for not properly helping students with learning disabilities. The goal was to see what the principals knew about their programs and how they can help guide teachers to become more aware of how to accommodate to those students with learning disabilities.

For the teacher interview questions, I felt that it was important to ask different questions than I asked the principals. I wanted to get a feel of how teachers handle students with learning disabilities within their classrooms and how they get information when they may know little about what they are dealing with in their classes. My questions consisted of teacher's positive/negative experiences with students who have learning disabilities, where do they go for advice or guidance, and what are the effects that can take place on these students.

Results and Discussion

My secondary research questions can mainly be answered with the results of my surveys that I conducted with the principals and teachers in the Monterey County area. All citations

regarding surveys will not be using actual names or specific locations of the schools where surveys were conducted. My primary questions will be answered last, after all my secondary research questions.

Who are elementary school students with learning disabilities?

Students with learning disabilities are hard to openly spot. There are not any tell tale signs that can openly be used in order to tell that a student has a learning disability. Due to the fact that these students are hard to find, it is always important to keep an eye out, “because there are no outward signs of a disability such as a white cane or wheel-chair, students with learning disabilities are often overlooked or misunderstood” (“Academic”, 2012, p. 1). These students are just regular students inside the classroom.

How could teachers tell when students in the classroom have some learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities are extremely common and it is very likely that teachers will always have a least one student in their classrooms throughout their career. These disabilities can range from hearing, speech, writing, visual, muscle, and memory issues. Typically, children who have learning disabilities have average or above average intelligence. On the outside the children look very healthy and normal compared to their peers, but the disability is still there and hinders their education. The website “Learning Disabilities Association of America” has a long list of disabilities and states what they are, the signs and symptoms, and the strategies that can be used in order to help whoever has the disability. In order for the readers of this capstone to gain knowledge and insight, it is important that I list the disabilities listed on the website and inform the reader on how to tell for signs. The list consists of auditory processing disorder (APD), language processing disorder, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, visual perceptual/visual motor deficit, and lastly, ADHD.

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) or also known as Central Auditory Processing Disorder, has to do with how sound is processed within the ears and how it is interpreted by the brain. People with this disability have a very hard time distinguishing where sounds are coming from, order in which sounds are picked up, and they may be unable to block out background sounds. Signs and symptoms include: distracted by background sounds/noises, may find it difficult remembering oral directions, tends to ignore people when engrossed in something, may process thoughts and ideas slowly and have difficulty explaining them, and has difficulty processing and remembering language-related tasks but may have no trouble interpreting or recalling non-verbal environmental sounds, music, etc. (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016). Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: visual versus auditory explanations, allow students to have “think time” (five to six seconds to respond to a question), reword or “help to decipher confusing oral and/or written directions, and vary pitch and tone of voice (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016).

Language Processing Disorder is a specific type of Auditory Processing Disorder and only relates to how language is processed in the brain. Signs and symptoms include: difficulty gaining meaning from spoken language, poor written output and reading comprehension, difficulty expressing thoughts in verbal form, and can describe an object and draw it but cannot think of the word for it (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016). Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: refer to speech pathologist, allow tape recorder for notes, write main concepts on board, and use of graphic organizers for note taking from lectures or books (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016).

Dyscalculia is when a student has trouble understanding numbers and learning math symbols, counting, and telling time. The student is unable to differentiate the symbols and be

able to chronologically place numbers in order. This can make math nearly impossible for a child and they may give up on themselves when help is not given. Signs and symptoms include: difficulty understanding with money, calendars (days, weeks, etc.), and any math related problem. Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: providing peer assistance, use of colored pencils to differentiate problems, use rhythm and music to teach math facts and to set steps to a beat, and work with manipulatives (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016).

Dysgraphia is a disability that affects the way a person writes. Every aspect revolving around writing is affected, legible handwriting, spacing, planning, spelling, and creating/composing. The signs and symptoms are very clear and is easy to spot when a piece of writing from that student is given to you. Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: oral exams, tape recorders for lectures, a note taker, not chastising student for sloppy work, and provide premade notes (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016).

Dyslexia is found to be extremely common with a large number of students. This disability varies by each child and it affects reading fluency, comprehension, writing, speech, and spelling. Signs and Symptoms include: decoding errors with letters, trouble spelling, reads slowly and painfully, and suffers with listening and reading comprehension (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016). Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: premade notes, books on tape, do not grade spelling on tests regarding other subjects, and allowing use of a laptop or similar device for in-class essays (“Types of Learning Disabilities”, 2016).

Visual Perceptual/Visual Motor Deficit affects a person's ability to draw or copy, the information received by the eyes gets processed wrong in the brain. Shapes and printed letters are hard to distinguish and there are struggles with cutting, and poor hand and eye coordination. Children struggle distinguishing "like" letters such as "d and b", "q and p", "u and n" and also "w and m". Signs and symptoms include: cannot copy accurately, read funny or at odd angles, loses place, and complains eyes hurt ("Types of Learning Disabilities", 2016). Strategies that can be used in order to help students with this particular learning disability include: avoid grading handwriting, allow computer use, use large print books or audio books, restrict copying assignments, and provide alternatives for written work ("Types of Learning Disabilities", 2016).

ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder affects the attention and focus of a child and can make getting schoolwork done very hard. A child is not likely to pay attention or stay focused on something for too long without getting distracted, it is also very hard for them to control their behavior. It is very important to state that, "ADHD is not considered to be a learning disability. It can be determined to be a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), making a student eligible to receive special education services. However, ADHD falls under the category "Other Health Impaired" and not under "Specific Learning Disabilities" ("Types of Learning Disabilities", 2016). Although not considered a learning disability it does hinder a child's education if not handled correctly. The signs are very obvious and help should be sought in order to help the child's education.

According to research, why is it important for schools to accommodate elementary school students with learning disabilities?

Before I researched and went out and did my surveys, I was clueless that there are laws in place to help students with learning disabilities. It is important for schools to accommodate

elementary school students with learning disabilities because it is illegal if they don't. In 1997 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), “ was amended to require states to include students with disabilities in statewide assessments, to offer accommodations where appropriate” (Thurlow et al, 2005, p. 232). In my principal survey, I asked if there were any consequences or negative effects that can take place if a student with learning disabilities educational needs are not being met.

Principal A stated that, “it’s a legal issue. If we don’t abide by the IEP, that's a legal document and we can get in big trouble, families can sue us” (Principal A, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). Principal B also stated similar information, “if they are not being met, if they are on an IEP meeting a legal document it could become a legal case. But even above and beyond and beyond that morally and ethically want to be able to teach any child where they are” (Principal B, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). Principal C did not mention anything about it becoming a legal issue but about how the child may not thrive if they do not receive the proper help.

I asked teachers their own question regarding this issue, “ How do you accommodate students with learning disabilities?” (Appendix B). Teacher A makes their accommodations by giving the students the same work but on different levels. They mention that the students all work on the, “same standard they are working on and usually they are with RSP, so we work together closely as to what they are doing. They never fall behind” (Teacher A, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). Teachers cannot be afraid to give a helping hand to their students even if it is just minor adjustments to current assignments. Teacher B makes sure that the classwork they give is untimed, “when you are under a time deadline, you feel rushed and pressured and that's not great. If I need to take some of the requirements off of the

assignments...I think it really is on the individual student and seeing where their struggles are and how I as a teacher can ease that because emotional stress brings down a person in the best of conditions but if you are dealing with that learning or emotional issues then that stress is just going to make it worse” (Teacher B, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). Again teacher C had a very short response, “I first make sure their physical needs are met. Where do they need to sit? Then I pair them with buddies to do small group work, etc.” (Teacher C, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016).

How is placement of students with learning disabilities being implemented in the classrooms in the Monterey Bay area? How does that affect them?

For school A, which is located more in the Marina area, the principal had stated, “We have “RSP”, which is our resource program and if a child qualifies for special education the IEP team will decide how many minutes they will be out of the general ed classroom and with the special ed group or the resource teacher. And it's the same thing for our speech pathologist” (Principal A, Personal Communication, 10 December, 2016). For school B located in the Pacific Grove area, Principal B went into very specific details regarding how the process works. This is what the principal stated..

But typically the teacher will talk with their grade level team, to come up with ideas before they would do more of a school wide SST and at that we will look more deeply into what modifications are being used what accommodations are being made and how they are working. And come up with an action plan, and then we might meet 4-6 weeks later and say, “how is it going”. If additional testing were needed then there’s an assessment plan to gather and that would be if they were to qualify an IEP, so they go through the testing process, we have an IEP meeting and then we determine if they do qualify or no they do not qualify. If they do not qualify they may qualify for what is called a 504 plan, which is a legal document it is for combinations that are typically done within the classroom setting, the general ed setting as well. They may also qualify for special education services so maybe a pullout kind of resource program: reading, math, writing, speech and language services, maybe counseling services, outside, I mean prior than if they had gone to the school counselor. Like for Monterey county mental

health or for occupational therapy, so kind of going down that track where it gets a little more narrow and the fewer kids that it might serve (Principal B, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016).

School C is located in the Salinas area; Principal C mentions that when a child is showing signs of learning difficulties the classroom teacher will work with the child and the family to see if modifications within the general education classroom help. If those modifications do not help the teacher puts in a Student Study Team meeting. “The purpose of these meetings is to offer more ideas for helping the student not limited to: before school or after school tutoring, small group instruction, modified schedule, modified assignments, special instruction in a supplemental program” (Principal C, Personal Communication, 10 December, 2016). If the students do not go through these processes then they may not ever end up receiving the help they need. This can cause negative effects to not only the emotions of the student, but also the educational success.

What can teachers do to create an environment that is conducive for students with learning disabilities to learn?

The classroom environment is a make or break when it comes to creating a safe and conducive learning environment. Accordingly, “it is thought that learning environments developed for individuals with a learning disability should be adapted to the learning requirements of the individual” (Polat & Adiguzel & Akgun, 2012, p. 3246). There are many different strategies that a teacher can use in order to create the best environment they can, it is really up to the teacher and the students within the class and how well they can gel together. I asked the teachers, “How do you help students with learning disabilities have a positive and prospering learning environment?” (Appendix B).

Teacher A states that, “Just like with any other student, treat them with respect and dignity, and care. Just make it a regular class, so when they come in just make it a regular and they start exactly where we are and they just continue. Constantly check in with them to see how they are doing. There never has been any problems with other students saying anything and they really support each other and help each other” (Teacher A, Personal Communications, 10 December 2016). Teacher B states that, “I think setting realistic goals for them and helping them feel success meeting those goals. If you set small goals and celebrate the success when they get there then they start to feel what’s it like to experience success” (Teacher B, Personal Communications, 10 December 2016). Teacher C had a very quick and to the point response, “I lower my expectations modify workloads, and constantly work on self-esteem” (Teacher c, Personal Communications, 10 December 2016). All teachers knew that they had to create a positive learning environment and all teachers had their own ways of creating that.

What are the most common affects those students with disabilities face in the classrooms according to teachers? What could teachers do to help them in their classrooms?

Teacher A talked about a specific student within her classroom, I felt that her answer was not beneficial or relevant to answer this question. Teacher B stated that,

I would say they probably feel a lot of isolation if they don’t have a teacher that doesn’t help them with their accommodations. If a teacher is expecting them to hit the same standards as the other kids and not giving them that time they may just feel hopelessness or that inability to have sort of success. I would think they would feel very isolated and like a failure. So we just have to make sure that we are really touching base with them and having one on one conference, and making them feel that they have that support and that they can come to teachers when they have questions. I always tell them that they have to advocate for yourself. You have to tell me what you need if you’re not getting it because I may not always know. But if teachers aren’t checking in with the students then they may not know to raise their voices and then they would just feel alone with all of it (Teacher B, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016).

Teacher C stated, “They can easily get frustrated and socially out casted. It important to raise awareness that perfection does not exist. That ALL students have some sort of a strength to share” (Teacher C, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). All teachers did realize that students with learning disabilities do face different troubles than those students without. It is great that these teachers understood that there are common effects that children can face within the classroom, whether it is an emotional or mental struggle or a physical struggle involving other classmates. These are possible and there are ways to prevent this with the proper help and care and classroom environment.

What can principals do to help students with learning disabilities have a positive and prospering learning environment? How do they help and guide the teachers?

Principals are not the primary help to students within the classroom that have learning disabilities. Teacher are obviously at the from of the line, although this may be the case, “the experiences of principals with all types of learners better served the teachers and students through the placement process, helping to create classrooms of learners that met the needs of teachers and students alike” (Thorvilson, 2014, p. 14). According to research principles are important and they also guide teachers and have expectations for how they want their teachers to handle situations with students.

When asking the question, Principle A states that, “We make them feel successful as much as possible in the general ed classroom as well as in their special education classroom and that really depends on them not being singled out as someone with a learning disability but it’s very important.” (Principle A, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). Principal B wants the teachers to make sure that the students always feel welcomed. Principal C stated that, “We have to celebrate their success. We have to help them stay positive and want to keep trying even

when they frustrated. We have to be willing to try new techniques and no keep pounding away at something that has not worked” (Principal C, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016).

Each principal talked about how they help and guide the teachers in order to then help the student. Principal A mentions the IEP, “They [the students] can still function in the general ed classroom and feel part of the class and feel successful as long as the teachers following the accommodation on the IEP plan” (Principal A, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016). The teachers mainly need to follow instructions and guidelines given in the IEP. Principal B skipped this question during the interview process. Principal C stated that, “We have them look at their day and the resources available. First what can they do to provide first best instruction, then what support do they need to help meet the students’ needs. Do they need a different type of program, or a piece of equipment? Does the child need additional services such as counseling?” (Principal C, Personal Communication, 10 December 2016).

Problems and Limitations

During my research period, I came across many obstacles, which include: time limitations, participation cooperation, and research refinement. Time limitations was one of the major obstacles that I had to face, this is due to the fact that I had a very limited amount of time to go out into the field and get ahold of participants who could respond and answer my questions. With this time limitation, I was unable to get into contact with more schools in order to obtain a larger diverse amount of data. This issue caused my next problem, which was participation response. Due to the restraint of time, my participants were unable or neglected to respond within the allotted time. With an extended period of time, a larger source of data could have been gathered in order to support my primary and secondary research questions. My results yielded a

variety of data this is because it was difficult to find a large number of studies that supported my topic.

Recommendations

I feel that it is hard to really give specific recommendations. People are going to either continue to practice the way they do, or they will decide to grow as educators in order to benefit their students. The first recommendation I feel that would be beneficial is that teachers should make a point to learn more about learning disabilities so that they are properly prepared when they have students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. The second recommendation is that educators should remember that students with learning disabilities are people too. These students should not be seen as less just because they have a learning disability, they should be seen as equal along side their peers.

Conclusion

Making accommodations is dire to making sure that all students receive educational fairness and equality among all peers. Not one student is better than the other but the regular general ed students have the advantage. Special programs and accommodations help the students with learning disabilities get on the same level as their non learning disability peers. It is important to always be the student's biggest advocate. Make sure to take the extra step to be the positive helping hand. The educational future is in the hands of teachers, principals, and the school system. It is vital to always guide and care for students with learning disabilities.

Why is it important for school to accommodate elementary school students with learning disabilities?

This is my primary question. Overall with all my research and with the help of my interviews and secondary questions, my primary question can be answered by simply

summarizing all my information I had discovered. It is important for schools to accommodate elementary school student with learning disabilities because it is illegal if not taken care of, students can have a negative and unsuccessful educational career, and lastly, the children can develop mental and physical health problems.

As previously stated, all schools must accommodate and care for those students with learning disabilities. The higher powers in education have made sure that they keep all schools honest with helping students in need. IEP's have been successful and the students go school to school with these records following them so that the next teacher can make sure they are helping the child become successful. Having learning disabilities does not mean that child is any different from the next; it just means that they learn a little different or they need a helping hand in order to receive an equal education to their peers. Teachers tend to be pretty good at creating positive environment, but there are those who are not good at it. For students who have these teachers, the environment can be harsh and judgmental from both the teacher and classmates. These harsh environments can lead to developing self-esteem issues and children do get physically bullied from being "different".

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Appendix A

Principal Interview Questions

- 1) What programs does the school have in order to help the students with learning disabilities?
- 2) What is the process for placing students with learning disabilities in classrooms?
- 3) How do you want your teachers to accommodate students with learning disabilities?
- 4) How do you help students with learning disabilities have a positive and prosperous learning environment?
- 5) How do you help and guide teachers in order to help the student?
- 6) What is your advice for new teachers who may end up with a learning disabilities student in their classroom?
- 7) Are there consequences or negative effects that take place if a student with learning disabilities educational needs are not being met?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

- 1) Do you currently or have you in the past had students with learning disabilities?
- 2) How has your experience been with students with learning disabilities?
(Positive/Negative)?
- 3) Have you ever not known how to handle a situation regarding a student with learning disabilities? Who did you go to for help or advice?
- 4) Did you receive training on how to look for a student with a learning disability? Or how to help them?
- 5) How do you accommodate students with learning disabilities?
- 6) Do you feel that lack of accommodations for students with learning disabilities is a problem for their educational growth?
- 7) How do you help students with learning disabilities to have a positive and prospering learning environment?
- 8) What are the most common effects students with learning disabilities face in the classroom?