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Making ALL Students "OUR" Students: Where to start?

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Making ALL Students "OUR" Students: Where to start?

Cover Page Footnote

The mindset of "my students" and "your students" can be found in the education arena when talking about students with general abilities and students with special needs. As inclusion becomes more and more accepted in public education, educators must be taught strategies that will enable them to work collaboratively with each other. This article addresses the result of a Personnel Preparation Profile instrument which examined the specific perceptions of Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) methods faculty ... faculty preparing candidates to teach in the general classroom. Respondents' responses were based on their perceptions toward the amount of time the IHE general education methods faculty was involved with professional development activities that included special education and their perceptions of how often special education was discussed in their "methods" classrooms.

Making ALL Students “OUR” Students: Where to Start?

Educating students with disabilities in mainstream classes must include a collaborative team approach between general and special education teachers. In getting to this level of collaboration, there must be a mindset established that would allow ALL future educators to think of serving children with disabilities as “OUR” responsibility. There must be a coordination of services for better teacher preparation programs, grades PreK-12, so as to create an understanding that ALL teachers will be working with both typical (general education) and students with special needs. Also, there must be supports for every general education and special education preparation program to work in a co-active and coordinated fashion. These preparation programs must jointly train heterogeneous groups of future teachers/educators to incorporate curriculum that better prepares them to serve students with disabilities in an inclusive environment.

This article focuses on the outcomes of a Personnel Preparation Profile (Appendix A) given to university general education “methods” faculty to assess their present comfort level for preparing general education future teachers to serve students with disabilities. The profile further explores each faculty’s personal involvement in professional development asking the amount of professional development hours used to increase their knowledge of special education. Perceptions of the general education faculty concerning the attitudes of their general education candidates toward serving students with disabilities are addressed along with priorities concerning special education knowledge for their pre-service candidates before completing their individual “methods” classes.

Review of Literature

Historically, teachers worked in isolation with one teacher to a classroom. Prior to the decade of the 1970's, self-contained classrooms were the usual delivery for children even with mild disabilities. In the 1970's a number of court cases steered the direction of public education toward the placement of more students with disabilities into general education settings (Bloomfield, 1988; Vergason & Anderegg, 1992). These students with disabilities were served by teachers certified in special education in self-contained or pullout classrooms. Over the past thirty-eight years, these students have slowly moved into the regular classroom through “mainstreaming” and “inclusion” (Howard, 2004). Students with disabilities were mainstreamed for selected subjects for parts of the day; they were not considered part of the typical (general) class.

Gordon (2006) reports that under the guidelines of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), the emphasis is to include all students in the same class, which has resulted in teams of teachers in both the general education and special education arena working collaboratively to combine their professional knowledge, perspectives, and skills. The abilities to do this work collaboratively and to service children with disabilities successfully are dependent on teacher preparation programs and the training/experiences they provide. Pace (2003) reported that several studies concluded that teacher attitudes toward inclusion are very important when establishing a working collaboration between both general and special education educators.

National activities to improve education of children with disabilities began. Discretionary funding for a variety of activities (research and innovation, personnel preparation, technical assistance, and dissemination of information) was authorized. Teacher preparation

programs became spotlighted. The call for better teacher preparation programs to create an understanding that all teachers work to serve both typical (general education) and students with special needs was sounded (Brownell, Rosenberg, Sindelar, & Smith, 2004). This, in turn, would allow for the incorporation of the general curriculum to support ALL students.

Coordinating services for better teacher preparation programs, PreK-12, will help create an understanding that all teachers will be working with both typical [general education] students and students with special needs (Zeichener, & Canklin, 2005). With this, every general education and special education preparation program will work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly train heterogeneous groups of pre-service candidates to incorporate curriculum that studies teaching techniques, subject area(s), disability, individualization, accommodation, and skills for collaboration in the classroom (McLeskey, & Ross, 2003). This training will allow future educators to share the goals, decisions, classroom instruction, and responsibility for students, assessment of student learning, problem solving, and classroom management envisioned by IDEA and, in turn, allow teachers to think of serving children with disabilities as “our” responsibility.

There should be a commitment every day to the development of skilled practitioners who are prepared with essential knowledge and applications in their fields of specialty. In addressing, improving, and strengthening all programs for the preparation of personnel to serve children with disabilities, there is a development of a program committed to the special education arena.

Where to start?

A Personnel Preparation profile was disseminated to evaluate general education “methods” faculty concerning their present personal knowledge base of special education and the

extent to which information concerning issues and trends of special education is being disseminated to future general education teachers.

Methodology

Initially, in order to answer the questions defined for this study, a survey was utilized. Survey research is descriptive in nature with only one observation (Behling, 1984). This study was developed to systematically describe a given population, establish a characteristic database, identify current problems and practices, and suggest solutions for future planning.

Instrumentation (Survey)

A thorough search of the literature failed to produce an existing survey appropriate for obtaining the specific data sought in this study. A new survey was constructed to examine the specific perceptions of Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) general education methods courses (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty specifically (Appendix A) but this same instrument could be used for all general education faculty.

The instrument was designed to elicit responses relative to the perceptions of IHE general education “methods” faculty concerning their present comfort level for preparing general education future teachers to serve students with disabilities, their personal amount of professional development hours used to increase their knowledge of special education, and their thoughts concerning general pre-service candidate’s attitudes toward serving students with disabilities.

The instrument was developed as a structured mail survey composed primarily of closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions not only give the question but also present response alternatives. The respondents were asked to rate each of the items using a five-point scale, with

1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree” (Taylor & Levine, 1991). The survey contained three parts: (a) descriptive information (demographics); (b) items to elicit responses based on the respondents’ perceptions toward participation in professional activities related to teaching; and (c) items to elicit responses based on the respondents’ perceptions of their fears and preparation in addressing special education in their general methods courses.

Validity

Behling (1984) describes validity as “the confidence one can place in the accuracy of the instruments used” (p. 61). In survey research, the data are considered valid to the degree that they meet the requirements of the survey client (Bateson, 1984; Fox, 1969), the degree to which the instrument is carefully designed, and the judgment of experts in the field (Berger & Patchner, 1988; Best, 1981; Fink & Kosecoff, 1985). The data represent an accurate picture of what Bateson (1984) referred to as “the social world” (p. 32). In this study, informant-based data were compared.

Validation Procedures

In planning this research effort, a validation procedure was conducted to (a) ensure the clarity and accuracy of the content and (b) assist the researcher in obtaining experience with the data to be accrued. A “panel of judges”, all of whom were employees of the same university, was selected to evaluate the survey instrument. The panel consisted of six faculty who had varied backgrounds. The backgrounds ranged from researchers to practicing teachers to pre- and post-service general education and special education faculty instructors. Space was provided on the trial survey for respondents to make suggestions and changes. As a result of the pilot testing, revisions were made to the instrument.

Sample Selection (Participants)

The subjects in this study consisted of IHE general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty, Elementary (K-6), Middle (7-9), and Secondary (10-12), English, Math, Music, Physical Education, Psychology, Reading, Science, and Social Studies. Participants were identified through the University's College of Education faculty listing.

Surveys were mailed to 60 faculty from the above general education areas. Respondent volunteers returned (N=32) surveys. Because this number represented more than 50 percent of the surveys mailed, no further follow-up or resend of the survey was done.

Data Collection

Once the official survey was approved, survey packets (N=32) were prepared and mailed through campus mail. The packet contained a letter of introduction which also delineated the time lines for return of the instrument and instructions for completing the survey, a survey instrument, and a self-addressed envelope to return survey through campus mail (Appendix B).

Instructions to the respondents were to answer all of the items. Comments on any item or qualification of an answer could be done using the space in the margins. It was asked that the surveys be returned by a specific date. Surveys that were returned by this date were included in the analysis of data. LeCompte, Millroy, and Preissle (1992) indicate that researchers must often be satisfied with a 30 to 50% return rate. This study had a return rate of 53%.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of IHE general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty concerning special education. A survey instrument (Appendix A) was developed to elicit their perceptions pertaining to their comfort level for preparing general education future

teachers to serve students with disabilities. The discussion of the study findings are focused on the three general areas of the survey: (a) descriptive analysis of the respondents (descriptive information, demographics), (b) personal time the IHE general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty involved with professional development activities including special education and, (c) perceptions of how often special education was discussed in the IHE general faculty's "methods" classroom.

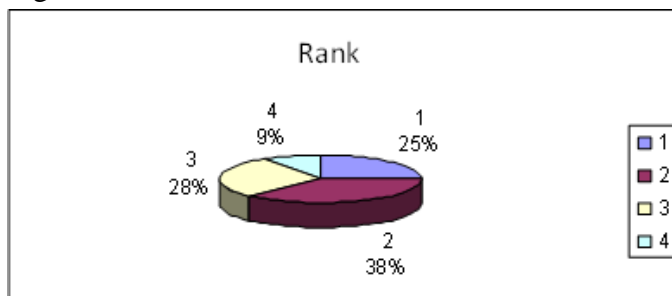
Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents

Using a survey instrument, this study investigated the perceptions of 32 respondents (IHE general education methods [English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies] faculty). This investigation included:

Section I: Demographics

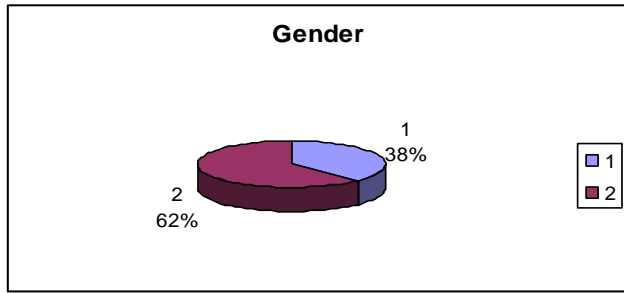
(a) **Identification of rank** held within the university (assistant professor, 25%; associate professor, 38%; full professor, 28%, department chair, 9%) (See Figure 1);

Figure 1



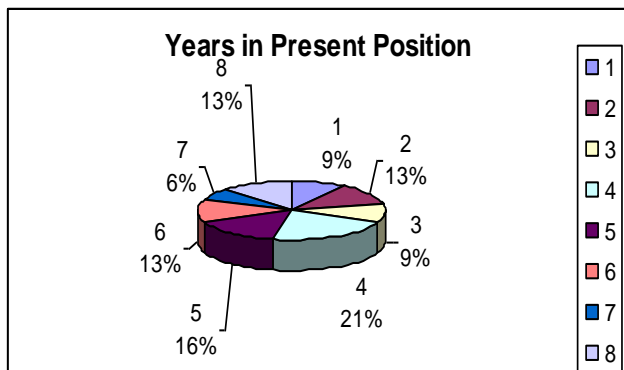
(b) **Gender** of respondents (male, 38%; female, 62%) (See Figure 2);

Figure 2



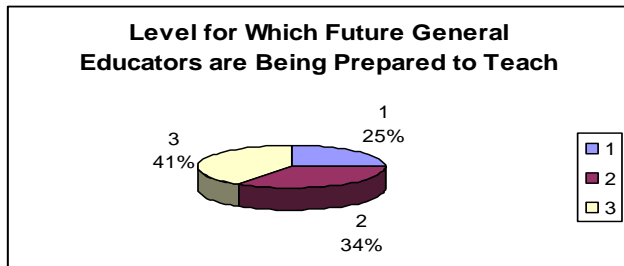
(c) **Years in present position** (0-2 years, 9%; 3-4 years, 13%; 5-6 years, 9%; 7-8 years, 21%; 9-10 years, 16%; 11-14 years, 13%; 15-19 years, 6%, 20+ years, 13%) (See Figure 3);

Figure 3



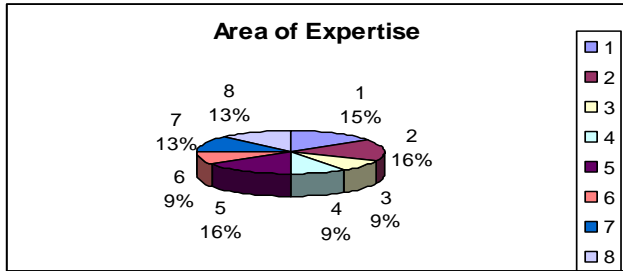
(d) **Teaching level of expertise** (secondary, 25%; middle school, 34%; elementary, 41%) (See Figure 4);

Figure 4



(e) **Level for which future general educators are being prepared to teach** (secondary, 10-12 grades, 25%; middle, 7-9 grades, 34%, elementary, K-6 grades, 41%) (See Figure 5).

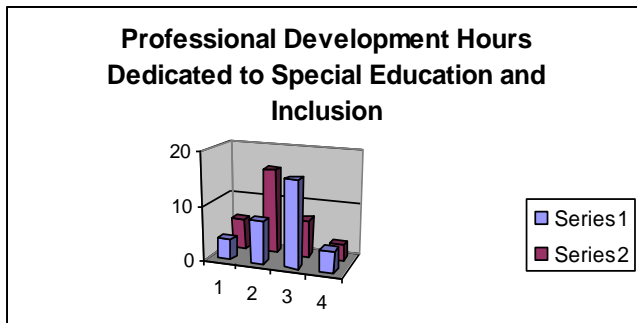
Figure 5



Section II: Personal Time the IHE General Education Methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) Faculty Devoted to Professional Development Activities Including Special Education

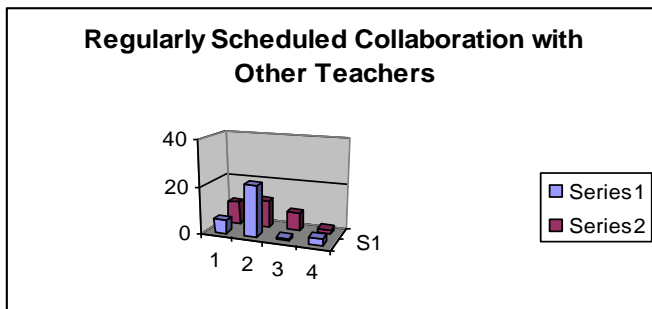
Professional Development Hours ... (a) dedicated to special education and inclusion (0 hours = 4 faculty, 1-8 hours = 8 faculty, 9-32 hours = 15 faculty, 32+ hours = 5 faculty) (See Figure 6);

Figure 6



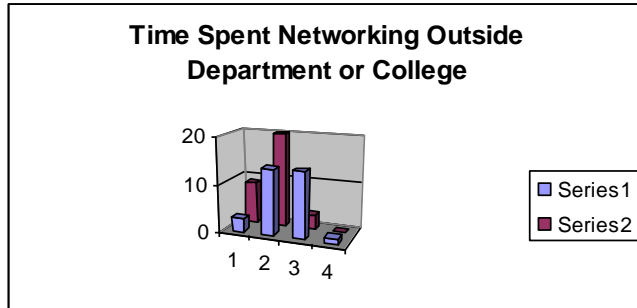
(b) regularly scheduled collaboration (in hours) spent with other teachers (0 hours = 8 faculty, 1-8 hours = 19 faculty, 9-32 hours = 2 faculty, 32+ hours = 3) (See Figure 7);

Figure 7



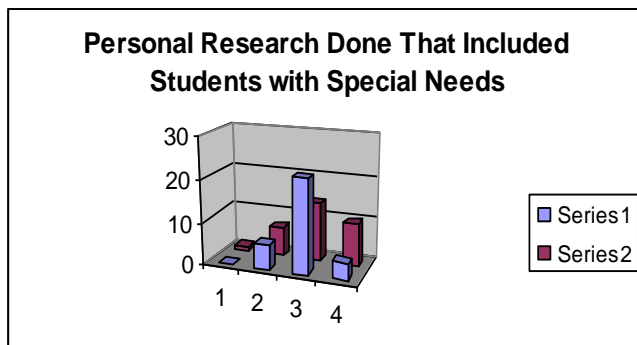
(c) time (in hours) spent networking outside department or college in general (0 hours = 4 faculty, 1-8 hours = 12 faculty, 9-32 hours = 13 faculty, 32+ hours = 3 faculty) (see figure 8);

Figure 8



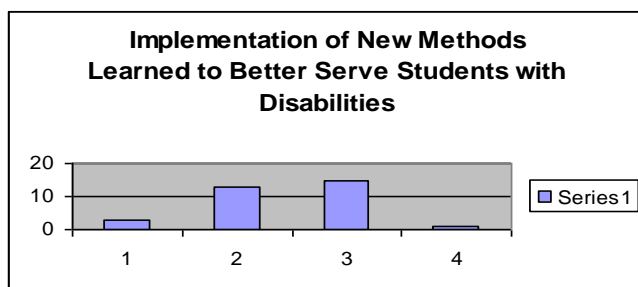
(d) personal research (in hours) done that included students with special needs (0 hours = 1 faculty, 1-8 hours = 7 faculty, 9-32 hours = 19 faculty, 32+ hours = 5 faculty) (See Figure 9).

Figure 9



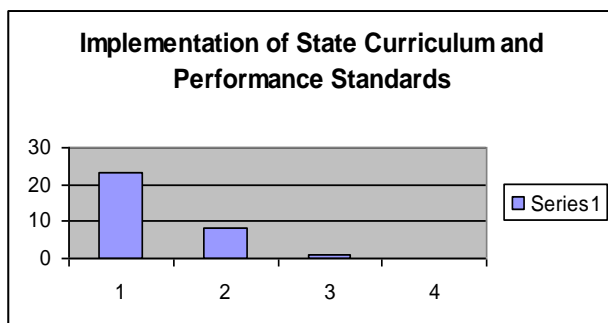
Comfort Level in ... (a) implementing new methods learned to better serve students with disabilities in their general “methods” classroom (1 [not at all] = 4 faculty, 2 [somewhat] = 12 faculty, 3 [moderately] = 14 faculty, 4 [very] = 2) (See Figure 10);

Figure 10



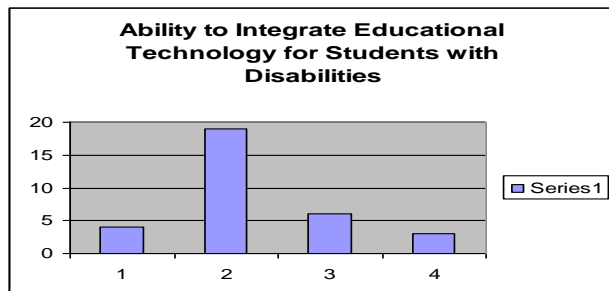
(b) implementing special education state curriculum and performance standards in their general “methods” classroom (1 [not at all] = 22 faculty, 2 [somewhat] = 9 faculty, 3 [moderately] = 1 faculty, 4 [very] = 0) (See Figure 11);

Figure 11



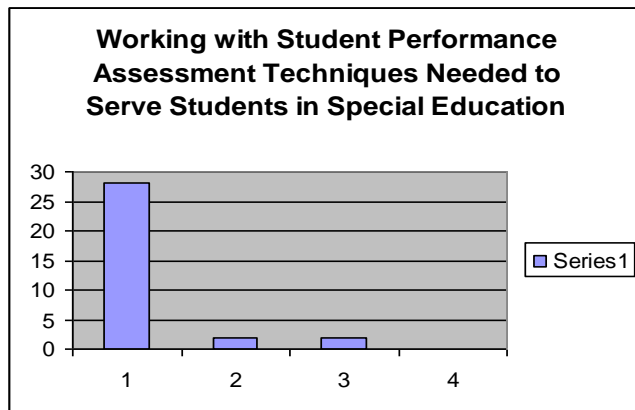
(c) ability to integrate educational technology strategies for students with disabilities in their general “methods” classroom (1 [not at all] = 4 faculty, 2 [somewhat] = 19 faculty, 3 [moderately] = 6 faculty, 4 [very] = 3) (See Figure 12);

Figure 12



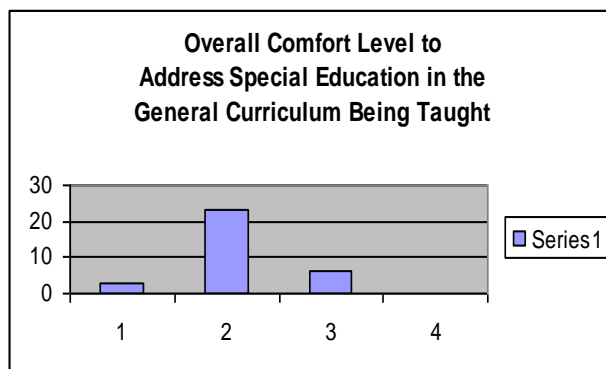
(d) working with student performance assessment techniques needed to serve students in special education 1 [not at all] = 28 faculty, 2 [somewhat] = 2 faculty, 3 [moderately] = 2 faculty, 4 [very] = 0) (See Figure 13); and,

Figure 13



(e) addressing (overall) special education in the general curriculum being taught within the “methods” classroom (1 [not at all] = 2 faculty, 2 [somewhat] = 24 faculty, 3 [moderately] = 6 faculty, 4 [very] = 0) (See Figure 14).

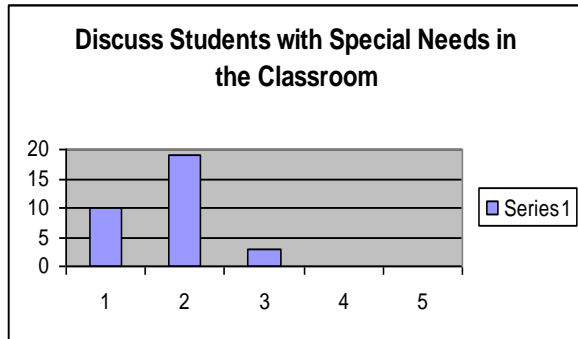
Figure 14



Section III: Fears and Preparation

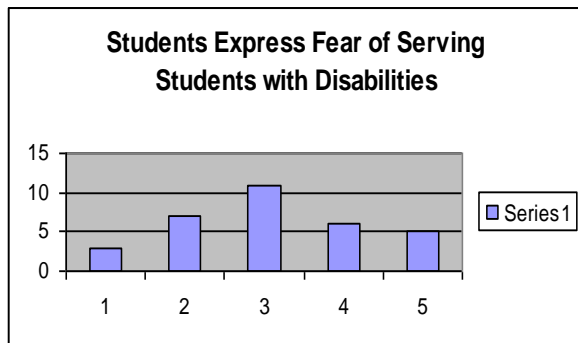
(a) discussion of students with special needs in general education “methods” classroom (1 [never] = 10, 2 [seldom] = 19, 3 [sometimes] = 3, 4 [nearly always] = 0, 5 [always] = 0) (See Figure 15);

Figure 15



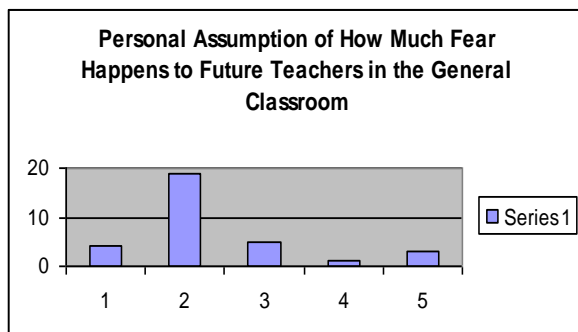
(b) pre-service candidates in “methods” classroom expressing fear of serving students with disabilities (1 [never] = 3, 2 [seldom] = 7, 3 [sometimes] = 11, 4 [nearly always] = 6, 5 [always] = 5) (See Figure 16);

Figure 16



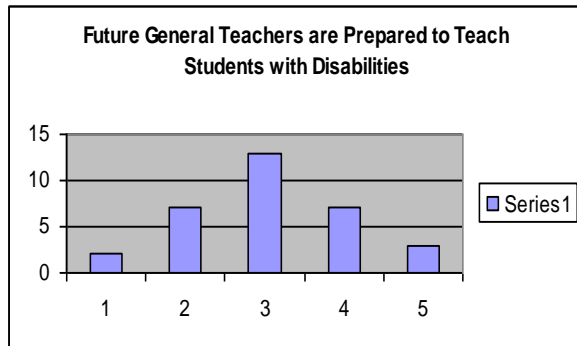
(c) personal assumption of how much fear occurs in and/or affects pre-service candidates in the general classroom concerning students with disabilities (1 [never] = 4, 2 [seldom] = 19, 3 [sometimes] = 5, 4 [nearly always] = 1, 5 [always] = 3) (See Figure 17);

Figure 17



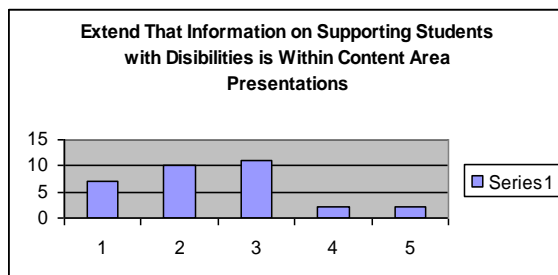
(d) future general teachers perceived preparation to teach students with disabilities (1 [never] = 2, 2 [seldom] = 7, 3 [sometimes] = 13, 4 [nearly always] = 7, 5 [always] = 3) (See Figure 18);

Figure 18



(e) extent that information on supporting students with disabilities is within content area presentation for “methods” classrooms (1 [never] = 7, 2 [seldom] = 10, 3 [sometimes] = 11, 4 [nearly always] = 2, 5 [always] = 2) (See Figure 19).

Figure 19



Implications (Future Research)

1. With modifications, the instrument and procedures of this study could be replicated to provide relevant information for other universities / colleges within the same and other states.
2. This study, if replicated, could create a desired outcome and end result that will have future general education / special education preparation programs working in co-active

and coordinated fashion to jointly train heterogeneous groups of students to incorporate curriculum that studies teaching techniques, subject area(s), disability, individualization, strategies, accommodations, and skills for collaboration in the classroom.

3. The overall response rate for the study was 53%. This could be increased by working with Deans and Chairs to gain permission for distribution of response surveys during the monthly faculty meetings which include general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty members.
4. This study identified perceptions of the general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty members concerning general responsibilities and roles of the introduction of special education information within their classrooms. Future research could identify specific responsibilities and roles as well as professional development needs which will impact the pre-service teachers who are being prepared to teach in an inclusive, yet extremely diverse, school culture.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the specific perceptions of Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) general education methods (English, math, reading, music, physical education, psychology, science, and social studies) faculty. To aid this research effort, an instrument was constructed that addressed the perceptions of general education methods faculty. It was designed to elicit responses based on the respondents' perceptions toward the amount of time the IHE general education methods faculty was involved with professional development activities including

special education and their perceptions of how often special education was discussed in their general “methods” classrooms.

The survey distribution list of subjects in this study included 60 general education methods faculty. Participants were volunteers. Of the 60 subjects sent surveys, 32 completed surveys were returned. This was a response rate of 53%. The reader is reminded of the respondent pool and the response rates of the individual groupings: (a) level for which future general educators are being prepared to teach (Elementary [K-6; N= 13], Middle [7-9; N= 11], and Secondary [10-12; N= 8]), (b) area of expertise (English [N= 5], Math [N= 5], Music [N= 3], Physical Education [N= 3], Psychology [N= 5], Reading [N= 3], Science [N= 4], and Social Studies [N= 4]).

When reaching out to general methods faculty, it will be important for general education and special education faculty to collaborate with each other in order to increase quality faculty development experiences for implementation of special education strategies for accommodations within the general education methods courses. As such, general methods faculty should focus their outreach efforts on empowering their future general education teachers with the resources they will need to support students with disabilities in their classrooms. The goal is create awareness and adopt inclusive instructional practices so that future general education teachers can make ALL students our students.

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Appendix A

IHE Continuous Improvement Subgrant
Department of Special Education**PERSONNEL PREPARATION PROFILE**

This information collection is authorized by the IHE Continuous Improvement Subgrant, Title VI-B, Part B. While participation in this collection is voluntary, your cooperation is critical to make the results comprehensive, accurate, and timely.

Section I: Descriptive Information

1. You are a (check all that apply)

Assistant Professor Associate Professor Full Professor Chair

2. Gender: Male Female

3. In years, you have been at your present position: (circle one)

0-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 11-14 15-19 20+

4. Level of Expertise

Secondary Middle Elementary

5. Level for which you are preparing general educators to teach (check all that apply)

Secondary (grades 10-12)

Middle (grades 7-9)

Elementary (grades K-6)

6. Area of Expertise

English

Math

Music

Physical Education

Psychology

Reading

Science

Social Studies

Section II: Personal Time Involved with Professional Development Activities Including Special Education

7. Considering all of the professional development activities in which you participated in the last 12 months, how many total hours, if any, have you spent in activities which offered information on how to prepare your students for serving students with special education needs in the inclusive setting?

Content Areas	Total hours spent				Improved my teaching			
	0	1-8	9-32	32 +	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	A lot
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

8. In the last 12 months, how frequently have you participated in the following activities related to teaching? For any activity in which you participated, indicate to what extent you believe the activity has improved your classroom teaching.

Content Areas	Total hours spent				Improved my teaching			
	0	1-8	9-32	32 +	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	A lot
a. Regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers (special education faculty in particular), excluding meetings held for administrative purpose	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
b. Networking with teachers outside your department and college (special education)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
c. Individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to you professionally that included students with special needs	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
d. Other (please describe)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

9. How well prepared do you feel to teach your general education teachers the following activities for dealing with student with disabilities?

	Not At All	Somewhat	Moderately	Very
a. Implementation of new methods of teaching (e.g., cooperative learning) being used to serve students with disabilities	1	2	3	4

	Not At All	Somewhat	Moderately	Very
b. Implementation of state or district special education curriculum and performance standards	1	2	3	4
c. Integration of educational technology for students with disabilities into the general grade or subject taught	1	2	3	4
d. Use of student performance assessment techniques (e.g., methods of testing, applying results to modify instruction) needed to serve students in special education	1	2	3	4
e. Overall, to address the needs of students with disabilities	1	2	3	4

Section III: How often special education is discussed in you general "methods" classroom

Using the following scale: 1 (never), 2 (seldom), 3 (sometimes), 4 (nearly always), 5 (always)

10. How often do you discuss serving students with special needs in the general classroom with your students?

1 2 3 4 5

11. How often do you have students in your classes express fears of serving students with special needs in the general classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

12. How much do you think the fear of serving students with special needs happens to students preparing to teach in the general classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

13. To what extent do you think that students preparing to teach in the general classroom are prepared to teach students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

1 2 3 4 5

14. To what extent do you include information on how to support students with special needs within your content area?

1 2 3 4 5

THANK YOU. PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix B

Date:

To: IHE General Education “methods” Faculty

From: Frank Mullins, Special Education Faculty

RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Frank Mullins. I am faculty in the Department of Psychology and Special Education. I am writing this letter to ask for your assistance in supporting a study being conducted by the Special Education Department.

This proposed grant will assist in coordinating services for better teacher preparation programs, PreK-12, by creating an understanding that all teachers will be working with both typical (general education) and special needs students. With this, every general education and special education preparation program will work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly train heterogeneous groups of students to incorporate curriculum that studies teaching techniques, subject areas(s), disability, individualization, accommodation, and skills for collaboration in the classroom. This training will allow future educators to share the goals, decisions, classroom instruction, responsibility for students, assessment of student learning, problem solving, and classroom management envisioned by IDEA and, in turn, allow teachers to think of serving children with disabilities as “our” responsibility.

Please take the 20 minutes needed to complete the attached questionnaire and return to Frank Mullins, Department of Psychology and Special Education. Should you have questions or require additional copies of the questionnaire, please contact me at 1-620-334-1200.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Frank Mullins
Associate Professor

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.