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THE ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS TOWARD MAINSTREAMING OF HEARING-IMPAIRED HIGH SCHOOLERS

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INTRODUCTION

Often teachers and researchers measure learning and explain it by describing input data and outcome products without looking into the classroom process itself. For over a decade, Special Education has been undergoing a change in the basic premises for educating handicapped children. The major thrust from this era has been the implementation of mainstreaming models of service delivery as alternatives to self-contained classrooms. This change has come about because of concern over the quality of life experienced by the handicapped student in self-contained settings (Budoff, 1976).

Special educators are generally in agreement that the quality of life issue encompasses three main areas: academic achievement, social and personal adjustment, and post-school adjustment (Gregory, Shanahan and Walberg, 1984). The constituents of research studies into educational attitudes are often the students themselves and, while social interaction variables (Anitia, 1982) and personal adjustment (Dowaliby, Burke and McKee, 1983) have been studied as factors in the process of education, particularly in mainstreaming success, academic achievement tends to be the dependent variable of most interest to researchers (Gregory, et al., 1984). While academic achievement appears to be an important variable in determining the success of mainstreaming, it cannot be viewed in isolation, nor can one overlook another key constituent group: the teachers who teach the students; in particular their attitudes toward education and mainstreaming. A review of the literature failed to turn up a single article on the attitudes of teachers of deaf students toward mainstreaming. Kutner (1971) suggests that not only are the attitudes of students often obstacles to true integration within the school setting but also that of the teacher; and he is not alone (Bowe, 1978; Vermeij, 1978).

Actually, and perhaps paradoxically, the whole process of socializing and acculturating the individual has been institutionalized in our society through our schools (Yee, 1971). This is not to say that the family is no longer the most important influence on a child's psychological and social development. However, the schools, through their curricular and extra-curricular programs, have become formalized environments through which children and adolescents establish personal and intimate relationships with peers as well as interact with life issues. A close examination of the classroom and the learning process reveals the importance not only in ideas, but also feelings. Perhaps this emphasis on ideas and social development in the schools and the degree to which teachers stimulate and nurture them in students determines the quality of educational life.

PURPOSE

This study sought to identify the perceptions and attitudes held by high school teachers of hearing-impaired students toward them and toward mainstreaming. Comparisons between two groups of teachers identified as *regular division* and *teachers of the hearing-impaired* were made. The purpose of the study was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a mainstreaming program through the eyes of the teachers who teach in it by quantifying their feelings about significant and practical issues that bear on mainstreaming.

METHOD

Forty-five high school teachers, 27 teachers of hearing-impaired students who taught normal-hearing students and hearing-impaired, mainstreamed students, and 18 teachers who taught them in self-contained classes were asked to complete two 10-item questionnaires. The teachers all taught at the largest public high school serving hearing-impaired students in a

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populous midwestern state. All of the teachers who taught the hearing-impaired students in the program, either in self-contained or mainstreamed classes, participated in the study. Content-similar questions about mainstreaming were asked in two different formats. On one questionnaire the teachers were instructed to answer *Yes*, *No* or *no response* to the questions. On the other questionnaire, the teachers were instructed to assign letter grades, *A-F*, to the questions. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers at a large group meeting of them and all of the items were answered by the teachers in the presence of the investigator. The items were drawn up by the investigator following individual meetings with regular-division and special education teachers who were involved in mainstreaming, although not teaching at the research school. The long list of items was streamlined into a set of 10 questions that constituted the questionnaires. The questionnaires paralleled each other in that the items were identical. However, one questionnaire was viewed as more content-sensitive than the other because the response format was more variable. The first

questionnaire administered required *yes-no* answers to the items. The second questionnaire required that the teachers rate each item by assigning a letter grade of *A* through *F*; with *A* being accorded that same value as the letter grade *A* on a report card and *F* a failing grade. The questionnaires were not statistically validated and because of their face validity-only nature require one to interpret the results with caution.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the discrete results of the teachers' responses to the 10 mainstreaming questions and Table 2 shows the continuous results of their responses to an identical set of questions. In response to the *yes-no* questions, teachers appear to be in agreement, with the possible exception of their confidence about the ability of hearing-impaired students to benefit fully from the services that are available to them. Twenty-three percent of the regular-division teachers felt that they could not while only 8% of the teachers of the hearing-impaired expressed pessimism (Q10).

Generally, the teachers were disappointed in

TABLE 1
The Responses Of The Teachers To The Yes-No Mainstreaming Question:
Reported In Percentages

	Regular			Hearing Impaired		
	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR
1. Should able students with hearing handicaps be enrolled in regular classes?	89	11		100		
2. Is there open and frequent communication between regular and special education teachers regarding hearing impaired students who are mainstreamed?	44	45	11	50	33	17
3. Have you received inservice training on mainstreaming topics?	33	56	11	25	75	
4. As a teacher, do you feel prepared for mainstreaming?	67	22	11	58	8	33
5. Is adequate information made available to serve as a basis for individualized educational programs?	22	56	22	25	58	17
6. Are regular staffings held on mainstreamed, hearing-impaired students?	33	44	23	33	67	
7. Should mainstreamed, hearing-impaired students be graded on the same standards as their regular class peers?	78	11	11	100		
8. Can hearing-impaired students who are mainstreamed keep pace in academic areas with their regular class peers?	56	11	33	42	8	50
9. Does mainstreaming require work "above and beyond" from teachers?	67	22	11	83	8	9
10. Can hearing-impaired students move in either direction along the contium of services that are provided them by your district?	77	23		92	8	

the adequacy of the help they had received concerning mainstreaming. Fifty to seventy-

five percent of the teachers said that they had received no in-service training on mainstreaming

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topics (Q3), although more than 50% of them felt prepared to handle mainstreaming (Q4). Thirty-three percent of the teachers indicated that regular staffings were held on mainstreaming students (Q6) and only approximately 25% of them felt that adequate information was made available in order to develop the individualized educational plans (Q5). Concerning the question of communication between and among mainstreaming teachers, approximately 50% felt that it was sufficiently open and frequent to enhance mainstreaming effectiveness (Q3). Most of the teachers felt that mainstreaming required an extra effort by those involved in it (Q10). Two student-driven questions (Qs 1, 8) suggest that better processes and criteria for determining who is to be mainstreamed should be developed. Nearly all of the teachers (89-100%) felt that able students should be mainstreamed (Q1), while approximately 50% (56-42%) of them felt that mainstreamed hearing impaired students keep pace with their normal-hearing classmates (Q8).

Table 2 seems to provide a more differentiated picture of teacher perceptions and opinions concerning mainstreaming. Generally, the

teacher tended to give the school "administration" poor marks on effort (Qs 1, 5, 6) and average to above-average marks to students, colleagues, and themselves. From 67%-83% of the teachers gave their school a grade of *C* or less on mainstreaming preparation (Q1) and 67% gave the same poor grades to the administration (Q5). From 66%-75% of the teachers gave the inservice effort either a *D* or an *F* (Q6). However, the majority of the teachers gave themselves *C* or better on mainstreaming preparation (Q2) and gave reasonably high marks to their colleagues (Qs 3, 4, 9, 10). Students also received grades of *C* or better from the majority of teachers (Qs 7, 8) although *C* was the most prevalent grade.

The questionnaires were not validated, although the items were generated through a series of interviews with teachers who participate in mainstreaming programs. While Borg and Gall (1983) argue that the true test of validity is not whether questionnaires are statistically valid, but rather, "Are they valid for the purpose to which I wish to put them?" (p. 275), the results must be viewed as suggestive and not conclusive.

TABLE 2
The Responses Of The Teachers To The Letter-Grade Mainstreaming Question:
Reported In Percentages

	Regular					Hearing-Impaired				
	A	B	C	D	F	A	B	C	D	F
1. In preparation for mainstreaming I would give my school a grade of:	0	33	33	22	12	17	0	58	25	0
2. In preparation for mainstreaming I would give myself a grade of:	22	22	22	22	12	17	50	0	0	0
3. In quality of effort I would give the cooperating teacher a grade of:	44	11	10	0	23	17	25	17	0	0
4. In quality of effort I would give myself a grade of:	33	56	11	0	0	8	58	8	0	0
5. I would give the administration effort to provide a mainstreaming program a grade of:	0	33	44	12	0	17	17	33	25	8
6. I would give our inservice training for mainstreaming a grade of:	0	22	12	44	22	0	8	17	50	25
7. I would give the attitude of regular class students toward mainstreaming a grade of:	12	33	44	0	0	0	33	50	8	8
8. I would give the attitude of hearing-impaired students toward mainstreaming a grade of:	12	33	44	0	0	0	33	50	8	8
9. I would give the attitude of regular class teachers toward mainstreaming a grade of:	11	56	22	11	0	0	58	25	0	8
10. I would give the attitude of teachers of the hearing-impaired toward mainstreaming a grade of:	11	33	22	11	0	17	42	17	8	8

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the attitudes of teachers toward the mainstreaming

concept are generally positive. However, the teachers were able to identify obstacles internal to the process that must be overcome in order

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for it to succeed. Teachers generally expressed regard for the student and for each other on the mainstreaming questions. If the students or the teachers were impeding the implementation of a mainstreaming philosophy as Kutner (1974) indicated could happen, they were not perceived as obstacles. The school administration, on the other hand, was viewed as ineffective in leading the school toward mainstreaming or at least needed to take a more active role in its implementation.

While school administrations are often blamed for many things that go wrong and seldom credited for school achievements, it would seem that the nature of the responsibility that they carry requires them to be accountable. In other words, no matter what actually is taking place, the school administration must gauge progress by considering teacher perceptions. If these perceptions are negative and poor, then

all is not well. Perhaps, on many educational questions, school administrations should be as sensitive to the feelings of teachers as they would hope the teachers are to their students.

SUMMARY

Forty-five teachers were asked a series of questions relating to mainstreaming in order to gauge practitioner attitudes. Clearly, the teachers felt that the students and they were positive forces in the mainstreaming milieu, although the school administration was found lacking in leadership.

While the validity of the teachers' attitude toward the school administration was not addressed, certain conclusions were drawn from the results. The principal suggestion made called for school administrations to be at least as sensitive to teachers' feelings as they expect teachers to be to their students.

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