

**TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL
EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Presented to
the Graduate Council of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Linda Sue Palmer Earheart

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Linda Sue Palmer Earheart entitled "Teachers' Perceptions of Special Education Programs." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in psychology.

Elizabeth H. Stokes
Major Professor

Accepted for the
Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

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Special appreciation is felt for the support, encouragement, and patience extended by my husband, Leslie, and our children, Chuck, Emily, Ellen, Chris, and Erin, without whom this experience would have been impossible.

Gratitude is also extended to my mother, Sue M. Palmer, who has devoted much time and energy as a "mother substitute" during the last two years.

This work is dedicated in memory of my father, Charles F. Palmer, who taught me the value of knowledge and understanding and instilled within me the desire for both.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Many exceptional students are mainstreamed into the regular classroom so there is a need for special support services in order to adequately provide for their education. In Tennessee, these exceptionalities include the gifted, the physically or seriously handicapped, speech and hearing impaired, the mentally retarded, the seriously emotionally disturbed, the multiply handicapped and the learning disabled.

A variety of service options are available to meet the educational needs of these children and may be used singularly or in any combination. The child's needs must be met in the least restrictive environment in both the academic and the non-academic setting.

The ten options available in Tennessee are designed in a way to be progressively restrictive [Tennessee Department of Education (TDE), 1983]. The first five options are designed as support services to the regular classroom and it is two of these services with which this paper deals. Since the children served by these options remain in the regular classroom most of the day, it seemed that the perspectives of the regular classroom teachers toward these programs were important to their successful implementation.

Several studies have been conducted on teachers' attitudes

toward exceptional children, but very few were found which focused on their attitudes toward the programs for these children. Bond and Deitrich (1981) conducted a study to determine teachers' attitudes toward the role of the resource programs and found that those who had negative attitudes toward special education programs also had negative attitudes toward special education children in their classroom. Mills and Berry (1979) found that teachers and parents of the gifted were generally more favorable toward those programs than were regular classroom teachers.

The Bond and Deitrich (1981) study looked at several areas and found no significant correlations between the teachers' attitudes toward the resource program with the grade taught, their knowledge of special education, nor the presence of special education children in their classes. This study also reported several other interesting findings. Only 74% of those participating felt the classroom teacher was obligated to inform the resource teacher of new concepts being introduced and 78% felt the resource room schedule should be arranged around the schedule of the classroom teacher.

In the area of communication, Graham, Hudson, Burd and Carpenter (1980) found that the classroom teachers felt that communication between themselves and the resource teachers was not adequate. They concluded that it is essential that communication between regular and resource teachers be improved. Most current studies of teachers' attitudes toward special

children or programs concentrate on the learning disabled child and programs for the learning disabled child (Bond & Deitrich, 1981). The resource room has been found to be the most popular special support program among teachers (Wiederholt, Hammill, & Brown, 1978). By its very nature, it is the program with which teachers are probably most familiar. Barnover (1971) found that 54% of 50 interviewees felt retention of special classes was beneficial to special students for several reasons, including less frustration and more successful experiences for the exceptional child, as well as more individual attention. She found that classroom teachers more often were in favor of special classes for special students than were non-teaching educators, who favored integration of the mildly exceptional into the regular classroom. In a study of teachers' perceptions of programs for the gifted, Nicely, Small and Furman (1980) found that more teachers felt that remedial programs make their job easier than those who felt these programs make their job more difficult. However, they found that there were as many who perceived enrichment programs for the gifted as making their job more difficult as were those who perceived these programs as making their job easier.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' attitudes toward three programs available in the Robertson County School System. These programs are the Resource Room program; Research, Investigation, Strategy and Evaluation program (RISE); and the Speech and Language program. These are programs for the learning disabled and mentally retarded, the gifted,

and the speech and hearing impaired, respectively.

The Resource Room and RISE are under Option 5: The Regular Program with Special Education Resource Activities (TDE, 1983). Under this option, the student is to receive as much of the regular classroom instruction as possible with additional activities provided by the special education teacher to meet his/her needs. As described, it is to be coordinated carefully with activities in the regular classroom to which he/she is assigned.

The speech and hearing problems children are served under Option 4: Regular Program with Speech and/or Language services (TDE, 1983). These children, also, are placed in the regular program with speech and/or language services provided by a speech and language teacher.

Each student served under these options must be provided a written Individualized Educational Program (IEP) to include the child's present level of functioning, annual goals for the child, short-term instructional objectives, specific educational and related services, date when those services begin, how much the child will participate in the regular classroom, justification of placement, persons responsible for implementation of the IEP, objective criteria and evaluation procedures for determining whether they have been met [Student Evaluation Manual (SEM), 1982]. While it is a function of the Multidisciplinary Team to write the IEP, often it is the special education teacher who is responsible for writing it. Poland, et al. (1982) sent questionnaires to a representative sample of special education

directors, video-taped more than 30 team meetings, and interviewed school professionals following team meetings. It was reported to them that regular education teachers were involved in 82% of the screening decisions, 78% of the placement decisions, and 72% of the instructional planning decisions for the learning disabled. Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Allen (1982) evaluated teachers' participation in these meetings by viewing video-taped team meetings and found that they participated very little in the context of presenting data or asking or answering questions. These teachers expressed general dissatisfaction with the process and also stated that their view of the individual children was not altered by the meetings.

Morgan and Rhode (1983) conducted a survey of special education teachers and found a moderately negative attitude toward the IEP in the areas of demand on their time and lack of sufficient support from the other school personnel. These teachers felt, however, that the IEP has done more good than harm in helping them organize their time. This survey also revealed that the special education teachers saw no clear relationship between the "IEP as a written document and the IEP as a determinant of what happens on a daily basis in the classroom" (p. 66). They felt that they would teach as effectively and the children would learn as well without it.

This study also viewed teachers' attitudes toward special

education programs as related to the number of special education classes they have taken. One would expect a more positive attitude toward these programs with greater awareness of their purpose and function. However, Bond and Dietrich (1981) reported that while 98% of their respondents had special needs children in their classrooms, only 50% had actually taken special education classes. This lack of training makes it doubtful that regular teachers would feel competent to meet the needs of these special children (Gallent, 1981). So, this finding raises the question of how this affects their attitude toward special services for these children.

While no studies were found comparing teachers' attitudes toward special children or special programs with teachers' years of teaching experience, Nicely, et al. (1980) found no difference in attitudes of younger teachers (21-29) and older teachers (30+) toward programs for the gifted. Their rationale was that younger teachers would have greater "awareness and sensitivity for the gifted student" (p. 14) having completed their undergraduate studies during a time of emphasis on gifted children. In the same vein, one might assume that with more experiences with special programs, hopefully positive ones, teachers would have more positive attitudes toward the programs.

Statement of the Hypotheses

In view of the related research, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. There will be a positive relationship between the teachers' attitudes toward special education programs and the perceived communication among members of the multi-disciplinary team.

2. There will be a positive relationship between the teachers' attitudes toward special education programs and the perceived usefulness of the IEP.

3. There will be a positive relationship between the attitudes of teachers toward the programs and their teaching experience.

4. There will be a positive relationship between the attitudes of teachers toward the programs and the number of special education classes they have taken as part of teacher's training.

Chapter 2

METHOD

The Sample

Permission was obtained from the Superintendent of Robertson County Schools and the Principals of Greenbrier Elementary School, East Robertson School, and Jo Byrns Schools to enlist the help of their teachers in the study. Teachers assigned to grades 1-6 participated from East Robertson and Jo Byrns Schools and those assigned to grades 1-5 from Greenbrier, resulting in a total of 33 participants. The participants' years of experience ranged from 1-38. The number of special education courses which they had taken ranged from 0-4. The number of students they had in their 1983-84 classes who were served by Options 4 or 5 ranged from 0-11.

The Procedure

All 33 participants were given a questionnaire and an informed consent form to be returned in separate envelopes. There were no identifying marks on the questionnaire, so the participants could remain anonymous. A copy of each form is in the Appendix.

At one school, the Assistant Principal requested to distribute and collect the questionnaire himself. There was 50% participation among that faculty. Here, in addition to the informed consent and the questionnaire, a cover letter of

introduction and explanation was included (see Appendix).

At the two other participating schools, the researcher personally talked with each faculty member individually or in small groups. The informed consents were signed and collected and the questionnaires were given to them at that point. While the researcher contacted other faculty members in the same school, they had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire. After a short period, the researcher returned to collect the questionnaires. There was 100% participation among those faculty members present.

Due to the differences in distribution and collection of the materials, the researcher felt it necessary to include school assignment in the demographic data in the event that it might account for response differences. There was a difference in the percent of participation in the school in which the questionnaires were returned to the principal as compared to the percent participating when the data were collected by the researcher.

Description of the Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first section asked for demographic data: number of years experience, assigned teaching level, number of special education courses taken, and the number of special education children in the teacher's class who were served under Options 4 or 5.

The second section consisted of 14 questions in reference to various aspects of the special education programs with

emphasis on communication, benefits to the children, usefulness of the IEP, and usefulness and ease of implementation of the suggestions offered by the special education teachers and school psychologists in meeting the needs of the children.

These questions were all stated in a positive direction. The participant then indicated whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed by checking the appropriate box opposite the question. For purposes of analysis, they were later assigned a -2, -1, 0, +1, or +2, respectively, so an "attitude score" could be determined for each participant.

Space was provided at the bottom of the questionnaire for teachers to make any additional comments.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Frequencies were computed on the data using the Crosstally and the Questionnaire Analysis portions of the computer program, The Statistical Package for Everyday Educational Decisions-X (SPEED-X) (Blair, 1983). Hypotheses 1 (teacher attitude X perceived communication) and 2 (teacher attitude X perceived usefulness of the IEP) were analyzed using the Questionnaire Analysis portion of SPEED-X. This reports frequencies and percentages of participants' responses to each item on the questionnaire. Hypotheses 3 (teacher attitude X teaching experience) and 4 (teacher attitude X special education courses) were analyzed with the Crosstally portion of SPEED-X. It reports the probability and Cramer's Phi. Cramer's Phi is a useful index of strength of relationship between two variables when the tables are larger than 2 X 2, because its calculation is not dependent on table size (Welkowitz, et al., 1971).

When the scores were tabulated, 82% or 27 of 33 participants reflected positive attitude scores, 12% or 4 of 33 reflected negative scores, and 6% or 2 of 33 reflected neutral scores. In the area of perceived communication, 45% of the respondents felt there was adequate communication among members of the Multidisciplinary Team, while 27% did not. They were asked if scheduling problems, when they occur, are worked out to the

mutual satisfaction of both the regular teacher and the special education teacher. While 73% agreed that they are, 15% felt that they are not. Only 48% of the respondents felt that there was adequate communication between the school and the parents regarding the child's needs.

Only 36% of the respondents agreed that the IEP is useful in meeting the needs of the child in the classroom. Of the 33 respondents, 12% did not see the IEP as useful to them. Six (18%) of the respondents reported that the IEP was not available to them. Of these six teachers, two had neutral attitude scores, four had positive attitude scores, and none had negative scores.

A significant relationship was found between the teachers' attitudes and their teaching experience. The Crosstally program reported a probability of .028 and Cramer's ϕ of .442, with 9 degrees of freedom. As the number of years experience increased, the percent having positive attitudes increased (See Table 1).

There was no significant relationship between the teachers' attitudes and the number of special education courses they had taken. Crosstally reported a probability of .212 and Cramer's ϕ of .362 with 6 degrees of freedom. While 91% of the respondents had special education students in their classes, only 69% of them had taken any special education courses (See Table 2).

Due to the differences in the method of collecting the data in one of the schools, the Crosstally was calculated comparing the teachers' attitudes with the school to which they were assigned, and found differences among the schools. The

program reported a probability of .028 and Cramer's ϕ of .464 with 6 degrees of freedom (See Table 3). The largest school, in the less rural area, had 100% participation. It had 80% expressing positive attitudes, with 13% expressing neutral attitudes and 6% expressing negative attitudes. The other two schools are similar in size and socio-culturally, but differed in method of data collection. The data from one were collected by the researcher and had 100% participation. Also, 100% of these participants expressed positive attitudes. The data in the other school were collected by the Assistant Principal. It was here that only 50% of the faculty participated. Fifty percent of them expressed positive attitudes and 50% expressed negative attitudes with none neutral.

Several comments were made in the space provided. Six respondents (18%) indicated that there was no psychologist available. These 6 teachers were all assigned to the same school. The need to know more about the special programs and their qualifying criteria was expressed by 12% of the participants. Six percent felt there was not enough awareness of curriculum among the special and regular teachers. Six percent felt school psychology services are inadequate due to quantity rather than quality.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the perceptions of teachers toward special education programs with a questionnaire. Only two of the four hypotheses were supported by the data.

First, there was only a slightly positive relationship between the teachers' attitudes toward the special education programs and their perceived communication among members of the Multidisciplinary Team. Fifty-nine percent of those with positive attitudes (27) also perceived adequate communication (16) among members of the Multidisciplinary Team. While 12% had negative attitude scores, 27% of all participants perceived communication as being inadequate.

Second, there was not a positive relationship between the teachers' attitudes and their perceived usefulness of the IEP. Only 44% of those having positive attitudes indicated that the IEP was useful to them. Forty-eight percent of those with positive attitudes indicated neutrality or that the IEP was not available to them. Unlike Morgan and Rhode (1983) who found a slightly negative attitude toward the IEP among special education teachers, this study found basically neutral attitudes toward it among regular classroom teachers.

Third, a significant relationship was found between the teachers' attitudes and their number of years teaching experience.

Of those with eleven or more years experience, 94% had positive attitudes toward special education programs. Of those with 6-10 years experience, 86% had positive attitudes. Of those with 3-5 years experience, 60% had positive attitudes, and only 50% of those with 2 years or less experience had positive attitudes. This is not in agreement with the findings of Nicely, et al. (1980) who found no difference in the attitudes of younger (21-29) teachers and older (30+) teachers toward special education programs for the gifted.

Fourth, no differences in attitudes of teachers toward special programs were found relative to the number of special education courses which they had taken. This study found that while 91% of the participants had special needs children in their classes, only 41% had taken any special education courses. These percentages are only slightly lower than those reported by Bond and Dietrich (1981). It is interesting to note that while 90% of those having taken no special education classes had positive attitudes toward the programs, only 77% of those having taken 1-3 courses and 89% of those having taken 4-6 courses reported positive attitudes. These findings are in agreement with Bond and Dietrich (1981) who found no significant correlation between teachers' attitudes toward the resource programs and their knowledge of special education.

Crosstally revealed differences in attitudes among all three schools. It is, therefore, questionable whether the method of data collection had any influence on responses. The two

schools where the same method was used, schools 1 and 2, showed almost as much difference as did school 3, where the method of data collection was different (See Table 3). This difference could be attributed to a variety of factors such as school size, socio-cultural factors, or teacher factors. Further research would be required to determine this difference.

In view of the fact that "further comments" was left to the discretion of the participants, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions based on those statements. However, it would be of interest to further investigate the indications of 50% of the teachers of one school that a school psychologist was not available. Some comments referred to the need for more information regarding curriculum to be exchanged between the resource and regular teachers. This warrants further investigation because the resource program is to be closely coordinated with the regular classroom program (TDE, 1981).

Twelve percent of all participants expressed a need to be more aware of qualifying criteria for special programs. Even this small a percentage voluntarily indicating such a need may warrant attention, possibly to the extent of an effort to make regular teachers more aware of these criteria.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine teachers' attitudes toward special education programs. Questionnaires with appropriate questions were given to 33 teachers. When collected, they were statistically analyzed to determine an "attitude score" which was then compared to the demographic data collected.

Analysis revealed 82% of the participants had positive attitudes toward the special education programs with which they deal, 12% had negative attitudes and 6% had neutral attitudes. Correlational analysis revealed support for only two of the hypotheses. There was a difference in attitudes of those who had differing levels of experience and differing perceptions of communication, but not in those who had taken differing numbers of special education courses nor having differing perceptions of IEP usefulness.

A difference in attitudes among schools was also revealed. This aspect warrants further investigation because there are differences among the schools in size and it may be socio-cultural or teacher differences which account for the differences, rather than data collection differences.

While some of the results of this study support previous findings and some do not, it revealed some enlightening data

which warrant further study. Based on comments teachers made at the bottom of the questionnaire, there appears to be a need for an effort to be made toward educating teachers to the criteria for qualifying for the various programs offered for special needs children. This might be accomplished through in-service training programs for teachers.

An investigation of whether an effort is made to coordinate the resource room curriculum with that of the regular classroom would be of interest. That the two programs are carefully coordinated is a guideline stated in the Student Evaluation Manual (TDE, 1982). This is a part of Tennessee's effort to implement PL 94-142 on a state-wide basis (TDE, 1982).

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TABLES

$$P(0.9) = 0.442$$

Crosstally Table 1
Attitude X Years Experience

		Attitude Score						
		-28	-1	0	+1	+28	+29	+56
Years Experience	11+	1		0		12		5
	6-10	1		0		6		0
	3-5	0		2		2		1
	0-2	1		0		1		0

Note. For the table above Cramer's $\Phi(9) = 0.442$,
 $p < 0.028$.

Crosstally Table 2
Attitude X Special Education Courses

		Attitude Score						
		-28	-1	0	+1	+28	+29	+56
Special Education Courses	4-6	1		0		4		4
	1-3	1		2		9		1
	0	1		0		8		1

Note. For the table above Cramer's $\Phi(6) = 0.362$,
 $p < 0.212$.

Crosstally Table 3

Attitude X School

		Attitude Score						
		-28	-1	0	+1	+28	+29	+56
School	3	3	0	0	3	0		
	2	1	2	8	4			
	1	0	0	10	2			

Note. For the table above Cramer's $\Phi(6) = 0.464$,

$p < 0.028$.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

- _____ 1. Assigned teaching level.
- _____ 2. Number of years teaching experience.
- _____ 3. Approximate number of special education courses you have taken.
- _____ 4. Number of students who leave your class for:
RISE _____ Resource _____ Speech & Language _____

Please express your opinion on each of the following statements by checking the box beneath the appropriate letter as indicated by the key.

KEY: SA=strongly agree A=agree N=neutral D=disagree SD=strongly disagree

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Having a child leave my class for special education classes does not create a problem with my schedule.					
2. There is adequate communication among the members of the multidisciplinary team to avoid or reconcile scheduling problems that occur.					
3. The scheduling of special class times is worked out to the satisfaction of both the regular and the special education teachers.					
4. There is adequate communication among members of the multidisciplinary team in the effort to plan the IEP.					
5. The IEP is useful in meeting the needs of the special needs child in the classroom. (Check here if the IEP is not available to you. __)					
6. The suggestions offered by the special education teacher are helpful to the child.					
7. The suggestions offered by the special education teacher can be implemented in the classroom in a practical way.					
8. The suggestions offered by the school psychologist are helpful to the child.					
9. The suggestions offered by the school psychologist can be implemented in a practical way.					

		SA	A	N	D	SD
10.	There is adequate communication between the school and the parents in an attempt to meet the child's needs.					
11.	The curriculum in special education classes (Resource) provides remediation that reinforces current classroom activities.					
12.	These programs are vital to the children they serve: <u>RISE</u>					
	<u>Resource</u>					
	<u>Speech & Language</u>					
13.	The identification and withdrawal of the special needs child from the regular classroom for:					
	<u>RISE enhances his/her:</u>					
	<u>Academic performance</u>					
	<u>Classroom behavior</u>					
	<u>Self-concept</u>					
	<u>Poor Relationships</u>					
	<u>Resource enhances his/her:</u>					
	<u>Academic performance</u>					
	<u>Classroom behavior</u>					
	<u>Self-concept</u>					
	<u>Peer relationships</u>					
	<u>Speech & Language enhances his/her:</u>					
	<u>Academic performance</u>					
	<u>Classroom behavior</u>					
	<u>Self-concept</u>					
	<u>Peer relationships</u>					
14.	The presence, identification and withdrawal of special needs children from the regular classroom also has an effect on the other children in the class. This is generally a positive effect in the area of:					
	<u>Academic performance</u>					
	<u>Classroom behavior</u>					

The space below is provided for your further comments:

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

28

The purpose of this investigation is to determine the perceptions of classroom teachers toward special education programs, including RISE, Resource and Speech and Language. These programs are included because the children must leave the regular classroom for a portion of the day in order to participate. There are no potential hazards which may occur from your participation in this research because the questionnaire you are asked to complete will be returned to me anonymously. The demographic information collected will be used only for purposes of analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time.

The results of the study will be made available to you upon its completion.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Linda S. Carhart

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, either orally or in writing or both, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries as I may have regarding the procedures. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

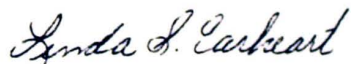
Dear Educator:

I am conducting a study which will be used to meet partial requirements for my M.A. in the School Psychology program at Austin Peay State University. It is an investigation of the perceptions of the classroom teacher toward special education programs. The study addresses issues which, as a parent and a former teacher, have concerned me for some time. Your views are of particular interest to me since I will be involved in these types of programs in the future.

Attached is a questionnaire on which you can express your views and return it and the Informed Consent to Mr. Ballard by Friday, May 18.

I realize how very busy you are at this time of the year and I appreciate you taking your time to assist me in this study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda S. Earheart".

Linda S. Earheart