Inclusive Education in the United States: Middle School General Education Teachers’ Approaches to Inclusion

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Research examined how three middle school teachers included students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Purposive sampling was used to select a sixth grade science teacher, seventh grade social studies teacher, and eighth grade math teacher whose classrooms were identified as exemplifying the characteristics of inclusive settings. Each participant had at least six years of teaching experience. The qualitative techniques of interviews, observations, and document analyses were utilized to tell the stories of the three teachers. The specific themes and areas that emerged from the data were preparation, attitudes, and expectations; planning time, collaboration and in-class supports; and instructional strategies. Data revealed that all participants had little pre-service preparation specific to working with students with disabilities and varying levels of in-class supports, but all had positive attitudes about having students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Each teacher developed and implemented numerous instructional practices which have implications for the effective inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusion, General Education Classroom, Middle School, Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of education in the United States has changed dramatically over the past four decades. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975 guaranteed all children access to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), regardless of the nature or severity of their disability. This legislation brought students with moderate to severe disabilities into public schools for the first time and promoted the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

The passage of this act dramatically increased the number of students with disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms. Approximately 59% of students classified with disabilities spend 80 percent or more of each school day in a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This practice of educating students with disabilities alongside non-