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## A Survey of Preservice Teachers' Attitudes on Integrating Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Education Classrooms

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*University of Central Florida*



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A SURVEY OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES ON INTEGRATING  
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION  
CLASSROOMS

by

KELSEY MCNAMEE

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Exceptional Education  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term, 2016

Thesis Chair: Caroline Pratt Marrett, Ph.D.

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## **ABSTRACT**

There are more than 2.4 million American public school students identified with learning disabilities who are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). General education preservice teachers are expected to effectively teach all students, including those with disabilities. However, most teacher preparation programs only require a single course in teaching students with disabilities. Research shows that that teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion are the greatest predictor of a successful inclusion classroom. This study explored the attitudes of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers regarding integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms. A quantitative research design with a survey method was used in this study. The survey method included a questionnaire via Qualtrics, an online survey system used at the University of Central Florida. Findings of this study revealed that 40% of preservice teachers indicated that integrating students with disabilities in the general education class was a burden. However, due to information limitations the results for preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers' attitudes regarding the integration of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and the number of hours of service learning completed was inconclusive.

## **DEDICATIONS**

Growing up, I was blessed with parents who dedicated all their love, wisdom, time, and money to their children. As a child, I had everything I needed and more. Even now as an adult my parents consistently make me a number one priority in their lives. For that, and so much more, this is for you, Mom and Dad.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First, I would like to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. Caroline Pratt Marrett. I could not have picked a better mentor to support and guide me through this process. Your unparalleled persistence during this research study is something I admire and hope to possess one day myself.

I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Hines and Dr. Wenzel, for their support and guidance. This research study would not have been possible without them.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

There are approximately 2.4 million American public school students identified with learning disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a specific learning disability (SLD) is defined as, “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (U.S Department of Justice, 2009).

Deficits that are associated with these various learning disabilities include auditory processing, which is a natural process of taking in sound through the ear and having it travel to the language area of the brain to be interpreted, visual processing, the sequence of steps that information takes as it flows from visual sensors to cognitive processing, nonverbal learning, a neurological disorder characterized by significantly higher verbal scores and lower performance scores on an IQ test. Some students with learning disabilities also experience deficits in executive functioning which is a set of processes that impact the ability to manage oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal. Students with attention deficit disorder oftentimes have challenges with learning and/or behavior due to not being unable to think about or pay attention to instructions for long periods of times (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Common academic deficits associated with students with SLD include difficulty with reading, math, memorization, coordination, and organization. Many students with SLD develop social and behavioral deficits due to these academic shortcomings and have difficulty with

cognitive processing necessary for academic success. In the classroom, these deficits may be manifested by inappropriate responses, a greater level of immaturity, inconsistency in academic performance or social skills, difficulty listening well, and problems dealing with new routines.

In 1975, President Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) into law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires:

Public schools to make available to all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs. IDEA requires public school systems to develop appropriate Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for each child. IDEA also mandates that particular procedures be followed in the development of the IEP. Each student's IEP must be developed by a team of knowledgeable persons and must be at least reviewed annually. The team includes the child's teacher; parents/legal guardians, subject to certain limited exceptions; the child, if determined appropriate; an agency representative who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education; and other individuals at the parents' or agency's discretion.

This law has allowed for students with specific learning disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education within a public school (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014): "Inclusion is the full acceptance of all students in the general education classroom that leads to a sense of belonging within the classroom community." Inclusion has given students with a specific learning disability the ability to receive free and appropriate public education in the general education classroom based on age. Since inclusion is not a legally mandated concept, there is no required

criteria that public schools have to abide by in order to implement it (Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, 2002).

Preservice general education teachers are expected to effectively teach all students, including those with disabilities. Most teacher preparation programs only require a single course in teaching students with disabilities. However, a single course in teacher education programs to prepare teacher's preservice teachers may help raise awareness and introduce students to the various disability categories, but it may not be enough to help them develop the professional dispositions or attitudes to effectively teach students with disabilities. Research shows that teacher attitudes regarding inclusion are the greatest predictor of a successful inclusion classroom (Martin & Kudlacek, 2010; Romi & Leyser, 2006). This research study explored the attitudes of preservice elementary and secondary teachers regarding teaching the practice and reality of inclusion.

## **Rationale**

In preparing to become a future educator, I have come to the realization that exceptional education is not a primary focus in teacher preparation programs. However, inclusion is being implemented in most of the 14,000 public school districts throughout the United States. In my journey of becoming more involved and educated in the exceptional education field, I have found that in the general education classroom, there can be anywhere from one to three students with a specific learning disability. The teacher in the same classroom is a teacher who may have taken one workshop or professional training in exceptional student education. Oftentimes, there is little to no special education training available depending on the school district.

Unfortunately, I have seen firsthand how the lack of understanding regarding exceptional

education has negatively impacted the academic and behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities; and in some cases, hindered their ability to be successful in the classroom. These behavioral challenges that start and cultivate in primary grades due to academic shortcomings and lack of understanding from teachers have long-term consequences and may persist in middle school, high school, and eventually into the real world. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, whether positive or negative, will influence the quality of education students with disabilities receive. The teacher plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive environment and providing instruction that allows all students to access the curriculum. Cassidy (2011, p.1) states, "Teachers' attitudes toward their current student population with special needs dramatically affect the success and effectiveness of their instruction".

Being a student with, Juvenile Diabetes, who attended the public school system from 1998 to 2011 I have experienced both positive and negative attitudes from teachers which affected my academic success and behavior in many ways. Juvenile Diabetes is, "a chronic condition in which the pancreas produces little or no insulin, a hormone needed to allow sugar (glucose) to enter cells to produce energy" (Mayo Clinic Staff, 1998-2016) which makes me completely insulin dependent. As an elementary and middle school aged student being insulin dependent made me very teacher dependent. The accommodations that had to be made in regards to my eating, drinking water, and using the restroom were controlled by my teacher. I was always aware of the attitude my teacher had in regard to these accommodations and whether or not they felt inconvenienced by them. Their attitude affected my academic success and behavior in and out of the classroom.

Teachers who view inclusion in a positive light are highly effective and provide a better

quality than their colleagues who do not embrace inclusion (Ryan, 2009). This study examined the attitudes of general education preservice elementary and secondary teachers regarding including students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **General Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion**

As beneficial as inclusion has proven to be (Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013, p. 23-30; Ruijis, Vander Veen, & Peetsma, 2010, p.351-390; C.M, Waldron, N., & Majd, M, 2004), not all general education teachers embrace inclusion. Views on inclusion and teaching students with disabilities vary among general education teachers. Cassady (2011) found that teachers were more accepting of students with autism than with emotional and behavioral disorders. Teachers cannot hand select who they will teach yet, the attitudes they have regarding inclusion or specific categories of disabilities are problematic. Having a negative or indifferent attitude toward teaching students creates barriers to success. Teachers may not welcome students with disabilities in the classroom or may feel unprepared to teach them. Their negative feelings toward inclusion impact their ability and desire to provide students with disabilities the quality education they deserve.

### **Benefits of Integrating Students with Disabilities into the General Education Classroom**

Both students with and without disabilities benefit from an inclusive classroom setting. Students with disabilities benefit from an inclusive classroom setting by first having increased social initiations, relationships, and networks. When students with disabilities are in a general education classroom setting, they are in a normal sized classroom of 17 to 21 students. This gives students with disabilities the same opportunities that students without disabilities have for social interactions. Second, inclusive classrooms provide peer role models for academic, social, and behavior skills which, includes areas where students with disabilities experience difficulties.

The best way for students with disabilities to learn academic, social, and behavior norms is to have it modeled for them by their peers. Third, being accepted and included into an inclusive classroom setting makes for increased inclusion in future environments. When students with disabilities have a positive experience in this type of setting, it is more likely for them to have the confidence to go out into other environments and include themselves. Lastly, inclusive classroom settings provide higher expectations for students with disabilities. When surrounded by the same expectations as their peers, students with disabilities feel included and held to the same expected class rigor.

In addition, students without disabilities benefit from an inclusive classroom setting as well, first, by having increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences. This type of environment teaches students that everyone has his/her own point of view and way of doing things. Learning to merge different point of view into one's own helps to develop valuable skills, especially for students with disabilities. It prepares all students for adult life in an inclusive society. There are differing kinds of personality traits in the real world and this requires one to develop the abilities to collaborate to achieve success. An inclusive classroom setting gives all students the opportunity to master activities by practicing and teaching others (Kids Together Inc., 1995-2009).

### **Challenges of Integrating Students with Disabilities into the General Education Classroom**

With the benefits of integrating students with disabilities into the general education classroom, there are also conflicts that arise. Many educational professionals feel students with disabilities will not receive the free and appropriate education they deserve in a general education classroom. First, in a general education classroom students receive academic instruction in a large

group setting. In a large group setting students are all taught the information in one way, at the same pace, and only generally monitored for proficiency throughout the lesson. Second, in a general education classroom setting specific grade level standards are geared towards on target students without a disability. The particular way the state wants students to be able to demonstrate their knowledge on assessments and state tests can be very difficult for students with disabilities. Lastly, the required behavioral and social norms that must be met in order to stay in the general education classroom and receive academic instruction are often not met by students with disabilities. Due to students with disabilities not possessing the correct behavioral and social norms, other students in the class often become distracted and academic instructional time is compromised for all students (Kids Together Inc., 1995-2009).

### **Florida Teacher Education Preparation Program**

The Florida Department of Education requires all initial teacher education certification programs to include an Exceptional Student Education course as part of their degree program. The course generally is an introductory course that explores the etiology, identification, diagnosis of exceptionalities. The focus of instruction may address the learning and behavioral needs of students with disabilities but not the pedagogy and/or provide service-learning opportunities where students have the opportunity to interact, work with, and teach students with disabilities.

### **Teacher Education Program at University of Central Florida**

Elementary education preservice teachers at the University of Central Florida, enrolled in teaching certification programs take EEX 4070. The course description states, “The purpose of

this class is to develop and practice skills in the effective teaching and management strategies for elementary general education teachers to use in working with students with disabilities.” In this course, preservice teachers are required to complete a service learning project known as, Teachers in Action. This project allows for preservice teachers to work directly with students with disabilities for 10 to 12 hours and document and reflect on their experience. What they are required to document/reflect upon depend on the professor. This hands on experience gives elementary education preservice teachers an opportunity to begin forming their own attitudes in regards to this population.

Secondary Education students at the University of Central Florida, enrolled in teaching certification programs take EEX 4242. The course description for EEX 4242, required for all majors in English Language Arts, World Languages, Science Education, Mathematics Education, Social Science education, and Art Education states, “In this course you will learn about how to plan and implement effective teaching and management strategies for secondary students with disabilities.” Preservice teachers are also required to complete 10-12 hours of working with students with disabilities. What they are required to document and/or reflect upon depends on the instructor and may vary greatly. These hands on experiences give secondary education preservice teachers an opportunity to begin forming their own attitudes in regards to this population

Students pursuing teaching degrees both elementary and secondary in the College of Education and Human Performance also take nine courses that involve working directly with students in field and/or service learning experiences beginning in their freshman year and continues throughout their programs of study. They are: *Introduction to the Teaching Profession*;

*Introduction to Diversity for Educators; Teaching Strategies and Classroom Management; Learning Theory and Assessment; Theory and Practice of Teaching ESOL Students in Schools; Diagnostic & Corrective Reading Strategies; Practicum for Assessment and Instruction of Reading; How Children Learn Math; and Integrated Arts and Movement.* However, none of these courses specifically focus on providing instructional supports to students with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. These service learning opportunities may give preservice teachers an experience dealing with an inclusive classroom setting, but it is not required for preservice teachers to complete these service learning projects in an inclusive classroom. Some preservice teachers may get a first-hand look on how to integrate and accommodate students with a disability in an inclusive setting early in their studies or in some cases, throughout their studies while other preservice teachers do not have that experience or work in an inclusive setting until they take EEX 4070 or EEX 4242.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning is an extremely large component of the coursework that is required to successfully complete teacher preparation programs. The coursework that deals specifically with exceptional education is no different, the service-learning component is required. According to Fayetteville University service learning is, “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Office of Civic Engagement & Service Learning, 2016). Service learning has proven to be a beneficial way to bridge the gap between theory taught in the university classroom and practice done in the field. It allows for preservice

teachers to use the knowledge they have been taught and apply effective practices in the general education classroom, while still receiving guidance and support from the classroom teacher.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is based on the notion that attitudes are formed by knowledge and that the attitude an individual has on a given topic, object, person, will reflect in his or her behavior. There are many definitions for the word attitude. However, as defined by Allport (1935, p.810), attitude is “a mental or neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual’s response to all objects and situations which it is related.” The theory of Reasoned Action developed by Fishbein (1967) states that attitude is a predictor of behavior. Preservice teachers obtain their knowledge and skills in teacher education programs. During their studies, they learn about researched based methods and strategies students for teaching students with disabilities and work in inclusive settings, all of which provide opportunities for learning that shape their attitudes. Preservice teacher may have a negative attitude prior to entering a teacher education program or be indifferent regarding the responsibility for meeting the instructional, social, and behavioral needs of those students. However, as they are nearing the end of their studies, it is essential that their views related to inclusion are aligned to best practices for teaching all students - those with and without disabilities.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample**

The researcher completed the Citi Training to receive her IRB certification in order to submit the proposal to IRIS. April 2015, The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study at the University of Central Florida. A convenience sample from the College of Education and Human Performance (CEDHP) was used. The Office of Clinical Experiences in CEDHP at UCF sent the survey electronically to all 564 participants who were enrolled in Internship I and Internship II. The participants are placed in 16 counties in central Florida. Internship I students are in a classroom two full days a week and take three method courses that allow them to apply the theory learned in class in the schools where they are placed. The Internship II students are completing their final semester where they are working full-time in a classroom to fulfill their student teaching requirement. All student interns included were Early Childhood, Elementary, or Secondary Education majors. Secondary education majors are students pursuing a teaching degree in Mathematics Education, Science Education, Art Education, Social Science Education, World Languages, or English Language Arts. All participants had to successfully complete either EEX 4070 or EEX 4242 and be currently placed in Internship I or II. Based on the research questions and the participants' schedules, it was determined that an online survey would be the most practical and efficient way to obtain the data. The anonymous survey was administered to explore the attitudes of the preservice teachers toward inclusion. Of the 564 students who received the survey, 98 participants responded which represents 17.7% of the students in Internship I and II. The survey was open for one week.

## **Limitations**

A limitation of this study was that all participants are from the same teacher education program in an urban setting therefore results may not be generalized with participants with different characteristics and in non-urban settings. Another limitation was that the researcher did not provide an opportunity for participants to indicate on the survey if they did not complete any service learning hours. Therefore, the choice of hours for “0 to 20” could not provide an accurate count. In addition, a convenience sample was used as opposed to a random sampling, which has stronger sampling procedures.

## **Assumptions**

Assumptions of this study include: participants responded accurately and honestly and that their decision to participate in this study was solely to provide information that may be helpful to the College of Education and Human Performance.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) Is there a relationship between attitudes of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers with regard to integrating students in general education classes?
- 2) Is there a relationship between attitudes of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers regarding integrating students with disabilities and the number of hours of service learning completed?

## **Research Design**

A quantitative research design with a survey method was used in this study. The survey method included a questionnaire via Qualtrics, an online survey system used at the University of Central Florida. Participants' responses were confidential and the questionnaire was intentionally selected because it was deemed most appropriate to address the research questions. In addition, its brevity increased the likelihood participants would respond and complete all questions.

### **Instrument**

The two research questions this study sought to investigate include 1) Is there a relationship in attitudes regarding inclusion of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers with regard to integrating students? 2) Is there a relationship in attitudes regarding integrating students with disabilities of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers and the number of hours of service learning completed? To examine these questions, selected items of a survey developed by Hadadian and Chiang (2007) was used. Hadadian and Chiang, professors from Ball State University and Azusa University respectively, administered a 4-part survey to their undergraduate and graduate students to determine the perceptions of preservice teachers regarding students with disabilities. The desired goal was to determine the best approach to use to prepare teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. Based on the results of the 248 students who completed the survey, they found that taking courses in special education improved students' attitudes regarding inclusion and experiences with students with disabilities did not. In this study, questions from the section on Agreements/Disagreements with Inclusion Related Issues was used. This study used five of the twelve questions on the Hadadian and Chiang survey to explore attitudes of preservice teachers. In addition, there were six demographic questions including gender, age, and major included on the survey. To examine Research Question 2, the

researcher included a question regarding the amount of hours spent in service learning, volunteering, and/or interacting with students with disabilities as part of a required course (s) at UCF.

### **Data Analysis**

Assistance in analyzing data was received from the Computing and Statistical Technology Laboratory in Education (CASTLE). Analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0. Descriptive statistics test was run to obtain frequencies on the demographic variables. The Pearson Correlation Test was run to answer the research questions.

### **Timeline**

I set a timeline in order to successfully complete this study and meet the due dates provided by the Burnett Honors College.

- Summer of 2015: I registered in Thesis I. During Thesis I, I explored and synthesized my research identified in the proposal more in depth. During this time I completed my Institutional Review Board certification and composing a formal survey. “The role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is to ensure compliance with all Federal regulations, state and local laws, and University policies for the use of human participants in research” (University of Central Florida, 2008). The human participants in my research will be preservice teachers that I survey; therefore, I will need IRB certification.
- Fall of 2015: I was not registered in any Honors in the Major courses at UCF, instead I worked independently on my thesis. I worked to finalize my survey, get my survey approved by

the Orange County public school system, and finalize what randomized schools I would distribute the survey to.

- Spring of 2016: I was registered in Thesis II. During Thesis II I planned to observe classrooms: Feb-March, send out survey: March 1st, schedule a defense date: March 4th, attend an Initial Format Review: March 29th, complete the writing portion of my Thesis, submit my Thesis to turnitin.com: April 1st, defend Thesis: Week of April 4-8, approval form and thesis attachment due to Honors: April 20th, submit Thesis: April 20th. However, due to the timing of the Florida Standards Assessment, I was informed I would not be able to conduct my research in Orange County or Sarasota County. As a result, the focus of my Thesis changed to A Survey of Preservice Teachers' Attitudes in Regard to Teaching in Inclusive Education Classrooms. For my new study, I conducted survey research to preservice teachers completing their Internship I or II clinical experience at the University of Central Florida. I stayed relatively within my previously set due dates, but with a new thesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

An anonymous survey was sent electronically to 564 students enrolled in Internship I and II for the spring 2016 semester at the University of Central Florida. Of the 564 potential participants, 103 completed the survey. The survey response rate of 18.2%. Five participants were Early Childhood majors and their responses were not included when investigating the two research questions but were reported as part of the descriptive analyses. There were 98 completed surveys with useable data to examine the two research questions. The survey included 6 demographic questions and 6 questions that were related to the integration of students with disabilities. This section will report on the findings of the research questions: 1) Is there a relationship between attitudes of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers with regard to integrating students in general education classes? 2) Is there a relationship between attitudes of preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers regarding integrating students with disabilities and the number of hours of service learning completed?

Descriptive analyses showed that the male participants accounted for 9% of the total sample (N=10) and that 91% (N=96) were female. Participant ages groups were 18-22 (53%); 23-26 (31%); 27-32 (9%) and 32+ (7%). With regard participants' major, Early Childhood Education accounted for 5%; Elementary Educations 68% and Secondary Education 28% (see Figure 1). Only 13 participants (12%) indicated they completed a minor in Exceptional Student Education degree (see Figure 2). In response to "How would you classify yourself?" the majority of the participants classified themselves as White (75%); Hispanic or Latino participants represented 21% of the participants, Asian, 5%, Black or African American, 4% and 4% identified themselves as other.

With regard to the statement, "Children with special need/disabilities should be integrated with children without disabilities," 75 (76.5%) of the preservice teachers agreed while 10 (10.2%) disagreed agreed with the statement. A total of 13 preservice teachers (13.3%) indicated they had no opinion about the statement. The statement regarding normally developing children benefitting from observing and interacting with children with special needs/abilities, 89 preservice teachers (90.8%) agreed. Regarding the statement that teachers can become more aware of needs for all children in their program, 89 preservice teachers (90.8%) agreed with the statement, 4 preservice teachers (4.1%) disagreed, and 5 (5.1%) indicated that had no opinion about the statement. In response to "Children with disabilities need to be educated in separate classrooms/schools", 19 (19.4%) preservice teachers indicated they had no opinion on the topic and 10 (10.2%) preservice teachers agreed with the statement, while 69 (70.4%) disagreed with the statement.

Table 1:

Integrating children with and without disabilities creates additional burdens for the general education staff based on major

		Elementary Education	Secondary Education	Total
Integrating children with and without disabilities creates additional burdens for the general education staff	Agree	25	13	38
	Disagree	34	10	44
	No Opinion	10	6	16
	Total	69	29	98

The researcher conducted a Chi Square Test of Association between preservice elementary teachers and preservice secondary teachers to determine if there is a relationship regarding their attitudes on the integration of children with and without disabilities being a burden to general education staff. There was no relationship between major and integration of

students with disabilities ( $\chi^2 (2) = 1.86, p = .394$ ). There was no relationship between preservice elementary and preservice secondary teachers' attitudes regarding the integration of children with and without disabilities being a burden to general education staff.

Table 2:

Overall, how many hours have you spent in service- learning, volunteering, and/or interacting with students with disabilities based on major

		Elementary Education	Secondary Education	Total
Overall, how many hours have you spent in service- learning, volunteering, and/or interacting with students with disabilities	20 hours or less	37	12	49
	21-40 hours	4	3	7
	40 -60 hours	14	8	22
	More than 60 hours	14	4	18
	Total	69	27	96

The researcher conducted a Chi Square Test of Association between preservice elementary teachers and preservice secondary teachers and hours spent performing service learning activities. There was no relationship between major and hours spent performing service learning activities ( $\chi^2 (2) = 2.12, p = .548$ ). There was no relationship between preservice elementary teachers and preservice secondary teachers and hours spent performing service learning.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Based on the survey results received, 40% of preservice teachers indicated that integrating students with disabilities is a burden and 17% have no opinion on the topic at all. Depending on the survey question, preservice teachers' attitudes seemed to change on inclusion based on the benefit to students. For example, over 90% agreed that having "Normally developing children will benefit from observing and interacting with children with students with disabilities." Yet, when asked about integrating students with disabilities being a burden, 4 in 10 preservice teachers indicated it was a burden to general education staff. With many preservice teachers graduating and going into the field with this attitude they are unlikely to view and model inclusion in a positive light, and are unlikely to provide highly effective instruction to all of their students. Based on the survey data preservice teachers do believe that students with disabilities should be integrated into the general education classroom, but that integrating them will burden the teacher. This attitude seems to align with the idea that students with disabilities should be integrated, however, there appears to be reservations about the implementation of inclusion. Perhaps too, there is a level of discomfort about students with disabilities being placed in their classrooms. This negative attitude affects how students with disabilities feel about themselves and the way students without disabilities treat students with disabilities.

From review of their teacher education programs of study, it was found that both elementary and secondary education majors take one course in regards to exceptional student education. In each of the elementary and secondary courses preservice teachers are required to complete 10 to 12 hours of service learning. This gives both majors the same amount of knowledge, the same content, and guidance on integrating students with disabilities into the

general education classroom. I predicted however, that elementary education students would have more of a positive attitude in regards to inclusive classroom settings over secondary education students. I predicted this because elementary education courses are more teacher preparation based, whereas, secondary education major courses are more content based. This prediction proved to be incorrect since the survey results showed there is no difference in attitudes between elementary and secondary education majors.

It is important to note that the survey did not take into account that some students may not have performed any service-learning activities and did not provide an opportunity for participants to indicate so. Therefore, the choice of hours for “0 to 20” was not able to accurately distinguish between the hours completed by some participants who completed between 1 to 20 hours from those who completed none at all. Also, the data collected did not reveal the quality or kinds of service learning experiences the participants were engaged in during the programs of study.

Interestingly, in Hadadain and Chiang’s study on preservice teachers, their findings indicated that knowledge learned in class was more beneficial than experiences working with students with disabilities in shaping or influencing positive attitudes toward inclusion. Although no conclusions could be drawn from this study regarding hours of service learning and the level of agreement regarding the integration of students with disabilities, based on my review of literature, there needs to be more studies on this topic. I agree that knowledge is a critical piece in helping students form positive views about inclusion. However, determining what specific kinds of information needs to be taught and the presentation of that information may also be essential factors in how students form their attitudes about inclusive education. Based on the

literature and survey results more information needs to be acquired in order to find out the root of what is shaping preservice teachers attitudes.

I was surprised to find that so many students had “No opinion” on some or actually, any of the survey questions. While I originally viewed that as a negative, especially since the preservice teachers will be graduating in the next few semesters and have completed their required course that prepares them for teaching students with disabilities. And perhaps, some of the students may not fully understand the philosophy or practice of inclusion, therefore did not have an opinion about the different statements related to inclusion. However, based on conversations with members of my committee, I believe there may be another explanation for the students, at least some who selected “No opinion” as their response. Most students my age have gone to school with students with disabilities. It is not uncommon to have a family member or friend with a disability. The idea that integration of students with a disability is or would be a problem is not something that they cannot relate to—their norm has always been inclusion. Special education has changed drastically over the past few decades and policies and laws have improved the quality of life and better opportunities for school and work for persons with disabilities. For my generation, watching movies and television shows with and about people with disabilities have allowed us to be more open and inclusive in our thinking. While I do not think all students who selected “No Opinion” on a response did so because they embrace inclusion fully, I believe that there may be some that did.

As a student in a teacher education program at the University of Central Florida I understand why preservice teachers may feel that integrating students with disabilities into the general education classroom is a burden. With only one course of exceptional student education

preparation provided, few service learning opportunities to learn about integrating students with disabilities, and many current teachers in the field who have negative attitudes towards integrating students with disabilities into the general education classroom, preservice teachers do not have enough experiences to form a positive attitude. These challenges that I observed throughout the program helped me to see the need to become more prepared for working with students with exceptionalities. During my junior year, I chose to add an exceptional education minor to my degree in order to better prepare myself for working in inclusive settings and form a positive attitude towards students with disabilities. However, I know this is not an option for all preservice teachers and therefore, teacher education preparation programs need to consider what they can do to provide greater learning opportunities for preservice teachers to gain knowledge and experience integrating students with disabilities into the general education classroom.

### **Future Recommendations**

In order for teacher preparations programs to better educate and inform individuals training to teach in inclusive settings infusing exceptional education knowledge into the general major classes and coursework could prove to be very beneficial. Having Exceptional Student Education infused into the elementary and secondary general major courses would be able to give preservice teachers more time and guidance on how to effectively integrate students with disabilities into the general education classroom. A great approach that could be mirrored would be the ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) infusion approach. Preservice teachers are required to complete two ESOL courses and then ESOL knowledge, guidance, and coursework is infused into each of the required courses to successfully complete the teacher preparation program.

It would also prove to be beneficial for teacher preparation programs to elaborate on this research and pose questions such as, 1) Where did you complete your service learning experiences?, 2) What did you learn about integrating students with disabilities from your service learning experiences, 3) Have the teachers you did your service learning with help to form your attitude towards integrating students with disabilities into the general education classroom? Surveying these three questions would be helpful in trying to find the root cause as to why many preservice teachers feel burdened by students with disabilities or have no opinion on the topic at all.

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## **APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS**

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES ON INCLUSION SURVEY

**Instructions:** This short survey is designed to provide feedback on your perceptions of teaching in inclusive education settings. Please complete the following questions as accurately as possible.

Q1. Children with special needs/disabilities should be integrated with children without disabilities.

- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

Q2. Children with special needs/disabilities who are in integrated programs demonstrate higher levels of social play and more appropriate social interactions.

- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

Q3. Normally developing children will benefit from observing and interacting with children with special needs/disabilities.

- Agree
- Disagree

- No opinion

Q4.

As a result of integrating children with special needs/disabilities, teachers can become more aware of needs for all children in their program.

- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

Q5.

Integrating children with and without disabilities creates additional burdens for the general education staff.

- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

Q6.

Children with disabilities need to be educated in separate classrooms/schools.

- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

Q7.

Overall, how many hours have you spent in service- learning, volunteering, and/or interacting with students with disabilities as part of a required course (s) at UCF?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 40-60
- More than 60 hours

Q8.

Gender

- Male
- Female

Q9.

What is your major?

- Early Childhood Education
- Elementary Education
- Secondary Education

Q10.

Did you complete a minor in Exceptional Student Education?

- Yes
- No

Q11.

What is your age range?

- 18-22
- 23-26
- 27-32
- 32+

Q12.

How would you classify yourself?

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

## **APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL**

## APPENDIX B: IRB Approval



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Caroline D. Pratt Marrett and Co-PIs: Kelsey McNamee, Rebecca A. Hines, Taylor B. Wenzel

Date: April 12, 2016

Dear Researcher:

On 04/12/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: A Survey of Preservice Teachers' Attitudes in Regard to Teaching in Inclusive Education Classrooms  
Investigator: Caroline D Pratt Marrett  
IRB Number: SBE-16-12199  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 04/12/2016 10:22:21 AM EDT

IRB Manager