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The Efficacy of Pullout Programs in Elementary Schools: Making it Work

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This study investigated the teacher's perspective on the efficacy of pullout programs and whether they, compared to inclusion programs, provided a superior academic and social benefit to students with learning disabilities. The qualitative study interviewed 25 general classroom teachers from 2 suburban elementary schools in Texas to analyze the efficacy of the program and provide ideas for improvements. Results revealed that both schools used a blended approach (pullout and inclusion) to meet all students' needs. While the blended program was effective, teachers struggled with logistics and lack of resources for ideal benefits. Many suggested co-teaching to remedy the issues.

The Efficacy of Pullout Programs in Elementary Schools: Making it Work

What do teachers have to say about pullout programs and their impact on students with learning disabilities, in terms of morale, stigmatization, and level of general classroom instruction? Is there collaboration between general classroom teachers and pullout teachers on educational instruction for students with learning disabilities? Can general classroom teachers provide students with learning disabilities the instruction they need without compromising the attention given to the rest of the class?

According to Fitch (2003), pullout programs have been part of the American public school system for decades. Their academic and social effectiveness on students with learning disabilities has been widely debated by educators, parents, and students (e.g. Fitch, 2003; Hurt, 2012; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). This study investigated from the teacher's perspective, the efficacy of pullout programs and whether they provided a superior academic and social benefit to students with learning disabilities compared to inclusion programs. Teachers determined whether the years of scrutiny of pullout programs have yielded progress and further, recommended suggestions for improvements.

As noted by Hurt (2012), the pullout program involves taking students out of their classroom for individualized or small group instruction; the instruction targets each student's learning needs. While students receive focused attention, research indicated they might also suffer drawbacks because

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they miss classroom instruction and often face stigmatization or feel inadequate for being pulled out of their regular class (e.g. Meyers, Gelzheiser, Yelich, & Gallagher, 1990).

The inclusion method involves all students being educated in the general classroom. The general classroom teacher is responsible for instructing all students, from the high achievers to those with learning disabilities (e.g. Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Hurt, 2012). Research showed that students with learning disabilities felt confident being educated with their peers however; they may not have received the targeted instruction they needed (e.g. Richmond, Aberasturi, Abernathy, Aberasturi, & DelVecchio, 2009).

Furthermore, review of the literature revealed that the pullout program has its benefits and drawbacks. According to Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, and Forgan (1998), some of the benefits included individualized or small group attention to students with learning disabilities, thus increasing academic success. Some of the drawbacks included logistics issues with coordination and planning, and social issues with stigmatization (e.g. Klingner et al., 1998). However, many studies showed that controversy still exists as to whether the pullout program, with its benefits and drawbacks, remains a viable option for students with learning disabilities (e.g. Klingner et al., 1998; Richmond et al., 2009).

Accordingly, schools' transition to the inclusion model was based on the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, later known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandated that students with learning disabilities receive the same opportunities for education as their nondisabled peers (e.g. McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). The inclusion method caused much debate about the extent to which students with learning disabilities should be educated in the general classroom (e.g. Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Richmond et al., 2009). The response to that debate was the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandate in IDEA, which specifically stated that students with learning disabilities should be educated in general education classrooms unless their disabilities were so severe that they could not function in the general classroom with aides or additional services (e.g. Meyers et al., 1990). This legislation allowed students with learning disabilities to develop the social skills they needed to be successful. Causing more controversy, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandated that students with learning disabilities achieve the same level of educational aptitude as students without learning disabilities (e.g. Hurt, 2012). Over the years, schools have succumbed to legislation and inclusion has grown, thus changing the framework of the general classroom.

As noted by Artiles (2006), as a result of inclusion, the general classroom is highly diverse. Moreover, high stakes accountability adds to the complexity and debate among educators and policymakers on the best methods to educate all students with varying skills and needs in the general classroom setting (e.g. Artiles et al. 2006). According to Hurt (2012), such diversity in one classroom poses a challenge for teachers in terms of classroom management and differentiated instruction for the success of each student.

This study viewed the teacher as researcher in the classroom and obtained first-hand information on the efficacy of the pullout program from a logistics, achievement, student impact, and teacher perspective. The focus of the study was to uncover whether the pullout model was a proper fit for students with learning disabilities, if progress had been made on the issues associated with it, and if teachers had suggestions for improvements. This research investigated what further action needed to be taken to improve pullout programs.

Literature Review

The review of literature provided a wealth of previous research on the efficacy of the pullout

model compared to the inclusion model. The inclusion model incorporates a co-teaching model, which was not used by the participants' schools in this study, but bears mention as it can be a viable option for inclusion programs. The studies in this literature review focused on logistics, achievement, student impact, and teacher perceptions of the programs. The review also highlighted the successes and shortcomings of the pullout and inclusion programs as discussed in this study.

Logistics

Based on a study by Meyers, Gelzheiser, Yelich, and Gallagher, M. (1990), assessing general classroom and special education teachers' perceptions on pullout programs showed that the drawbacks to the pullout programs had logistical issues such as, students missed valuable class instruction, scheduled timings for pullout were not ideal, there was no collaboration of curriculum between the general classroom teacher and the pullout teacher, and singling out students caused a stigma and low morale. On the other hand, there were benefits to the program, one of the most significant was the focused, small group or individualized instruction students with learning disabilities received. Additionally, general classroom teachers were freed up during pullout time, to focus on the average and advanced learners in the class (e.g. Meyers et al., 1990). Teachers concluded that in order for pullout programs to work optimally, there had to be time for collaboration and planning between the classroom and pullout teachers, effective scheduling, and remedial instruction in the classroom as well (e.g. Meyers et al., 1990). The inclusion model, alleviated some of the drawbacks of the pullout program, but was not the optimal answer for students with learning disabilities (e.g. Richmond et al., 2009).

Achievement

While comparing the academic benefits of inclusion versus the pullout model, Salend and Garrick-Duhaney's (1999) analysis of several studies revealed mixed results. In some general classrooms, students with disabilities scored higher on achievement tests and their Individualized Education Programs (IEP), while others needed focused instruction through pullout programs. Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002) compared inclusion (with co-teaching and collaborative planning) in one school versus the pullout model in another school. Their study showed that students in the inclusive program scored significantly higher in core subjects than students in the pullout program. Also, students in the inclusion program had better attitudes toward school and had higher attendance than students in the pullout program. However, Richmond et al. (2009) conducted a similar study comparing inclusion (with aides) versus pullout. They recognized no difference in achievement scores in math or reading with the exception that the pullout students showed a higher level of letter-word recognition, which suggested that they received more skills building instruction in their pullout program. The comparisons of studies showed inconclusive results as to which model was more effective in achievement for learning disabled students; but, the studies indicated that both models may be needed for different outcomes.

Impact on Students

From a student impact perspective, reviews were also mixed as to whether students preferred inclusion as opposed to pullout programs (Elbaum, 2002; Klingner et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1990; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999; Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 2010). As noted by Salend and

Garrick-Duhaney (1999), students with severe learning disabilities received social support from their nondisabled peers within inclusion settings, but the interactions were more compassionate in nature and not based on real friendships. On the other hand, students with mild learning disabilities claimed that their interactions with their peers without learning disabilities were both, favorable and unfavorable (Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999). According to Klingner et al. (1998), socially, some students preferred meeting their friends in their small resource groups (pullout), while others felt more confident when interacting with their non-disabled peers within the inclusion setting. Whinnery et al. (2010) reported that socially, students who were pulled out felt acceptance from their non-disabled peers, but rated themselves lower on intelligence compared to their non-disabled peers. As noted by Fitch (2003), students' perception of themselves varied based on their teachers' attitudes toward the programs and their own success in either program. In some cases, students "felt rejected and lost" (Fitch, 2003, p. 249) in inclusion programs and preferred pullout classrooms where they felt accepted. These studies, based on placement and self-concept among students with learning disabilities, revealed that self-concept has more to do with just placement. It did not mean that placement was not important; instead, when considering placement, schools should also consider individual student's disability needs, background, personal characteristics, preferences, classroom environment, and academic standing (e.g. Elbaum, 2002). Students' perceptions depended on which environments students felt more confident and successful. Students' perceptions and academic success are highly regarded by teachers when considering the most suitable environment for students with learning disabilities (e.g. Elbaum, 2002).

Teacher Perspectives

Teachers' perspectives toward inclusion versus pullout models were impacted by the success of the program and assessment of their own capabilities. Specifically, as noted by Salend and Garrick-Duhaney (1999), out of the 28 studies they researched on general education teachers' perceptions of inclusion, "two thirds of teachers supported inclusion programs while one third or fewer felt they did not have the expertise, resources, time, and training to implement inclusion effectively" (p. 123); some teachers supported pullout programs even for students with mild disabilities. Additionally, Buell, Hallam, and Gamel-McCormick (1999) reported that general education teachers expressed the need for more training in working with students with learning disabilities, adapting curriculum appropriately, dealing with behavior issues, writing and participating in IEP conferences with parents, and having enough resources to successfully integrate students with learning disabilities into the general classroom. However, general classroom teachers did respond favorably to support from the school principals and administrators whose attitudes toward inclusion, training, and experiences, impacted the success of the inclusion program and made them more open to making changes and improvements to the model as needed (e.g. Buell et al., 1999; Idol, 2006; Praisner, 2003).

Furthermore, in Idol's (2006) study, teachers were positive about educating students with learning disabilities in general education settings with the support of aides. Educators also were positive, from a social perspective, about the merging of students with and without disabilities. Findings predicted that overall achievement scores on state tests would not be affected much with the inclusion of students with disabilities (e.g. Idol, 2006). Additionally, review of the literature on inclusion practices revealed that co-teaching was a method that helped teachers with diversity in the general classroom. As noted by Hang and Rabren (2009), to teach inclusion classes effectively, co-teachers needed to collaborate on planning, sharing skills, and instructional strategies along with students' IEPs. Based on a one year study of the co-teaching approach, Hang and Rabren (2009)

measured efficacy through the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), attendance, and discipline referrals, compared to the records from the previous year when there was no co-teaching. Findings revealed that scores significantly increased for students with disabilities; but no change was found for students without learning disabilities. Overall, student discipline and attendance had improved from the previous year. Students and teachers reported the co-teaching setting as more favorable than the previous year. Accordingly, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie, (2007) reported that co-teaching was beneficial because teachers learned from each other and all students received attention to their needs. However, through observations of co-taught classrooms and through research, studies showed that while in theory, co-teaching can help the general classroom, it is typically implemented with a one teach one assist model which is popular but does not address all learning disabilities (e.g. Volonino and Zigmond, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007).

The review of literature revealed inconclusive results in favor of any one particular model for educating students with learning disabilities in inclusion or pullout programs. Larrivee, Semmel, and Gerber (1997) concluded in their study that there was “no single feature, structure, or organization of school environment” (p. 27) that consistently impacted student performance and that there were multiple ways to achieve desired outcomes. Also, they claimed, a set of programs or methods in one school may produce a different outcome in another school (e.g. Larrivee et al., 1997).

Methodology

This is a phenomenological study that utilizes purposeful sampling. This was the most appropriate methodology because it allowed for the voices of the participants to be heard and for their experiences to be described.

Participants

This was a qualitative study of 25 convenient respondents drawn from 2 suburban elementary schools in southeast Texas. The selection process was a purposive sample in that the researcher sent an email to all general classroom teachers in both schools detailing the study and requesting an interview. The sample of teachers from kindergarten through second grade taught all subjects, while the teachers from third and fourth grades specialized in either language arts or mathematics. All teachers had experience with pullout and inclusion programs. Although the schools in this study did not employ the co-teaching model, some teachers had prior co-teaching experience in other schools. The teachers were all female, their teaching experiences ranged from 7 to 32 years, and based on the researcher’s observations, five appeared to be Caucasian, Hispanic, and 20 were Caucasian non-Hispanic.

Instrument

Interview questions were developed through a review of the literature and a series of trial interviews that allowed the researcher to choose and organize a series of questions to use. The questions posed by the researcher were a combination of structured, semi-structured and open-ended (Appendix A). All participants were asked the same questions.

Procedure

The study followed procedures set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993), Merriam (1998), and Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) and applied trustworthiness quality criteria. The field notes were organized and transcribed using the procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Member checks (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) were used to confirm the veracity of the information provided by the participants. This was accomplished by reading back to the participants the information they provided at the end of the interviews as well as calling them on the telephone or communicating with them via email after the interviews were analyzed.

Validity and reliability were enhanced by using triangulation – trial interviews for developing the set of questions used in the study (focus group), participant interviews, and observation in selected classrooms. This study was delimited to a sample of teachers in 2 suburban school districts in southeast Texas. The limitations of the study come from its sources of information. The researcher's own experience in teaching introduces unknown levels of bias.

All participants had to sign an informed consent form developed by the IRB at Sam Houston State University who had approved the study. The school district and administration at both schools gave written approval of the study. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and campus after school hours. This requirement allowed for a certain level of comfort to be felt by the participants. The interviews were scheduled and confirmed by telephone and or email 2 weeks prior to the actual meetings. The interviews lasted 30 min to 1 hr. Emerging themes were identified using the protocols outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). If participants voiced a point 4 or more times, it was considered an emerging theme. The emerging themes were compiled into an Audit Trail.

Trustworthiness was assured by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced by the similar responses of the participants to the questions in the study. Transferability maybe limited to elementary schools in the southwest. Dependability was possible by asking rephrased questions when necessary. Reading back to the respondents their answers and allowing them to correct their responses or add to them achieved confirmability. Appendix A is a list of the questions used in this study.

Discussion

Results from the interviews revealed that the elementary school teachers were supportive of the pullout model and used it in conjunction with the inclusion model. This created a blended approach toward teaching a diverse group of students. Typically, the general classroom teachers had an average of four students pulled out at a frequency of two to four times a week for special instruction (remedial or skills specific instruction). Based on formal student evaluations, the pullout students in this study had learning disabilities, which required small group or one-on-one instruction. However, their disabilities were not severe enough to require them to be placed in a special needs classroom. Overall, the general classroom teachers felt the pullout program was important as it provided skills that they could not teach in the classroom. Additionally, they confirmed that the pullout model provided a small environment that was less distracting and specialized instruction that could not be achieved in the larger general classroom.

The findings revealed that the schools had made some level of progress in how the pullout program was implemented. The research exposed issues with the pullout program that teachers continued to struggle with and how they worked around those disadvantages. Teachers also provided

suggestions for improvements to both, the pullout and inclusion models.

The findings are discussed in detail below in terms of logistics, achievement, impact on students, and teacher perspectives. Moreover, the audit trail (Appendix B) delineates the emerging themes from this study.

Logistics

“The name of the game is flexibility,” said participant R1 in explaining how teachers accommodate pullout timings. The results determined that flexibility from the general classroom and pullout teachers is paramount when scheduling pullout instruction. In their study, Meyers et al. (1990) also found that general classroom teachers struggled with scheduling academic instruction when students were pulled out of the classroom. All teachers interviewed claimed that flexibility in schedules ensured that students missed the least amount of important classroom work when pulled out of class. Sometimes the pullout timing worked for some teachers but not for others. Only seven teachers said that pullout timings worked in their favor this year; students were pulled out during warm-up work, centers, or independent work. Teachers for whom pullout timings were not ideal tried to avoid teaching new material or doing important activities while the students were away -- “teachers try to adjust the instructional day in a way that allows pullout students to miss the least important instruction,” explained participant R11. For many teachers, students were pulled out at different times during the day depending on their needs. Participant R17 said that she had complete autonomy in structuring her day to meet the needs of her students -- “it is detrimental when we have a cookie cutter schedule,” she said. All participants stated that it was important for teachers and administration to support flexibility for the students’ benefit.

In addition to avoiding important instruction, teachers tried to ensure that students did not have to make up much missed work. 12 out of 25 teachers said that they did not have their students make up missed work while the rest of the teachers claimed that sometimes their students did have to make up work. In order to make up work, students were required to complete missed work during pockets of free time during the day or occasionally, during read-aloud story time. It was unanimous that none of the teachers let students miss recess to complete missed work. All teachers considered recess a crucial requirement that should not be taken away from students due to pullout instruction. Completing missed work also meant that teachers typically had to instruct the students individually on the assignment thus causing extra work for the teacher. Meyers et al. (1990) concluded in their study, that “scheduling is a substantial problem” (p. 543) with pullout programs and can impact the engagement of students with learning disabilities. Their study suggested that special education and general classroom teachers collaborate on scheduling in order for the program to be beneficial to students (Meyers et al., 1990).

Teachers revealed that lack of collaboration with pullout teachers was a crucial issue. Over half the teachers said that they did not collaborate in any way with the pullout teacher on their student (s’) progress and curriculum. Math teachers especially complained that when the pullout teacher instructed a student to work out problems one way, but the classroom teacher instructed a different way, it caused the student confusion. Some teachers said they might get a quick update from the pullout teacher as they passed each other in the hallway. Only four teachers said they collaborated with the pullout teacher because the student(s) had extensive learning needs. Teachers attributed the poor collaboration to lack of time. Prior studies showed that teachers collaborating and consulting with each other were important in educating students with learning disabilities (e.g. Florian, 2008; Whinnery et al., 2010).

Planning and scheduling around pullout programs was a key focus for teachers to ensure that students who were leaving the classroom missed as little as possible. By being flexible and creative

about scheduling issues, teachers in these schools had ameliorated some of the drawbacks of the pullout model and helped make it a viable solution for students who needed it. However, issues with collaboration persist.

Achievement

The chief benefit of the pullout program, unanimously shared by the teachers, was that students with dyslexia and speech problems benefited significantly from it. Both disabilities require specialized programs that general classroom teachers did not typically have the training to teach. Additionally, most of the tutoring for these disabilities required a quiet environment for careful attention to listening, which could be difficult to access in the general classroom. All teachers had either prior or current experience with students with dyslexia and speech impediments in their classrooms and unanimously claimed that pullout programs should be sustained for those disabilities and other extreme disabilities as needed. Participant R2 felt strongly about the dyslexia program and commented “those students would have zero success if there was not a pullout program for them.” Research supported teachers’ claims that inclusion is not the answer for all students with learning disabilities because some need pullout programs (e.g. Manset and Semmel, 1997; Meyers et al., 1990).

Most teachers said they assessed pullout students more frequently to ensure they were making progress. Aside from dyslexia and speech instruction, most teachers said they did not recognize drastic improvements in the pullout program in reading or math. While nine teachers reported minimal benefits, eleven saw mediocre benefits and only five thought the program was highly beneficial. Some of the teachers who reported minimal improvements claimed it was due to the student’s disability and not the program, while some claimed it was due to the quality of the instructor or lack of collaboration as to what the student needed. In such cases, the general classroom teachers thought they could have made more of an impact on achievement.

Some of the other reported benefits to the pullout model were that students who needed the small group or individualized instruction received it from the pullout program. Participant R3 explained that some students need to be taught certain skills slowly and broken up into “baby steps” – “the general classroom is not baby steps,” she said. Additionally, participant R3 explained that the teacher could not always slow the class down to explain certain skills because there was not enough time and other students would become disengaged. Teachers in Meyers et al. (1990) study also expressed that pullout programs provided, “minimal distractions, intense and structured instruction, and individualized curriculum with a focus on students’ strengths and weaknesses” (p. 543).

Most teachers found pullout programs to be beneficial in general because they added some amount of focused instruction for students with learning disabilities. This notion supported research that academically, some students with learning disabilities preferred pullout programs because they felt confident when learning in a less distracting environment (e.g. Klingner et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1990). From the general classroom teachers’ perspective, student confidence was a necessary factor for achievement.

Impact on Students

Students losing focus from transitioning to and from a pullout classroom was an issue that has been reported in previous research (e.g. Klingner et al., 1998). While most teachers in this study said that students did not have an issue focusing when they returned to class, 10 teachers said that sometimes, students did have problems. The interviews revealed that the focus issue had a lot to do with the disability (especially if there was a behavior issue) and the timing of the pullout program. The teachers who said that they did not notice issues with focus claimed that it was due to having a firm

routine in place. Participant R21 claimed that her first graders knew what to expect when they returned to class -- “if you have a structured environment, they know what is going on in the class when they return and they jump right in.”

In the Meyers et al. (1990) study, research showed that pullout programs might cause a stigma. However, in this study, all the teachers except one emphatically discounted the stigmatization claim that has historically been a drawback to pullout models. The only teacher who reported a stigma commented that sometimes the stigma is based on the student’s own perception. Most teachers credited the lack of stigmatization to the positive school environment and inclusion setting which taught appreciation for diversity, compassion, tolerance, and acceptance of peers. Several teachers also commented that at the elementary school level students were not too aware of why they were being pulled out – for example, participant R4 said that some of her students “frequently think they’re special”. Several teachers declared that they conscientiously uplift students with learning disabilities publicly whenever they can. Participant R20, in particular, said she carved out time for her class to visit the special education classroom (for severely handicapped students) several times during the year. The teachers’ attitudes toward stigmatization in this study were commensurate with the findings in Salend and Garrick-Duhaney’s (1999) study which stated that educators can positively impact the attitudes of students, with and without disabilities, by helping them appreciate their differences and encouraging social and academic interactions.

Out of all the participants, only five teachers commented that some students might suffer low morale. The teachers who made that observation stated that sometimes those feelings are reported by parents, and could be related to the student’s own sense of self rather than feelings inflicted by peers. Most teachers commented that ideas of stigmatization and low morale have changed from years ago when students with learning disabilities were separated from the general student body. With inclusion practices, issues with stigma and morale are fading. In Meyers et al., (1990), the authors concluded that teachers had great ideas to remedy the issues faced in education and that school districts should consult them when making decisions for improvements. Congruent with Meyers et al., (1990), the results of this study clearly depicted that changes with stigmatization were a direct result of educators’ efforts.

Teacher Perspectives

All participants said they were in favor of inclusion because of the social benefits it afforded all students, with and without disabilities. Participant R5 said, “there are things beyond academics that students teach other students such as compassion, empathy -- which is more than I could teach them.” All classroom teachers set up their rooms in cooperative groups where students with varied skills and talents were mixed in with each group. Teachers said that they reassigned seats several times during the year, to promote socialization, diversity appreciation, and to encourage peer tutoring and learning. According to literature, this type of setting was indicative of an inclusion classroom where students all felt a part of the same group, shared ideas, and learned from each other (e.g Fitch, 2003; Ornelles, 2006).

While teachers were supportive of the inclusion model, they liked having the option of the pullout model as well. With the diverse classroom, teachers contended that the pullout program helped some of the students with learning disabilities even though instruction and timing were not always ideal. This view was congruent with Marston’s (1996) study where teachers supported pullout and inclusion options for students with learning disabilities. Nevertheless, teachers in this study were passionate to resolve the issues they struggled with and seemed desperate for solutions.

The biggest complaint teachers had was that they were pulled in too many directions to

adequately tend to the needs of their diverse classrooms. While students with learning disabilities received focused instruction through the pullout program, it only lasted 30 to 45 minutes. For the remainder of the school day, the teacher still had to instruct the students with learning disabilities in other content areas. Teachers reported that attending to students who needed extra help, slowed down the class. This caused teachers to overlook the average to high achievers -- "that is the saddest part of inclusion programs," said participant R10. "Teachers spend much more time with the low performers because they know the high achievers will pass the assessments," she added. Additionally, participant R6 contended that she had too many students with learning disabilities in her class and she was inundated with the paperwork associated with the students' progress. While some teachers had assistants to help the students with learning disabilities, the assistants only stayed for 45 minutes or less. Moreover, some teachers bore the brunt of having more students with disabilities in their classes than other teachers because of a shortage of assistants who could only attend to a few classes per day. Teachers also commented that in spite of the time indicated on student IEPs, some students could benefit from more than just 30 – 45 minutes of pullout instruction. But, because the pullout teacher had too many students, she was unable to accommodate the extra time. Teachers unanimously concluded that more resources (teachers or assistants) were needed for better use of both, inclusion and pullout programs. The teacher responses in this study paralleled teacher attitudes in Meyers et al. (1990) research which indicated that general classroom teachers were knowledgeable about student needs and had ideas of how pullout programs could be more beneficial.

While more aides and pullout tutors would be helpful, most teachers felt that a co-teacher in the general classroom would be ideal. They clarified that they would not want to do away with the pullout program because of its benefits to students with dyslexia, speech and a few other learning disabilities, but having a co-teacher would allow them to handle the specific needs of many other students with learning disabilities who are currently pulled out. Additionally, a co-teacher environment would afford them the extra time needed to focus on the average and high achievers as well. Co-teaching would reduce the number of students who need to be pulled out and would therefore, allow the pullout teachers to extend the allotted time with other students if needed. Having the pullout program as an option with the co-teaching method is also supported by Volonino and Zigmond (2009), who claimed that the co-teaching method only supported half of all students with learning disabilities; the others needed pullout programs.

Furthermore, all teachers reported that they were pleased with the support from their principal and fellow teachers in their attempts to do the best for each student. All teachers unanimously concluded their interviews with suggestions for more resources, co-teaching, and time for coordination and planning. They asserted that both models were needed to reach all students' needs. They also asserted that in the inclusion environment, flexibility, options in teaching methods, and a variety of strategies were needed so that all students, from high to low achievers were reached. It was clear from these findings that teachers had come up with strategies to remedy some of the drawbacks of pullout programs such as stigma, morale, focus, and scheduling. What did not change in the years of inclusion and pullout programs was teachers' struggle for better strategies or professional development to help with managing diverse classrooms. They continued to plead for more resources and time to plan and coordinate curriculum with pullout teachers.

This study revealed that decades of pullout and inclusion program use has resulted in some positive adjustments made by educators, but perhaps little change has been made at the district or state level. The teachers in this study claimed that their administrators were supportive of logistical changes that they needed to make as long as the changes adhered to state and district guidelines. However, the teachers implored that more adjustments needed to be made to allow pullout and inclusion programs to

operate smoothly for the optimal impact to students. Compounded with scheduling issues, curriculum demands, student behavioral issues, and time consuming paperwork, the teachers stated that more resources would allow them the time needed for more focused instruction for all students in the general classroom.

Limitations

This study was delimited to a sample of teachers in 2 suburban school districts in southeast Texas. The limitations of the study came from its sources of information. The researcher's own experience in teaching introduced unknown levels of bias.

There was a limited amount of time (2 semesters) to complete the study. The schools were similar in internal construct and academic standing in order to narrow the variables for each participant. A larger sample size from a variety of schools in the district might have allowed for a greater understanding of the inclusion and pullout models used and the issues teachers faced. While teachers claimed that issues of stigma and low morale have changed over the years to where those problems are almost non-existent, reaching out to students and parents with this issue may have reveal different responses. Additionally, this study was done at the elementary level; studies of stigmatization at the middle or high school levels may have rendered different results. Only general classroom teachers were interviewed to get their views on pullout programs. To obtain a comprehensive perspective on efficacy it would have been advantageous to interview pullout and special needs teachers as well.

Potential researcher bias was addressed by spending a significant amount of time at the schools in order to become acquainted with the environment of the institutions. This helped limit observational bias. There was potential bias because of the limited diversity of the participants – 5 appeared to be Caucasian Hispanic and 20 appeared to be Caucasian non-Hispanic. Constant review of the field notes allowed for checking of the collected data and comparing it against the initial perceptions of the researcher. Member checking at the conclusion of each interview allowed for the participants to revise or confirm information shared with the researcher. A faculty mentor completed an external audit of the study. Validity and reliability were enhanced by using triangulation – trial interviews for developing the set of questions used in the study (focus group), participant interviews, and observation in selected classrooms.

Implications for Practice

As depicted in the literature review, there has been decades of controversy and debate on the benefits and drawbacks of pullout programs. Despite the issues of the pullout program, and considering the subsequent implementation of inclusion practices, this study determined that teachers still considered the traditional pullout program as a viable option in educating students with learning disabilities. Additionally, the goal of this study was to find out if any of the issues of pullout programs had been resolved and if teachers had suggestions for improvements. Results of this study revealed that the two schools in this research used a blended approach, valuing the benefits of both, pullout and inclusion models considering neither model superior to the other. While some issues related to pullout model were remedied, others still persisted. However, the chief issue that emerged was not which model works best but how to use these models to achieve an inclusive environment with a diverse student body. Meyers et al. (1990) recommend that school districts should include teachers in making decisions about pullout programs. Since teachers are the ones working with the pullout and inclusion programs on a regular basis, school districts should involve them in decisions about improving the

effectiveness of the programs.

Brought to light were the struggles teachers faced with both pullout and inclusion programs. The obvious dichotomy was that they valued both pullout and inclusion instruction for optimal education benefits. The pullout program satisfied the need for focused instruction for students with learning disabilities, while the inclusion program allowed access to peer socialization, grade level exposure to the curriculum, and large group instruction as needed. Furthermore, inclusive settings could positively impact both, general classroom students as well as special needs students, socially and academically. However, to effectively execute these programs, teachers in this study claimed that the resources, specifically time and additional teachers, were lacking. As a result, teachers expressed disdain that neither program could be run effectively. Continuing education for teachers with a focus on developing strategies and skills for an inclusion classroom would be highly valuable.

The interviews revealed that teachers highly supported inclusion and pullout programs, but the blended approach was not a one-size-fits-all model. It required time to structure and organize for it to yield the most favorable outcomes for students. As noted by Ornelles (2006), in order for blended programs to be successful, “teachers must carefully orchestrate social and curricular access for all students” (p. 22). The audit results of this study clearly indicated that the majority of general classroom teachers did not spend time coordinating instruction with pullout instructors on a regular basis. In cases wherein the general classroom teacher and pullout teacher did coordinate instruction on a regular basis, it was typically due to the severity of the student’s needs or performance. Accordingly, Zigmond’s (2003) research indicated that each student should be analyzed individually to determine what he needs to succeed. The struggle is that while policymakers are concerned with school outcomes as a whole, schools recognize that successful outcomes are achieved with a focus on each student. According to Marston (1996), -while legislation has laid down the mandate for equal opportunities for all students, implementation of those ideas has been inadequate. Teachers in this study clearly disclosed that they needed more resources and better strategies for successful implementation of the blended programs. The addition of aides or co-teachers would allow the general classroom teacher more time for planning, assessing, and collaborating with the teachers in the pullout program.

Furthermore, prior studies conducted by (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Marston, 1996; Murawski & Hughes, 2009), have indicated that teachers preferred the co-teaching approach because they noticed positive attitudes from students and higher academic progress. Congruent to the aforementioned studies, a majority of teachers in this study also found the notion of co-teaching appealing. On the other hand, Murawski and Hughes (2009) pointed out that the issue with co-teaching was funding and not every class needed a co-teacher. They recommended evaluations to see which combinations of students needed to be in a large classroom with co-teaching and which needed to be in smaller classes with one teacher. Further research may be required at the district level in assessing the needs of the students and devising strategies that determine whether co-teachers or alternative methods are needed to provide general classroom teachers with the assistance they need.

The results of this study revealed that teachers have been able to ameliorate some of the issues of stigma and morale by using useful strategies in boosting student morale and allowing collaborative environments where students appreciate diversity. Also, scheduling and focus issues with pullout programs were somewhat controlled by teachers’ flexibility in changing their classroom schedules so that students did not miss important class instruction. However, scheduling can still be a complex issue on a daily basis. As research has suggested (i.e. Fitch, 2003), and as teachers in this study have attested, these changes are a result of teachers’ and administrators’ positive attitudes and values toward the blended model. These changes clearly showed that educators have the ability to recognize the benefits of a program and work out strategies to alleviate the issues that may come with it. This

analysis alerts legislators and school districts to place more value on the professional development of our teachers and administrators. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) asserted that professional development of teachers was essential to improving and sustaining inclusion programs. Educators' knowledge and understanding of melding legislation with practical pedagogy can lead to favorable outcomes in the classroom.

While the study indicated that issues of stigma, morale, focus, and scheduling in pullout models have changed positively over the past few decades, the struggle with collaboration with pullout programs remained an issue. Teachers contended that collaborating with pullout teachers around curriculum and teaching strategies for each student was essential for the student to receive optimal instruction. This view was compatible with Zigmond's (2003) research that each student should be analyzed individually to determine what he needs to succeed. The struggle was that while policymakers were concerned with school outcomes as a whole, schools recognized that successful outcomes are achieved with a focus on each student. Teachers need to be allowed focused time to collaborate with pullout teachers in order to achieve successful outcomes for each student.

The study determined that crucial issues still exist with the implementation of pullout and inclusion models and teachers are still challenged with blending both programs effectively. Educators now need answers on effective implementation of the programs. Efficacy of programs no longer seems to be the issue; teachers now want to know what they need to do to make these programs more effective for students who need them and what resources are needed to accomplish that goal. Zigmond (2003), supported the notion that whatever special needs program a school chooses to use, is only as beneficial as the implementation of that program; "Good programs can be developed in any setting, as can bad ones. The setting itself is less important than what is going on in the setting" (Zigmond, 2003, p. 196). Obtaining teacher knowledge for the improvement of the pullout and inclusion programs, considering the use of more resources that allow teachers additional time for planning and collaboration, and continuing teacher education are recommended to improve the effectiveness of the blended program.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Describe the set-up of your classroom.
2. Is there a strategy behind the set-up of your classroom?
3. Do you currently have students in your class who are pulled out for specialized instruction?
4. If not, have you in the past, had students who were pulled out for specialized instruction?
5. If yes, on a weekly basis, how many students are pulled out of your class and how frequently?
6. What are the typical reasons students are pulled out for Language Arts or Math?
7. Do you agree with the parameters set for these particular students, for being pulled out (or not pulled out)?
8. Do students who are pulled out miss valuable class instruction/teaching?
9. Are students expected to complete work that they have missed in class due to pull out sessions?
10. If students are expected to complete missed work, when do they make up that work?
11. Do students have to be instructed separately on missed class work?
12. Do students miss activities, such as recess or read aloud, due to make up work from pull out sessions?
13. Do pull out students have a difficult time focusing because of the shift from one environment to another?
14. Qualitatively (below average, average, or above average), how do students score on work that they have to make-up due to pull out sessions?
15. For pull out students, do you assess them more frequently for progress than students who are not pulled out?
16. Qualitatively, when pull out students go through mid-year and end of year assessments, have you noticed significant improvements (i.e. are they progressing, slowly, average, fast, remains the same)?
17. Do you think students who are pulled out feel singled out or stigmatized?
18. Do you notice a difference in the morale of pull out students?
19. Do you think a general ed. setting can give pull out students the skills they need to succeed?
20. How would you feel if pull out students were to remain in the classroom setting and be taught by the general classroom teacher in small groups?
21. How do you feel about having a co-teacher to assist you with students who need special assistance?
22. If there is small group instruction time in the general classroom, do you think it would be beneficial for you to teach (as a co-teacher) pull out students while the general classroom teacher is teaching another small group?
23. What challenges do you face (if any), with students with learning disabilities in your classroom (i.e. when they are not pulled out)?
24. Do you think teaching pull out students in a general classroom would negatively impact the mainstream and high achieving students? Explain.
25. If pull out students were to remain in a general classroom, what do you think is needed for them to be successful?
26. Would you be able to effectively address the needs of students, from gifted to remedial, in a general classroom setting?
27. What would you like to add about this topic that you have not had the chance to tell me?