

Changing Pedagogy from Segregation to Inclusion: A Phenomenological Case Study of Ten Special Educators

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Abstract : As special education service delivery models are shifting in order to better meet the academic and social rights of students with exceptionalities, teaching practices must also align with these goals. This phenomenological case study explored the change experiences of special education teachers who have transitioned from teaching in a self-contained special education class to an inclusive class setting. Ten special educators who had recently changed their teaching roles to inclusive classrooms, completed surveys and participated in a focus group. Of the original ten educators, five chose to participate further in individual interviews. Data collected from the three methods was examined and compared for common themes. Emergent themes included, support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice, growth and change, and teaching practice. The overall findings indicated that despite their special education training, these educators were challenged by their own beliefs and expectations, the attitudes of others and systematic barriers in the education system. They were equally surprised by the overall social and academic performance of students with exceptionalities in inclusive classes, as well as, the social and academic growth and development of the other students in the class. Over the course of their careers, they all identified an overall personal pedagogical shift, to some degree or another, which they contributed to the successful experiences of inclusion they had. They also recognized that collaborating with others was essential for inclusion to be successful. The findings from this study suggest several implications for professional development and training needs specific to special education teachers moving into inclusive settings. Maximizing the skills of teachers with special education experience in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and mentorship opportunities would be beneficial to all staffs working toward creating inclusive classrooms and schools.

Keywords : attitudes and perceptions, inclusion of students with exceptionalities, special education teachers, teacher change

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