

A Qualitative Study on the Peer Perceptions of Effects of Disruptive Classmates

by

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Since the establishment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), full inclusion—where students with disabilities receive education in the general classroom all day, every day—has become prevalent in schools. IDEA requires the education of students with disabilities to occur in the setting that provides maximum student learning, otherwise known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). However, when the LRE for disruptive students who have emotional and behavioral disorders is determined to be the general classroom, they can disrupt classmates' learning. While approximately 4.5 million students in the United States have a diagnosed behavior disorder (Ghandour et al., 2018), 77 percent of surveyed teachers determined that the full inclusion of just a small number of disruptive students per classroom caused classmates to experience adverse effects (Eden, 2019). Although IDEA's specifications protect the rights of students with disabilities, the stipulations do not seem to consider the rights of general education students, including peers with disruptive classmates. Those making decisions in the field of education need to consider how full inclusion affects all students, especially peers of disruptive classmates, by giving them a voice regarding their perceptions of the effects of the disruptive behavior. This concept paper includes the following sections: problem, purpose, research questions, literature review, design, and methodology.

Problem Statement

The problem is the disruption of learning in the general classroom caused by disruptive students placed in their LRE, but there is little research on the effect these classmates have on peers. The background of this problem began with the passage of IDEA in 1975. Because of mandates that govern LRE, there has been a historical practice of fully including students with disabilities in general classrooms. Likewise, the Salamanca Statement (1994) expounded on this

idea by indicating that schools should simultaneously educate all students in the same setting, without consideration of the disability or difficulty. A large quantity of research on the full inclusion of students with disabilities reflects benefits for all students. Research shows that students with disabilities placed in the general classroom have stronger skills in both reading and math, positive rates of attendance, and fewer problem behaviors than students with disabilities placed in non-inclusive classrooms (Hehir et al., 2016).

In contrast, the effects of disruptive students on classmates is not a popular area of research. In the small amount of research that exists, Gottfried (2014) observed that in classes with disruptive students, classmates displayed escalated problem behaviors and deteriorated social skills. Students at Bucyrus Elementary feel the impact of this problem because, since the implementation of the full inclusion of students with disabilities, including disruptive students, five years ago, there has been a schoolwide increase in behavioral problems as well as a decline in academic performance. There is a gap in research of the perceptions of classmates on the effects of disruptive students in their classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study will be to determine peer perceptions of the effects of the inclusion of disruptive classmates. Surveys and interviews of peers of disruptive students at an elementary school in central Ohio will provide trend data and will be generalized to the students in that school. This study is necessary to determine the behavioral, social, and academic well-being of peers of disruptive students. If the proposed research is not conducted, the decline in behavior and academic achievement of general education students at Bucyrus Elementary, as has transpired since the full inclusion of disruptive students five years ago, may continue. The proposed study can contribute to the knowledge base by supplying data

on the effects of full inclusion on the classmates of disruptive students, primarily regarding peer perceptions, as this is an area of inadequate research. The results of this study will add to the body of research on how general education students perceive the inclusion of disruptive students. These findings will be shared with the district leadership to inform educational practice and teacher professional development regarding full inclusion.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this research study:

Research Question One: How do peers with disruptive classmates perceive (a) the behavior of the disruptive students and (b) their own behavior as related to the inclusion of disruptive classmates?

Research Question Two: How do peers with disruptive classmates perceive (a) the academic achievement of the disruptive students and (b) their own academic achievement as related to the inclusion of disruptive classmates?

Research Question Three: How do peers with disruptive classmates perceive (a) the social skills of the disruptive students and (b) their own social skills as related to the inclusion of disruptive classmates?

Literature Review

The problem is the disruption of learning in the general classroom caused by disruptive students placed in their LRE, but there is little research on the effect these classmates have on peers. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study will be to determine peer perceptions of the effects of the inclusion of disruptive classmates. This review of current literature examines the effects of disruptive students on their peers' achievement, behavior, and social skills. The theoretical framework for this proposed research study is Bandura's Social Learning Theory. A

review of existing literature showed a thorough body of research on the positive effects of inclusion on all students; however, this existing literature points to a gap in classmates' perceptions of the effects of disruptive students in their classrooms. The major sections of this literature review include (1) the theoretical framework, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, (2) a review of current literature regarding the achievement, behavior, and social skills of peers of disruptive students, and (3) a summary of the literature review.

Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory will serve as the theoretical framework for this study and explains students' behaviors in social environments through their observations and possible imitations of peers, in either direct or indirect manners. Bandura (1977) reported that the consequences of observed behaviors aided the students in deciding whether to imitate the behavior. When students observe disruptive behaviors and the consequences of these behaviors, some students may choose to join in. Other students may merely tolerate the behavior and experience negative indirect effects; still, others may observe the behaviors and use them in positive ways (Huston, 2018). This behavioral theory helps explain the various effects a disruptive student has on peers.

Review of Current Literature

The research that exists on the effects of disruptive students on peers, while limited, is inconclusive. As such, this sparse research indicates both positive and negative behavioral, achievement, attendance, and social effects on peers of disruptive students (Gottfried, 2014). Nonetheless, this expanding body of research illustrates a growing awareness of the negative effects of disruptive students on peers. For instance, research on peers of disruptive students

affirms both direct and indirect effects (Gottfried, 2014), including negatively impacted behavior, achievement, and attendance (Constantinescu & Samuels, 2016).

Achievement Effects

Of the effects of disruptive students on peers, the most researched is academic achievement, and this research indicates both positive and negative direct and indirect effects. When teachers modify the way they teach to accommodate students' disruptions, the negative indirect effect that results is a less demanding curriculum (Choia et al., 2018). Similarly, when teachers spend class time dealing with disruptive students, this produces a negative indirect effect through the loss of instructional time (Ford, 2013). Carrell, Hoekstra, and Kuka (2018) revealed a long-term negative indirect effect through a decrease in testing scores for peers of disruptive students years later in high school. Likewise, peers of disruptive students are unlikely to pursue schooling past high school, resulting in lessened incomes as adults. Alternately, positive indirect effects can occur, such as the bolstering of instruction through the addition of teachers in a classroom, initially intended to monitor disruptive students (Tauber, 2007).

Disruptive classroom behavior can also cause negative direct effects, such as reduced academic achievement. Santavirta and Sarzosa (2019) uncovered lowered literacy and numeracy achievement, while Brown and Babo (2017) found reduced assessment scores for peers of disruptive students. Similarly, Gottfried and Harven (2014) identified that peers of disruptive students showed a decline in reading and math levels. However, Szumski et al. (2017) found that a positive direct effect on peers of disruptive students is favorable academic outcomes.

Behavioral Effects

The behaviors of disruptive students can produce both positive and negative behaviors in classmates. To illustrate these positive and negative effects, Santavirta and Sarzosa (2019)

explained that there are two reactions that students with disruptive peers may display; (1) these students may directly engage in unacceptable behaviors themselves (Ford, 2013), or (2) students may experience indirect anxiety due to the continual disruptions. On the other hand, positive indirect effects on classmates of disruptive students include gaining an understanding of those they consider atypical and becoming positive role models (Evins, 2015).

Social Effects

Research reinforces powerful negative indirect social effects of disruptive students on peers (Santavirta & Sarzosa, 2019). One of these social effects includes reduced attendance in order to avoid the conflict of class disruptions (Gottfried et al., 2016). In the same way, peers of disruptive students may become disinterested, distant, or withdrawn because of the persistent disruptive behaviors (Abry et al., 2017). Additionally, long-term indirect social effects include peers of disruptive students earning less money and having lower salaries as adults, resulting from these peers not desiring to pursue higher education (Carrell, Hoekstra, & Kuka, 2018). However, the National Council on Disability (2018) found positive peer effects of increased tolerance, empathy, awareness, and comfort in diversity.

Literature Review Summary

This review of literature covers peer effects of disruptive students including academic effects, behavioral effects, and social effects. While researchers have studied negative effects on peers far less often than positive effects, the literature is inconclusive in determining overall benefits or disadvantages. The theoretical framework for the research study is Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). There is a need for the study because the literature indicates a gap in the perceptions of peers on the disruptive behavior of classmates.

Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study will be to determine peer perceptions of the effects of the inclusion of disruptive classmates. As the topic of peer perceptions of the effects of disruptive classmates does not fit within other qualitative research methods' specifications, a basic qualitative methodology will be the most effective approach to conduct this research (Kahlke, 2014). Even though basic qualitative methodology does not follow other qualitative methodology protocols, Crotty (1998) found that basic qualitative methodology builds upon the ideas of other pre-existing methodologies. Additionally, this approach can stand alone as a valid methodology through participants interpreting, constructing, and making meaning through their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Population and Potential Research Site

The population for this study will consist of a sample of students in an elementary school classroom with one or more disruptive students. Convenience sampling, a type of sampling resulting in generalizable information to the students in the school rather than the general population, will guide the choosing of participants (Jager et al., 2017). The number of participants chosen will be dependent upon the number of classrooms that contain disruptive students and the number of parental permissions granted. The research site will be an elementary school in rural middle Ohio with students in general education classrooms that teachers perceive as disruptive.

Informed Consent

In following the guidelines of informed consent from the Belmont Report (1979), participants should (1) receive transparent information regarding the study, (2) be capable of comprehending the information, and (3) volunteer to be part of the study. As this research

involves children, the parents stand in the place of the children to make these decisions. Parents of the participants will receive printed information about the study. Those parents who so choose will volunteer their children to be part of the study. Additionally, because this research deals with human participants, there must be Internal Review Board (IRB) approval prior to the start of this research. Privacy of the participants

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this basic qualitative research will be interviews and surveys. Since the purpose of this research is to acquire participant perceptions—how peers of disruptive classmates feel about the disruptive behavior—interviews will provide this perception data (Seidman, 1991) while surveys will supply participant attitudes that may be otherwise difficult to observe (Biedrzynska, 2011). Both the interview questions and survey questions will be researcher-developed.

As an extension of the structured survey questions, which provide standardization and accuracy, relative in-depth interview questions will allow students to expand on their answers (Biedrzynska, 2011). The semi-structured interviews will offer a friendly, conversation-like atmosphere where students will feel comfortable speaking to the interviewer (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Additionally, the interviews will use the visual tool of cartoon bubbles to enhance the participant's interest and communication between the researcher and participant (Glegg, 2013). The researcher will individually administer paper and pencil surveys to participants first, and then use these results to determine questions for face-to-face individually administered surveys. Fictitious names will be assigned to the participants to protect their identities during and after the surveys and interviews, and the data will be stored on the researcher's personal password-encrypted laptop.

Alignment

The sections of this basic qualitative study, including the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and methodology all align, allowing for strengthened research on peer perceptions of the effects of the inclusion of disruptive classmates. The problem describes how disruptive students may interfere with classmates' learning and indicates a lack of research on this topic. The problem leads to the purpose—collecting peer perceptions—using interviews and surveys through basic qualitative methodology. The surveys and interviews will include questions regarding the (1) behavior, (2) academic achievement, and (3) social skills of peers of disruptive classmates. The information gained from this study can inform district leadership on practice and policy.

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