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An inquiry into the special education training of AEA 7 elementary school administrators

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An inquiry into the special education training of AEA 7 elementary school administrators

Abstract

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, principals are being required to assume increasingly greater responsibilities for the education of handicapped children within their schools. 1 As the recognized administrative and instructional leader of the school, it is the principal who is the primary school person involved in promoting adequate programs for the handicapped child. The school principal is considered to be the person who determines the attitudes and sets the tempo for the total educational program within the building. The principal is the educator who encourages flexibility, innovation, and the uses of appropriate techniques to improve all educational services, particularly all those offered handicapped children.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING
OF AEA 7 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
Kay Spaulding
Summer 1983

This Research Paper by: Kay Spaulding

Entitled: AN INQUIRY INTO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING
OF AEA 7 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (or Master of Arts in
Education).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background and Rationale	1
Statement of the Problem	2
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	4
The Role of the Principal in Special Education.	4
Attitudes and Knowledge of Principals Concerning Education	10
Principal's Formal Training in Special Education.	14
Effects of Training in Special Education .	18
Summary of Review of Literature.	20
3. METHOD	22
Initial Preparation and Research	22
Instrumentation.	22
Distribution of Questionnaire.	23
Data Analysis.	24
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	25
Procedures for Reporting Results and Analyzing Data	25
Basic Response Information	25
Personal and Professional Data	25
Principals' Background and Perceived Training Needs in Special Education. . .	27
Demographic Information.	34

Table of Contents, Cont'd

Chapter	page
Role in Special Education Matters	36
5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	37
Major Findings of Study	37
Recommendations	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	40
APPENDICES	
A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT	45
B. COPY OF COVER LETTER WHICH ACCOMPANIED QUESTIONNAIRE	50

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Personal and Professional Data	26
2. Principals' Perceptions of the Relative Amount of Exposure to Handicapped Children in Their Formal Coursework in School Administrative Programs.	27
3. Principals' Formal Training in Special Education.	28
4. Number of In-Services in Special Education	29
5. Importance of Including Special Education Courses in University Training Programs for Public School Administrators	29
6. Rank Order of Principals' Perceived Needs for Specific Areas of Training	31
7. Principals' Level of Interest in Participating in Appropriate In-Service Special Education Training Experiences	32
8. Rank Order of Principals' Perceptions Relative to the Most Effective Vehicle for Delivery of In-Service Training in Special Education.	33
9. Principals' Estimate of Professional Time Devoted to Special Education Matters	34
10. Types of Special Education Classes	35

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, principals are being required to assume increasingly greater responsibilities for the education of handicapped children within their schools.¹ As the recognized administrative and instructional leader of the school, it is the principal who is the primary school person involved in promoting adequate programs for the handicapped child. The school principal is considered to be the person who determines the attitudes and sets the tempo for the total educational program within the building. The principal is the educator who encourages flexibility, innovation, and the uses of appropriate techniques to improve all educational services, particularly all those offered handicapped children.

As the result of Public Law 94-142 principals have been forced to familiarize themselves with programs about which they obviously had felt little need for knowledge or training. In the past, many handicapped children were not present within the system for which the principal was

¹William E. Davis, "An Analysis of Principals' Formal Training in Special Education," Education, Fall 1980, p. 89.

responsible. However, today principals have suddenly found themselves as managers of the special education delivery system.²

If the due process procedures, including the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) requirements of Public Law 94-142, are to be appropriately implemented, the building principal must assume a leadership role in the instructional planning for handicapped children. To be effective, the principal must exhibit competence and knowledge about special services for the handicapped.³

Statement of the Problem

Although considerable evidence exists which supports the important role principals must play in the education of the handicapped child, the question of training emerges. Do principals possess the necessary training in order for them to carry out their responsibilities in this area? Are principals being required to assume a leadership role, when in fact, they have not been given adequate opportunity to develop basic skills in the field of special education?

The specific objectives of this study were: (1) To provide basic information relative to the amount of exposure

²William E. Davis, Principals Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming and Related Training Needs, Orono, University of Maine, 1978, p. 26.

³Kathleen M. McCoy, "Interest, Leadership, and Implementation: Views On the Role of the Mainstream Principal," Education, Winter 1981, p. 165.

and training principals have had in the field of special education. (2) To identify specific training needs in the field of special education as perceived by principals as well as the most desirable vehicles for providing such training.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Role of the Principal in Special Education

As larger numbers of handicapped pupils are being mainstreamed into regular classes for all or parts of their educational programs, the need for the integral involvement of the principal in this process is receiving widespread support.⁴

One aspect of P.L. 94-142 is that it appears to have blurred many of the traditional boundaries between regular and exceptional education administration, since building principals' decision-making responsibilities were appreciably altered, if not increased by this legislation.⁵

Many articles have appeared in the educational journals on the role of the principal in implementing Public Law 94-142. However, empirical data regarding the roles and functions of building principals in educating handicapped children and decision making are extremely limited.⁶

Cochrane and Westling, both Florida educators, see

⁴Pamela V. Cochrane and David L. Westling, "The Principal and Mainstreaming: Ten Suggestions for Success," Educational Leadership, April 1977, p. 174.

⁵Jeremy Lietz and Jeffrey S. Kaiser, "The Principals' Role in Implementing Public Law 94-142," Education, September 1980, p. 81.

⁶Lietz and Kaiser, op. cit., p. 32.

mainstreaming as a team effort with the principal as leader. They suggest that in order to manage mainstreaming and diminish its inherent problems, the principal should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children and ensure through training programs, similar knowledge on the part of regular classroom teachers. Also, they believe that the principal should become a ready faculty source of additional information on exceptional children and use special educators as support personnel. Finally, they recommend that the principal provide continuing moral support for the faculty and direct assistance to the handicapped child in interpersonal relations.⁷

McCoy stresses that functioning at the building level, the principal is in a critical position to provide needed administrative support for successful mainstreaming practices. By virtue of strong leadership the principal can provide noticeable input toward developing, planning and implementing mainstream programs.⁸

He further states that the principal well-versed in mainstream skills can assist a staff member to grow in team process skills, communication skills and knowledge of needs such as information about handicapped conditions and how to relate these conditions to educational processes.

⁷ Cochrane and Westling, op. cit., p. 507.

⁸ McCoy, op. cit., p. 167.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education published a Child Study Team Placement Training Manual that attempted to define the role of the principal in dealing with handicapped children. "The role of the building principal in exceptional education is to ensure the effective and complete provision of necessary and appropriate services to handicapped children in school."⁹ The specific responsibilities are to:

1. Coordinate and administer special education services in the school.
2. Supervise educational personnel serving handicapped children in the school.
3. Designate and implement educational programs for handicapped children in the school, in accordance with approved policies, procedures, and guidelines of the Local Educational Agencies of the State Department of Education.
4. Promote attitudes of school personnel and parents that encourage the acceptance and inclusion of handicapped children in regular classes and interaction with regular students.
5. Receive referrals of students with suspected handicapping conditions from teachers, parents, and others.
6. Arrange for appropriate evaluation for these students recommended for evaluation as a result of a screening procedure.
7. Supervise the maintenance of child records at the school level and protect the confidentiality of these records.
8. Receive teacher requests for assistance and provide or arrange for specialized assistance.

⁹The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Child Study Team Placement Training Manual, Washington, D. C., The Association, 1976, p. 59.

9. Implement due process procedures.
10. Plan for special-education programs in the school and make budget recommendations to the superintendent.
11. Participate in LEA plan for special education services.

Lietz and Kaiser investigated the ideal and real influences of building principals in twenty-seven key operational decision making tasks affecting the education of handicapped children. The top five ideal influences of the building principal were perceived to be: (1) Evaluate professional personnel, (2) Recruit and select para-professional personnel, (3) Recruit and select professional personnel, (4) Approve purchase orders within central-office guidelines, and (5) Receive budget requests from the special education staff.¹⁰

However, in reality the top five decision making tasks the principals identified were: (1) Evaluate professional personnel, (2) Coordinate due process procedures, (3) Be responsible for maintaining and controlling student records, (4) Provide counseling services to students, and (5) Approve purchase orders within central-office guidelines.

Bonds and Lindsey explained the beliefs of elementary and secondary school teachers concerning what they think the principal does in special education since the

¹⁰Lietz and Kaiser, op. cit., p. 32.

passing of Public Law 94-142.¹¹

Sixty-four teachers enrolled in graduate classes at Georgia Southern College were administered ten questions in a Lichert Scale format of 1 to 5. The responses were 1-Always, 2-Frequently, 3-Occasionally, 4-Rarely, and 5-Never.

Question 1 was, "Does the principal offer suggestions for classroom arrangements for special needs children?" Nearly half (48 per cent) of the respondents stated that the principal "Always" or "Frequently" offered suggestions.

In response to question 2, "Does the principal plan and enforce an effective schedule for special needs?" Only 28 per cent responded "Always" or "Frequently." Thirty-two per cent responded "Occasionally" and 40 per cent "Rarely" or "Never." The authors concluded that "from this diminutive survey, the principal must give more attention to this necessary area."¹²

To the question, "Does the principal assist the teacher with interpretation of test data?," 54 per cent responded "Always" or "Frequently," 20 per cent responded "Occasionally" and 26 per cent responded "Rarely" or "Never."

The fourth question was, "Does the principal function

¹¹Charles W. Bonds and John Lindsey, "The Principal In Special Education: The Teachers' Perspective," Education, Summer 1982, 407-410.

¹²Ibid., p. 408.

on the advisory or placement committee?" Fifty-two per cent responded "Rarely" or "Never," 26 per cent responded "Always" or "Frequently" and 22 per cent responded "Occasionally."

To the question, "Does the principal seek outside funds for materials?" Forty-four per cent responded "Always" or "Frequently," 28 per cent responded "Occasionally" and 28 per cent responded "Rarely" or "Never."

Forty per cent of the teachers responded "Always" or "Frequently" to the question, "Does the principal conduct inter-class visitations?" Twenty per cent responded "Occasionally" and 36 per cent responded "Rarely" or "Never."

The teachers were asked, "Does the principal read professional journals and share his readings with the teachers?" The teachers' responses were as follows: 54 per cent "Always" or "Frequently," 18 per cent "Occasionally," and 28 per cent "Rarely" or "Never."

Question 8 was, "Does the principal seek services from outside agencies for special needs children?" The teachers' responses were 36 per cent "Always" or "Frequently," 30 per cent "Occasionally," and 34 per cent "Rarely" or "Never."

When asked, "Does the principal acquaint teachers with the provisions of Public Law 94-142?," the teachers' responses were 38 per cent "Always" or "Frequently," 24 per cent "Occasionally" and 38 per cent "Rarely" or "Never."

The last question of this survey was, "Does the

principal explain Public Law 94-142 at parent organizations or PTA meetings?" Over half (56 per cent) of the teachers responded "Always" or "Frequently," 24 per cent "Occasionally," and 20 per cent "Rarely" or "Never."

This brief survey of teachers' perception of what the principal does in special education revealed that even in this new area, the principal continues to function well in instructional leadership capacity. If the school is to provide more adequate services for special needs students, the principal is the key to success. His leadership will determine the success or failure of such programs.

Attitudes and Knowledge of Principals Concerning Education

Even though the literature contains considerable evidence which suggests that building principals must play an integral role in the effective mainstreaming programs of handicapped pupils, this particular group of professionals has received relatively little attention in regard to their specific attitudes toward the process.¹³

Davis investigated the attitudes of principals in Maine toward the mainstreaming of handicapped children according to type and level of handicapping condition. He found that principals tended to estimate "success" for mainstreaming according to the degree of the handicapping condition. "Mild" conditions were assigned the highest success rate for effective mainstreaming. "Moderate"

¹³William E. Davis, "Public School Principals' Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming Retarded Pupils," Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, October 1980, p. 174.

conditions next, and finally children with "severe and profound" handicapping conditions. Based upon a rank order of all handicapping conditions, "mild learning disabilities" emerged as first choice to have an "excellent" or "good" chance of being successfully mainstreamed within their schools. Ranked as having the least favorable prognosis for "excellent" or "good" mainstreaming were pupils with "severe and profound mental retardation."¹⁴

The study indicated further that principals in Maine public schools apparently have little faith that mentally retarded pupils, regardless of degree of handicap, can be successfully integrated into regular classes, as compared with other handicaps. Of the 21 handicapping conditions listed according to degree and type, "mild mental retardation" was ranked number 12. In fact five "moderate" conditions were considered by the respondents to be more conducive to successful mainstreaming than that of pupils labeled as having "mild mental retardation."

Based upon an analysis of the results of this study, it would appear that public school principals tend to view the chances for successful integration of mentally retarded pupils into regular class programs as relatively poor as compared with those for other handicapped children. The author inferred that the label "mental retardation" holds

¹⁴Davis, op. cit., p. 175.

a particular negative stigma for building principals and that the chances for retarded children to receive an appropriate educational program in regular class settings may be significantly reduced should most principals truly consider retarded pupils to have such limited potential.

The study dealt primarily with perceptions of principals toward the mainstreaming of children with various types and degrees of handicapping conditions. It should be recognized that perceptions may be based upon personal and professional bias of the respondents as well as being reflective of exposure and/or training with handicapped children.

Payne and Murry explained the attitudes of urban and suburban elementary school building principals toward the placement of the handicapped child into a regular classroom setting. A questionnaire was sent to 100 elementary school principals regarding willingness to integrate handicapped children into their regular program, the categories of handicapped children they would be willing to include, those they would not be willing to include in an integrated situation within their school, and the resources they felt would be required to operate an integrative program. They found that suburban principals (71.4 per cent) were more willing to integrate handicapped children into their regular programs than urban principals (40.3 per cent). Both had similar perceptions about the categories of handicapped they would be most willing to see in an integrated program.

Ranked highest were the visually and hearing impaired and lowest the educable and trainable mentally retarded.¹⁵

Both urban and suburban principals perceived the need for teachers and student support services in an integrative type program. In-service teacher training was ranked as the number one need, resource teachers and rooms as the second need, and itinerant services third.

Ralph Cline evaluated the attitudes and knowledge about handicapped children of 91 principals in a large metropolitan school district in the southeastern United States. The attitudes of the principals were compared with the attitudes of experts. The study found that principals' attitudes toward handicapped children compared favorably with those held by experts in all areas of handicaps. However, principals demonstrated significantly less knowledge than experts regarding placement, and those with less than 10 years experience are more knowledgeable than those with more experience. Cline concluded that a major emphasis by teacher trainers and in-service programs must be on educating principals.¹⁶

Alexander and Strain reviewed existing research related to the attitudes of educators toward handicapped

¹⁵Reed Payne and Charles Murray, "Principals' Attitudes Toward Integration of the Handicapped," Educational Children, October 1974, p. 124.

¹⁶Ralph Cline, "Principals' Attitudes and Knowledge About Handicapped Children," Exceptional Children, October 1981, p. 172.

children and mainstreaming. They concluded the Director of Special Education had the most favorable attitude toward integration, with the special education teacher and principal following, and the regular teacher the least favorable attitude.¹⁷

Principal's Formal Training in Special Education

An ERIC search at the University of Northern Iowa library resulted in limited research to determine the formal background and perceived needs of principals in the area of special education.

A 1970 study by Lyndal Bullock showed that none of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico require a single course in special education within the certification requirements for school principals. Bullock hypothesized that unless an administrator elects to take a course in special education during his professional training, he has little background in the area to guide his decision making. In order to test his hypotheses an inquiry was made to determine the amount of specialized training that elementary school administrators have had in the area of special education. The design of the investigation called for the examination of the academic credentials filed with the state department of education of 92 elementary

¹⁷Cara Alexander and Phillip S. Strain, "A Review of Educators' Attitudes Toward Handicapped Children and The Concept of Mainstreaming," Psychology In The Schools, July 1978, p. 391.

school administrators, all of whom were employed by one large midwestern city school district. The study showed that 65 per cent elected no course work in special education, 33 per cent had a single special education course, while 12 per cent had taken two or more courses in the field. As a group the 92 administrators had earned 114 semester hours of special education. Bullock concluded that unless training programs in school administration or state certification law require course work in this area of specialization, few administrators will seek specialized training.¹⁸

A thorough perusal of graduate school catalogs by Sharon Fineman revealed that few schools offer any courses (and rarely more than one) in special education for administrators. Nor is an applicant to most graduate programs in educational administration required to have any special education courses as an undergraduate.¹⁹

The most comprehensive study relative to the amount of exposure and training principals have had in the field of special education was conducted by William Davis in 1978. A questionnaire was sent to 345 principals throughout the state of Maine concerning their attitudes toward

¹⁸Lyndal M. Bullock, "An Inquiry Into the Special Education Training of Elementary School Administrators," Exceptional Children, Summer 1970, p. 770.

¹⁹Sharon Fineman, "We Need Principals Who Understand," The Principal, November 1981, p. 34.

mainstreaming, perceived obstacles to mainstreaming, the success or mainstreaming in their school, the perceived skills necessary by regular teachers in dealing with handicapped students, the formal training of principals, the perceived training needs of principals and the most effective vehicle for delivery of in-service to principals. The results of their questionnaires showed 51.9 per cent had never taken a single course in the field of special education, 14.9 per cent had taken only one course and 15.7 per cent reported that they had taken only two courses in the field.²⁰

The principals in Davis' study were asked to estimate the relative amount of experience they had with handicapped children during their formal course work in university school programs. Thirty-two and eight tenths per cent reported they had received "No" exposure to the education of handicapped children in their formal school administration training programs, while 44.9 per cent responded they had received "Some Exposure."²¹

When asked to estimate the "Increase in Professional Time Devoted to Special Education as a Result of Special Education Legislation," 41.4 per cent viewed the increase

²⁰William E. Davis, Principals' Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming and Related Training Needs, Orono, University of Maine, 1978, p. 38.

²¹Ibid., p. 39.

as "Major" and 45.2 per cent as "Moderate."²²

Another objective of the Davis study was for principals to assess training needs in the areas of special education for themselves. First, the principals were asked to indicate their perceptions of the need for formal training in special education for individuals preparing to be public school principals on a five-point scale, ranging from "None" (1) to "Very High" (5). Thirty-seven and four tenths per cent considered the need for special education training to be either "High" or "Very High." When the "Moderate" category was included the percentage rose to 78.3 per cent. Only two of the 345 principals saw "No" need for such training.²³

Secondly, the principals were asked to assess the need for some formal training in special education to be included in university training programs for school administrators. Fifty-eight per cent of all respondents consider the inclusion of such courses to be "Very Important" or "Extremely Important." When the category of "Moderately Important" was included the percentage rose to 85 per cent.²⁴

Principals were asked to indicate their current in-service training needs in special education. The top

²²Davis, op. cit., p. 45.

²³Davis, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁴Ibid., p. 83.

priority needs were: (1) "staff development and improvement issues" (66.1 per cent), (2) "overall program evaluation techniques" (58.1 per cent), and tied for (3) were "relationship of special education to other pupil support services" (51.0 per cent) and "development of individualized education programs (IEP)" (51.0 per cent). Low priority needs were "grantsmanship relating to special education" (34.8 per cent), "budgeting and financial matters related to special education," (31.0 per cent), and "dealing with child advocacy groups" (29.2 per cent).²⁵

Having obtained specific "perceived in-service training needs" of principals Davis measured the principals' attitudes toward the most effective vehicle for delivering the special education in-service program. Preferences were "Regional workshops by DPI" (73.0 per cent), "Regional workshops by University Personnel" (64.3 per cent), and "Short-term courses taught by university personnel" (56.2 per cent).²⁶

Effects of Training in Special Education

Lane showed that a background in special education can help alleviate stereotypes or prejudices toward excep-

²⁵Davis, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁶Ibid., p. 95.

tional children.²⁷ His data support the notion held by Payne and Murray²⁸ and Kraft²⁹ that the lack of experience in the area of special education is the main contributor to many educators' fears and prejudices toward mainstreaming and special education.

Harasymiw and Horne found that although in-service education may make educators less anxious in working with handicapped children, a more prolonged procedure of familiarization with various disability groups may be needed to modify underlying social biases.³⁰

Mandell and Strain noted that previous special education teaching experience, number of courses taken in special education, and special education in-service experiences all were related to a positive attitude toward mainstreaming.³¹

Alexander and Strain concluded that what is needed

²⁷P. Lane, "Evaluative Statements by Prospective Teachers as a Function of Ethnic and Retardation Labels," Dissertation Abstracts International, 1976, 37, p. 3.

²⁸Payne and Murray, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁹A. Kraft, "Down With (Most) Special Education Classes," Academic Therapy, 1973, 80, p. 207.

³⁰S. Harasymiw and M. Horne, "Teacher Attitudes Toward Handicapped Children and Regular Class Integration," Journal of Special Education, 1975, 10, p. 395.

³¹C. Mandell and P. S. Strain, "An Analysis of Factors Related to the Attitudes of Regular Classroom Teachers Toward Mainstreaming Mildly Handicapped Children," Contemporary Educational Psychology, in press.

now are larger, more specific studies of all aspects of in-service education in the area of special education.

How much time would be allotted for mainstreaming preparation? What is the appropriate role of elementary and secondary educators in preparing trainees for mainstream settings? What skills are necessary for integrated teaching and therefore need to be addressed? What is the best way to teach these skills and disseminate materials and information. These are only a few of the many questions in need of systematic study.³²

Summary of Review of Literature

The role of the building principal in matters relating to special education is seen as one of instructional leadership. He is seen as the key to the success or failure of such programs.

A review of the literature indicates that school principals lack formal training in the area of special education. Furthermore, not a single one of the fifty states requires that they have any such course work, nor do many university training programs require special education courses as a part of their training program for principals.

The principals themselves feel a need for university programs to include courses in special education as a part of the training program for principals. They feel a need for current in-service in staff development, overall program evaluation, relationship for special education to other pupil support services, and in the development of the individualized educational plan. Furthermore, they desire

³²Alexander and Strain, op. cit., p. 395.

that these in-service programs be regional workshops by the department of Public Instruction or universities, or short term courses taught by university personnel.

In-service and training in special education was found to relate to a positive attitude toward such programs.

Chapter 3

METHOD

Initial Preparation and Research

During December 1982 and January 1983 a review of relevant literature was conducted in an attempt to identify the background, needs and concerns of principals in the area of special education. The study conducted by William Davis³³ was the most comprehensive, and it was given considerable attention. In addition, informal contacts were made with several principals in order to obtain some of their views on the need for training in special education and mainstreaming.

Instrumentation

Five of Davis' 96 questions were selected as pertinent to the present study. These five questions concerned (1) the formal background of principals; (2) the need for formal training; (3) the specific areas of training needed; (4) interest in receiving in-service training; and (5) the vehicle for the delivery of in-service programs.

In addition questions were added to elicit the number of special education students and teachers and the type of special programs for which the respondent was

³³Davis, op. cit.

responsible. Finally questions were devised to ascertain the principal's role in relation to the special education students in his building.

The result was a four page questionnaire soliciting responses to 21 objective items. Major portions of the instrument, which allowed for respondent anonymity, utilized a 5-point Likert type scale to assess principals' perceptions.

Distribution of Questionnaire

March 1, 1983, the questionnaire (see Appendix A), accompanied by an explanatory, personalized cover letter (see Appendix B) was mailed to all of the 63 public and private elementary principals in Area Educational Agency 7 (AEA 7) of the state of Iowa. The 1982-1983 school year directory of "Area 7 School Administrators" distributed by Area Educational Agency 7 was utilized as the source for individuals currently listed as "principals." A concerted effort was made to include every individual listed as an elementary principal and to avoid sending more than one questionnaire to any individual, even though he or she may have been listed several times (in situations wherein a principal is listed as serving more than one school).

A personalized explanatory letter accompanied each questionnaire. It was felt that "Dear Mr. Smith" was less formal than "Dear Principal" and that a personalized letter might be influential in gaining cooperation.

Respondents were asked to return the questionnaire

in a first-class postage paid envelope provided by the investigator.

Data Analysis

All questionnaires were tallied upon receipt and any narrative comments noted.

Since the information gathered from the questionnaire was essentially descriptive, it was decided that simple and combined percentage presentations would best portray the practical significance of the data as well as be most meaningful to readers.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Procedures for Reporting Results and Analyzing Data

Due to the descriptive nature of the information obtained by the questionnaire, a simple and combined percentage presentation of data was chosen. It was determined that by presenting the data by percentages and through the average mean, where appropriate, readers would be best able to develop meaningful understandings of the content.

Basic Response Information

Of the 62 questionnaires sent to elementary principals in Area Educational Agency 7, 48 or 77 per cent were ultimately returned. The rate of return (77 per cent) on this survey was considered excellent for the purposes of this study.

Personal and Professional Data

Table 1 includes a percentage breakdown of the responses according to the following variables: (1) position (full or part time); (2) school setting (public or private); (3) sex; (4) age; and (5) degrees held. A "composite profile" of the respondents would present the following "typical principal": A 41-50 year old man who has a master's degree and is employed as a full time principal.

Table 1
Personal and Professional Data

Category	Number	Per cent
Position		
Full time	45	94
Part time	3	6
School Setting		
Public	38	79
Private	10	21
Sex		
Male	38	79
Female	10	21
Age		
21-30	0	0
31-40	14	29
41-50	17	36
51-60	14	29
60 and over	3	6
Degree		
Bachelor's	0	0
Master's	45	94
Specialist	1	2
Doctorate	2	4

The respondents' experience as principal ranged from 2 to 38 years. Fifteen (31 per cent) had had no elementary teaching experience. Two had teaching experience at all levels (elementary through high school), one had elementary and high school experience, six had elementary and junior high school experience, one had elementary and middle school experience, one had elementary, middle and junior high school experience, and one had only high school teaching experience.

Principals' Background and Perceived Training Needs
in Special Education

The principals were asked to estimate the relative amount of experience which they had in the education of handicapped children during their formal course work in university school administration programs. Their responses are contained in Table 2.

Table 2

Principals' Perceptions of the Relative Amount of
Exposure to Handicapped Children in Their
Formal Coursework in School
Administrative Programs

Category	Number	Per cent
None	11	23
Some	23	48
Moderate	9	19
High	5	10
Very High	0	0

An examination of Table 2 shows that 23 per cent of the group indicated they had "No" experience in the education of handicapped children in their formal school administration training programs, while 48 per cent responded that they had received only "Some exposure." Thus 34 principals or 71 per cent of the total sample perceived their exposure to the handicapped as being minimal. The results strongly suggest that there has not existed in university training programs an effort to include material dealing with

handicapped children.

Table 3 reports the formal training in the area of special education indicated by the respondents.

Table 3
Principals' Formal Training in
Special Education

Category	Number	Per cent
None	23	48
One	4	8
Two	7	15
Three	6	12
Four	1	2
Five or More	7	15

It is noteworthy that 48 per cent of the principals surveyed reported that they had never taken even a single course in the field of special education at any point (undergraduate, graduate, or continuing education) in their college course work. Also of importance was the fact that 8 per cent indicated that they had taken only one course, while 15 per cent reported they had taken only two courses in special education.

When asked the number of in-services they had taken in special education, 69 per cent reported they had sought some assistance in the area. Table 4 reports the findings.

Table 4
Number of In-Services in
Special Education

Category	Number	Per cent
0	15	31
1	1	2
2	9	19
3	5	10
4	0	0
5 or more	18	38

When asked if they felt some formal training in special education should be included in university training programs and courses for public school administrators, 45 or 94 per cent responded "Yes" and 3 or 6 per cent responded "No." The principals were asked to rate how important they considered this factor and the results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5
Importance of Including Special Education Courses
in University Training Programs for
Public School Administrators

Category	Number	Per cent
Extremely Important	2	4
Very Important	25	52
Moderately Important	19	40
Mildly Important	2	4
Not Important	0	0

Two of the 3 principals who did not consider this as important were private school principals. One of these had no special education students in his building and the other had only 7, all of whom were in a resource room program.

When one analyzes the response patterns of principals surveyed in this study regarding their perception of the importance and need for formal training in special education, two factors seem clear.

First, as a group principals typically have received extremely little exposure to the education of handicapped children. Second, principals feel that it is important that formal training in the area of special education be included in university training programs for public school administrators.

This study also attempted to measure the in-service training needs of principals as they perceive them. Principals were asked to indicate which areas of training they felt would be helpful to them in their role as a principal in dealing with matters of special education. The responses of the total group are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that the number 1 perceived in-service training need is "Pupil evaluation team process." Tied for number 2 were "Overall program evaluation techniques" and "Knowledge of characteristics of various categories of handicapped children." Ranked number 3 was "Supervision of special education personnel." Ranking lowest were "Budgeting and financial matters related to special

education," "Knowledge of pertinent legislation relating to special education," and "Overview of current philosophical issues in special education."

Table 6

Rank Order of Principals Perceived Needs
for Specific Areas of Training

Rank	Skill/Area	Number	Per cent
1	Pupil Evaluation Team Process	27	56
2	Overall Program Evaluation Techniques	26	54
2	Knowledge of Characteristics of Various Categories of Handicapped Children	26	54
3	Supervision of Special Education Personnel	24	50
4	Dealing With Parents of Handicapped Children	20	42
5	Development of IEP's	16	33
5	Individual Pupil Assessment Techniques	16	33
6	Overview of Current Philosophical Issues in Special Education	11	23
7	Knowledge of Pertinent Legislation Relating to Special Education	9	19
8	Budgeting and Financial Matters Related to Special Education	8	17

Having obtained specific "perceived in-service training needs" of principals an attempt was made to obtain the "level of interest" of principals to participate in an appropriate in-service training experience in the area of

special education. Table 7 contains the responses of the group.

Table 7

Principals' Level of Interest in Participating
in Appropriate In-service Special Education
Training Experiences

Category	Number	Per cent
Very High Interest	3	6
High Interest	10	21
Moderate Interest	25	52
Mild Interest	9	19
No Interest	1	2

An examination of Table 7 shows that only 27 per cent of the principals surveyed indicated a "High" or "Very High" interest in participating in appropriately designed special education in-service programs. "Moderate" interest was cited by 52 per cent of the respondents, while 21 per cent stated "No" or "Mild" interest in participating in such experiences. The person who indicated "No interest" made a note that he is not continuing in his present position.

It is surprising that the level of interest was not higher considering that the principals surveyed felt that courses should be included in university training programs for school administrators.

Having obtained specific "perceived in-service training needs" and "level of interest" of principals, an effort

was made to measure principals' attitudes toward the most effective vehicle for delivering the special education in-service programs. Principals were asked to designate four delivery options as "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," "Poor," or "Very Poor." Responses of the group in the "Excellent" and "Good" categories are ranked ordered in Table 8.

Ranked number 1 was "in-service provided by AEA special education personnel." Ranked number 2 was "regional workshops provided by DPI." Short term courses taught by university personnel" and "formal university courses" were ranked low.

Table 8

Rank Order of Principals' Perceptions Relative
to the Most Effective Vehicle for
Delivery of In-Service Training
in Special Education

Rank	Vehicle	Number	Per cent
1	In-Service provided by AEA special education personnel	29	60
2	Regional workshops provided by DPI	26	54
3	Short-term courses taught by university personnel	15	31
4	Formal university courses	8	19

Demographic Information

The final portion of this study was an attempt to assess the current involvement of the principals with special education programs.

The size of the schools of the principals surveyed ranged from 131 to 484 students with 0 to 50 special education students. The number of teachers in the schools ranged from 8 to 33 with 0 to 5 special education teachers.

Principals were asked to estimate the amount of professional time which is currently devoted to special education matters. Table 9 contains this information.

Table 9

Principals' Estimate of Professional Time Devoted to Special Education Matters

Category	Number	Per cent
Very High	2	4
High	6	13
Moderate	19	40
Some	17	45
None	2	4
No Response	2	4

It appears that principals do not feel they devote much time to special education matters as 75 per cent indicated only "Moderate" or "Some" professional time is devoted to special education matters.

As a matter of interest principals were asked which type of special education classes were currently located in their buildings. This information is contained in Table 10.

Table 10
Types of Special Education Classes

Category	Number	Per cent
Learning Disabled	23	48
Emotionally Disturbed	9	19
Physically Handicapped	0	0
Developmental Classroom	5	10
Mentally Disabled	8	17
Hearing Impaired	3	6
Visually Impaired	2	2
Resource Room	26	54
No Classes	4	8

It is interesting that most principals surveyed deal with "Learning Disabled" and "Resource Room" students, or those with the least involved handicaps. Perhaps this is one reason for the low interest in being involved in special education in-service programs. However, it is worth noting that 52 per cent of the principals who had students in the "mentally disabled," "emotionally disturbed," "visually impaired," and "hearing impaired," or the more handicapped areas, marked "High" or "Very high" interest

in in-service programs. In other words, those principals with students with more severe degrees of handicaps are more interested in in-service than those with students with low levels of handicaps.

Role In Special Education Matters

Finally, principals were asked questions pertaining to their role in dealing with the special education classes in their buildings. This section did not apply to 4 of the 48 respondents because they had no special education classes in their buildings.

The first question was, "Are the teachers responsible to you?" Forty-three (90 per cent) of the principals responded "Yes" and one responded "No."

To the question, "Are you involved in staffings?" 43 (90 per cent) responded "Yes," and one responded "Some."

When asked "Do you handle parent concerns?" 39 (81 per cent) responded "Yes" and 5 responded "Some."

To the question "Do you handle the discipline of special education students?" 40 (83 per cent) responded "Yes" and 4 responded "Some."

The final question was "Do you have a voice in determining who is placed in special education classes in your building?" and 32 (67 per cent) responded "Yes," 6 (12 per cent) responded "No," and one responded "Sometimes."

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess elementary principals' background and perceived training needs in the area of special education.

An effort was made to include all Area Educational Agency 7 elementary principals in the survey. Sixty-two (62) questionnaires were distributed, and 48 were returned, representing a 77 per cent response.

Major Findings of Study

Following are some of the major findings of the study.

Relative to prior training in the area of special education, 48 per cent of the respondents reported they had received "No" exposure to this field, while 34 per cent reported they had received only "Some" exposure. Only 10 per cent of the principals indicated they had received "High" or "Very High" exposure to the education of handicapped children.

Forty-eight per cent of the principals surveyed had never taken any formal course work in special education. Twenty-four per cent (24 per cent) had taken only one or two courses.

Forty-six (46) or ninety-six per cent (96 per cent)

of the principals felt the inclusion of training in special education in university courses for public school administrators to be "Moderately to Extremely Important." Only two respondents considered this type of training to be "Not Important."

The three major special education in-service training needs the principals perceived as "Major" or "Most Important" were "Pupil Evaluation Team Process," "Overall Program Evaluation Techniques," and "Knowledge of Characteristics of Various Categories of Handicapped Children."

In-service provided by AEA special education personnel (60 per cent) and regional workshops provided by DPI (54 per cent) were considered to be the most effective vehicles for delivery of in-service training programs to principals. Formal university courses and short-term courses taught by university personnel were not considered as effective vehicles in this regard.

Only 28 per cent of all principals reported a "High" or "Very High" interest in participating in appropriately designed in-service training programs in the area of special education, while 21 per cent indicated "No" or "Mild" interest and 52 per cent indicated a "Moderate" interest in participating in such programs.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings produced by this study, the following recommendations are offered:

- (1) University personnel responsible for training

public school administrators should include formal course work in special education as part of their requirements. An introductory course in special education such as "The Exceptional Child," offered by departments of special education should be one of the requirements. This course typically gives an overview of each disability including characteristics of the handicap, appropriate educational programs, a history of how they have been served in the past, and current and future trends. Also formal courses should be designed to cover the pupil evaluation team process, overall program evaluation techniques, supervision of special education personnel, dealing with parents of handicapped children, the development of individualized educational plans, and problems and issues in mainstreaming.

(2) Increased emphasis should be placed upon the development of special education in-service training opportunities for principals. Seventy-one per cent of the principals in this study indicated a "Moderate" to "High" interest in participating in in-service programs. The principals indicated specific areas of need and should be included in the development of such programs. Since the AEA was the preferred vehicle for delivery of in-service training (60 per cent), perhaps they need to be made aware of the needs of principals in the area of special education and provide such programs.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

An Inquiry Into the Special Education Training
of AEA 7 Elementary School Administrators

Appendix A

AN INQUIRY INTO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING
OF AREA 7 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Please respond to the following questions or statements by circling, checking, or completing the appropriate items. Provide written comments, if you choose, where indicated.

1. Your position as principal:

full time: _____ part time: _____

2. Your school setting:

public: _____ private: _____

3. Sex: male: _____ female: _____

4. Age: 21 - 30: _____

31 - 40: _____

41 - 50: _____

51 - 60: _____

60 and over: _____

5. Total number of years experience as principal (Including 1982-83 school year). _____

6. Number of years of full-time teaching experience:

Elementary Level _____

Middle School _____

Junior High _____

High School _____

Total _____

7. Degree's Held: Bachelor _____

Master's _____

Specialist _____

Doctorate _____

8. As a part of your formal coursework and/or degree program in the area of school administration, please estimate the relative amount of exposure which you have had to the education of handicapped children.

None Some Moderate High Very High
 1 2 3 4 5

9. Number of formal courses in special education taken as an undergraduate, graduate and/or continuing education:

10. Number of in-services you have had in special education:

11. Do you feel that some formal training in the area of special education and mainstreaming should be included in university training programs and courses for public school administrators?

Yes _____ No _____

How important do you consider this factor?

Not Mildly Moderately Very Extremely
 Important Important Important Important Important
 1 2 3 4 5

12. Please indicate the specific skills and/or areas of training which you feel would be currently helpful to you in your role as a principal in dealing with matters of special education in your school setting.

No Some Moderate Major Most
 Need Need Need Need Important

- a. Knowledge of pertinent legislation relating to special education..... 1 2 3 4 5
- b. Individual pupil assessment techniques..... 1 2 3 4 5
- c. Pupil evaluation team process.... 1 2 3 4 5
- d. Development of IEP's..... 1 2 3 4 5

12. (Continued)	No Need	Some Need	Moderate Need	Major Need	Most Important
e. Budgeting and financial matters related to special education..	1	2	3	4	5
f. Overall program evaluation techniques.....	1	2	3	4	5
g. Knowledge of characteristics of various categories of handicapped children.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Overview of current philosophical issues in special education.....	1	2	3	4	5
i. Dealing with parents of handicapped children..	1	2	3	4	5
j. Community public relations relating to special education.....	1	2	3	4	5
k. Supervision of special education personnel.....	1	2	3	4	5

13. Assuming that an appropriate in-service could be provided for you in the area of special education, what would your present level of interest be in participating in such.

No Interest	Mild Interest	Moderate Interest	High Interest	Very High Interest
1	2	3	4	5

14. What would you consider to be the most effective vehicle for the delivery of inservice training to principals relating to matters of special education and mainstreaming?

14. (Continued)	Very	Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
a. Formal univer- sity courses....	1	2	3	4	5	
b. Short-term courses (e.g. 6-8 weeks) taught by univer- sity personnel...	1	2	3	4	5	
c. Regional workshops provided by DPI..	1	2	3	4	5	
d. In-services provid- ed by AEA special education person- nel.....	1	2	3	4	5	

15. Total number of pupils in your school 1982-83 school year. _____

16. Total number of special education students in your building 1982-83 school year. _____

17. Total number of teachers in your school 1982-83 school year. _____

18. Total number of special education teachers in your school 1982-83 school year. _____

19. Please estimate the amount of your professional time which is currently devoted to special education matters.

None	Some	Moderate	High	Very High
1	2	3	4	5

20. Which of the following AEA 7 special education classes are in your building 1982-83 school year.

Learning Disabled _____ Mentally Disabled _____

Emotionally Disturbed _____ Hearing Impaired _____

Physically Handicapped _____ Visually Impaired _____

Developmental Classroom _____ Resource Room _____

21. What is your role in dealing with the special education classes in your building?

a. Are the teachers responsible to you? _____

b. Are you involved in the staffings? _____

21. (Continued)

- c. Do you handle parent concerns? _____
- d. Do you handle the discipline of special education students? _____
- e. Do you have a voice in determinign who is placed in special education classes in your building?

APPENDIX B
COPY OF COVER LETTER WHICH
ACCOMPANIED QUESTIONNAIRE

2617 Delane Ave.
Waterloo, Iowa 50701

March 1, 1983

James C. Sterling, Principal
Dyer Elementary School
142 East Lincoln Street
Dyer, Iowa 50364

Dear Mr. Sterling:

Enclosed is a survey for you to complete. The purpose of this survey is to determine the background elementary principals have had in special education and to assess the needs for courses or in-service education in the area of special education.

I am conducting this survey to fulfill the requirements for a Master's Degree in School Administration. The survey has the approval of the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Northern Iowa. Dr. Norman McCumsy is the faculty advisor for this project.

Your answers will remain anonymous and the results will be available following the study. Should you be interested in these results you may contact me at the above address.

For your convenience a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this survey.

Sincerely,

Kay Spaulding
Graduate Student
University of Northern Iowa