

2019

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Recommended Citation

Perricone, Giovanna, "The Influence of the "Emotionally Disturbed" Classroom Label on General Education Teachers' Sense of Efficacy" (2019). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1319.
https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1319

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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE “EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED” CLASSROOM LABEL
ON GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ SENSE OF EFFICACY**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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DECEMBER 14TH, 2018

Abstract

Students identified as “emotionally disturbed” face resistance to inclusion in classrooms with typically-developing peers on the part of the general education teachers. This study aims to address whether the classroom label of “emotionally disturbed” affects teacher efficacy and whether this relationship is moderated by the amount of applied inclusion training a teacher has received. General education teachers will read identical case studies of a student who either spends some of his school day in an “Emotionally Disturbed Class” or a “Self-Regulation Skills Class.” They will complete a measure of student-specific teacher efficacy and then report how many hours of inclusion training that involved direct interaction with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties they have had. An analysis of covariance is predicted to show higher reports of teacher efficacy in the “Self-Regulation Skills Class” condition than in the “Emotionally Disturbed Class” condition, and this relationship is expected to be even stronger as the amount of applied inclusion training increases.

Keywords: emotional disturbance, teacher efficacy, education, mainstreaming

The Influence of the “Emotionally Disturbed” Classroom Label on General Education Teachers’
Sense of Efficacy

For the majority of our country’s history, students with disabilities were sent to separate schools from their typically developing peers and denied access to many educational opportunities (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). It wasn’t until 1975 that legislation, currently titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), was passed to support students with special educational needs (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). This law guarantees a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Woolfolk, 2016). For most students, the LRE is considered to be the general education class setting (Woolfolk, 2016). There are 13 specific categories of disability served under IDEA, and based on data from 2011, the total number of students falling into one or more of these categories in the United States exceeds 6 million (Woolfolk, 2016). The public educational system in the US went from a model of segregating this large population of students with disabilities to a model predicated on the belief that general education classrooms are the most appropriate educational environment for all students regardless of ability.

This dramatic shift to uniting students in general education classes has been a gradual process (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). There have been several different approaches over the years in order to achieve the goal of the LRE for every student. The first push was for mainstreaming: including children with disabilities in some general education classes when convenient (Woolfolk, 2016). Later, the trend favored integration: fitting the student with special needs into established general education class structures (Woolfolk, 2016). Most recently, the LRE has been assumed to mean inclusion: restructuring educational settings to promote

belonging for all students (Woolfolk, 2016). These terms are still sometimes used interchangeably by educators and researchers despite their nuanced differences.

“Mainstreaming,” for example, is the term most often used in the US, while internationally, it is more common to use the term “inclusion” (Lindsay, 2007). The way schools are structured also varies, and there are many types of mainstream schools, which can make comparisons difficult (Lindsay, 2007), but the focus of this study will be inclusion.

Inclusion can be challenging as educators and parents work together to figure out the best placement for a student and what supports will be necessary for their success in school. Overall, however, there appears to be an upward trend in educating students with disabilities along with typically developing students. Between 1990 and 2001, there was a decline in students being educated the entire school day in a separate setting along with an increase in students with disabilities educated for the majority of the school day in regular class settings (McLeskey et al, 2012). Both elementary and secondary schools reflected this trend toward less restrictive placement practices (McLeskey et al, 2012). By 2011, more than half of students with a disability served under IDEA were instructed in general education classrooms for at least 80% of the school day (Woolfolk, 2016). While this data is encouraging, it does not necessarily reflect the reality of students with every kind of disability. Although the statistical analyses showed an increase in educating students in less restrictive settings regardless of disability categories, students with emotional and behavioral difficulties were still one of the groups with the lowest rate of mainstreaming into general education classrooms and the highest rate of separate and contained educational placements (McLeskey et al, 2012).

Emotional disturbance is one of the thirteen categories of disabilities served under IDEA (Woolfolk, 2016). A child qualifies for this disability based on the federal definition if they have

one or more of the following characteristics: an inability to learn that can't be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to have satisfactory relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; unhappy or depressive mood; and a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears related to personal or school problems (Wery and Cullinan, 2013). Emotional disturbance is not a psychiatric diagnostic category but rather an educational one, and there has been criticism of the federal definition (Becker et al, 2011). Furthermore, states may alter the definition and change the category label. In 2011, only 24 states used the term "emotional disturbance," while the rest had altered it slightly (Wery and Cullinan, 2013). The next common labels were "emotional disability," "serious emotional disturbance," and "emotional impairment" (Wery and Cullinan, 2013). This variance in definition exists because this disability category does not reflect an actual neurological diagnosis; therefore there are no standardized measures to assess the criteria of the category (Burns, 2000). Some have argued that separating children into educational disability categories like "emotionally disturbed" or "learning disabled" is both difficult, because many student characteristics overlap, and unnecessary, because effective teaching methods for these different populations don't actually vary much (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1977) Due to the inconsistency in definition, there is probably not an accurate number of students labeled with this educational disability, but as of 2008, less than 1% of students were identified as having an emotional disturbance (Becker et al, 2011).

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders face many challenges throughout their personal and academic lives (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). The manifestation of this particular disability is variable and unpredictable, so it is difficult to determine the appropriate LRE for these students (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). Although overall about 60% of

students with disabilities spend at least 80% of the school day in mainstream class settings, only 5% of students classified with emotional disturbance reached this benchmark in 2007 (Becker et al, 2011). In fact, about one third of these students are educated in separate schools (Becker et al, 2011). This general trend is probably indicative of this specific disability and the limitations that come with it. Additionally, some reports have suggested that only about 30% of students labeled as emotionally disturbed are at or above grade level in any given subject and that as a group these students have less than average intellectual ability (Kauffman, Cullinan, and Epstein, 1987). Emotional and behavioral difficulties on their own do not lead to deficits in academic achievement, however. Although lower performance may be why students labeled as ED often end up in separate special education settings, it is also possible that the opposite is true: that these students do not experience the same academic rigor in special education classrooms as in general education classrooms, and as such they have been held back intellectually. If this is the case, inclusion is necessary for ensuring academic success for these students.

Perhaps even more important than the potential for intellectual development, however, is the potential for social development that inclusion in general education classrooms provides for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. These students' deficits usually fall in social and relational spheres, and without interaction with typically-behaving peers, they will not get the practice they need to improve. Although the effectiveness of inclusive education is fairly scarce (Lindsay, 200), there is evidence to suggest that students with emotional and behavioral difficulties can succeed in the general education classroom. A case study of a student with a behavioral disorder who was gradually reintegrated into a typical school from a specialized school showed that the student experienced improved relationships with both educators and peers, increased self-esteem, and higher academic achievement after being mainstreamed

(Cumming and Strnadova, 2017). Other studies of students with similar emotional and behavioral disorders have found that although these students might show higher levels of aggression and disruption in class and lower levels of cooperation with other students, in organized, well-run classes, they did not exhibit behavior significantly worse than their typically developing peers (Farmer and Hollowell, 1994; Swinson, Woof, and Melling, 2003). These studies featured small sample sizes and therefore one must be wary of generalizing the positive findings to all mainstream school settings, but if the LRE is such settings and all students have the right to access of it, this evidence should function as support for these students. In addition, inclusion of students with different kinds of disabilities can have benefits for the typically developing students, such as more positive attitudes towards those with disabilities (MacMillan et al, 2014). However, there is still an excess of alternative schools that keep students with behavior and emotional problems out of the general education classroom (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012).

Barriers to inclusion in mainstream class settings can be unrelated to the specific student and their likelihood of success. Rock (1995) conducted a study to determine the variables that influence preliminary reintegration decisions made for children with serious emotional disturbance. She found that at the program level, the more developed and emphasized a reintegration orientation was, the higher the rates of reintegration, regardless of the severity of the emotional disturbance in the students being served by the particular program. Of importance to the program success is the ability of the special education teacher to select a reintegration class placement for their students (Rock, 1995). In addition, classroom location mattered, as children were more likely to be reintegrated into general education classrooms if the students with emotional difficulties were at the same school, not in a separate special facility (Rock, 1995). It

is, however, precisely these students that are the most likely to be sent to an alternative separate school (Simpson and Mundschenk, 2012). Students with emotional and behavioral difficulties face not only resistance from the educational system, but also resistance in the form of negative attitudes of the people in the mainstream schools (Tootill and Spalding, 2000).

Even if students with emotional and behavioral disorders make it into the general education classroom, they face many challenges that can impede their success. One such challenge is peer relations. Students with these disabilities have been shown to be at a higher risk for bullying and for a lack of positive peer relations (Hajdukova, Hornby, and Cushman, 2016). A study on the moral evaluations of children showed that typically developing children generally had more sympathy for children with physical disabilities than children with mental disabilities (Gasser, Malti, and Buholzer, 2013). Later research by Gasser et al (2017) sought to further understand how children recognize and react to mental disabilities specifically. They compared the social rejection and experiences of bullying of students with academic problems with that of students with behavior problems, and they found that children with behavior problems were excluded more than low-achieving students. The researchers suggested that neurotypical children view behavioral problems as more controllable but view learning disabilities as more biologically based. This mirrors the previous finding of children having more sympathy when a disability was visible (physical) rather than invisible (mental). Gasser et al (2017) suggested that teachers can counteract this social exclusion by creating a cooperative learning setting that will allow for helping behaviors and sympathy to develop in the neurotypical children.

This idea places the responsibility on the teacher who, indeed, probably plays the largest role in ensuring the success of all of the students in a classroom, whether they have a disability or not. However, teachers appear just as likely as children to be affected by implicit biases

against students with behavioral and emotional problems. In fact, a study by Cook and Cameron (2010) found evidence to suggest that teachers treat students with behavioral disorders differently than students with other types of disorders. They looked at student-teacher interactions at elementary and middle schools and found that no matter the disorder of the student, they all received higher concern ratings than typical students by the teacher, but students with behavioral disorders received the highest rejection ratings from teachers when compared to any other type of student. Similar to Gasser et al (2017), Cook and Cameron (2010) suggested that when a disability is more visible or severe, teachers are more likely to excuse disruptive behavior and, if not, the student is considered responsible for their conduct, even if it truly is out of their control, resulting in more teacher rejection. These teacher attitudes regarding specific types of disability translate into attitudes about inclusion, which appear to be more positive if the disability is physical or sensory than if it is a learning difficulty or a behavioral/emotional one (Lindsay, 2007). This is important because research has supported the idea that actual classroom practices are positively related to teachers' attitudes on inclusion (Sharma and Sokal, 2015). MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) also found evidence that teachers' beliefs and perceived behavioral control were positively correlated with teachers' intention to include children with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. Without a willingness to include a student with an emotional disability in the general education classroom, it is unlikely the teacher will engage in successful inclusion teaching strategies.

General education teachers may feel uneasy about teaching students who exhibit maladaptive behaviors because they have not received adequate training. Gable, Tonelson, and Sheth (2012) found that neither most general education teachers nor most special education teachers are sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of students with emotional difficulties. The

teachers surveyed indicated that they were not confident about developing appropriate behavioral interventions for the students or instituting social skills instruction, which are the two main areas of need for students falling in the category of emotional disturbance (Gable, Tonelson, and Sheth, 2012). Evans, Weiss, and Cullinan (2012) found in their research that general education teachers had more strategies to help students with academic problems and fewer to address behavior problems. The mainstreaming process can be complex and require cooperation among several different educators and administrators (Cumming and Strnadova, 2017), so a lack of confidence or preparation on the part of any one of those key players could be detrimental to the inclusion prospects of a child with an emotional disability.

Insufficient training could contribute to lowered teacher sense of efficacy in regards to teaching students with disabilities, specifically emotional and behavioral ones. Teachers' sense of efficacy refers to the teacher's belief that they can affect student learning (Dembo and Gibson, 1985). It is a type of self-efficacy that influences how much effort a person will put into a task and how much they will persist when confronted with challenges (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy, 1998). Self-efficacy becomes part of a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the greater the efficacy a person has for a task, the more effort they will put into it. This increased effort results in a better performance, which in turn causes efficacy to increase (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy, 1998). For teaching efficacy, this process has an impact not only on the teachers but on the students as well. Low-efficacy teachers and high-efficacy teachers lead their classes and interact with students differently, and higher efficacy is related to greater student success (Dembo and Gibson, 1985). Teachers' sense of efficacy is important in regards to students with special learning needs because, as Woolfson and Brady (2009) demonstrated, it can affect how teachers view the causes of learner difficulties. Teachers with

higher self-efficacy tended to see learning support needs as external factors rather than problems within the child, and they believe that they as teachers can influence those external factors (Woolfson and Brady, 2009). Generally, these high-efficacy teachers also make more positive predictions of every student's success and are less likely to be negatively influenced by specific student characteristics (Tournaki and Podell, 2005). Teacher efficacy is not necessarily constant across all contexts, rather it is dependent on the situation and can vary from student to student (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy, 1998). A teacher may have a high sense of efficacy in regards to teaching typically-developing students but a low sense of efficacy for working with students with disabilities. Still, an overall high sense of efficacy seems to bode well for students with special educational needs such as social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) found support that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy had higher commitments to inclusion of these children in their classrooms. However, not all studies have supported the finding of a strong correlation between teaching efficacy scores and classroom practices (Sharma and Sokal, 2015).

Some behaviors appear to be inexcusable in the eyes of general education teachers regardless of the ability of the child to control them. Landon and Mesinger (1989) asked both special education and general education teachers to rate their tolerance of maladaptive behaviors without any label attached to them. They found that general education teachers were generally less accepting than special education teachers of behavioral problems, and they explained that most teachers consider some behaviors intolerable whether the child has control over their actions or not. They suggested that students with extreme maladaptive behaviors not be allowed in general education classrooms until special education teachers had first trained them not to exhibit those behaviors. If the suggestion of Landon and Mesinger (1989) were followed,

however, it would result in some students being banned from general education classrooms altogether. Rather than placing impossible expectations on the child and denying them access to the LRE, more effort should be put into training teachers on inclusive classroom practices.

There is considerable support that inclusion training has an impact on how teachers approach working with students with disabilities. After participating in training programs, teachers report positive changes in attitudes towards and an increase in knowledge about students with special educational needs as well as higher levels of teaching efficacy (Kurniawati et al, 2014; Sharma and Sokal, 2015). However, not all research has found evidence that training affected beliefs about inclusion of children with social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties or levels of efficacy towards inclusion (MacFarlane and Woolfson, 2013; Woodcock, Hemmings, and Kay, 2012), because not all training is equivalent. Certain aspects appear more important in influencing attitudes and efficacy than others, one such factor being amount of training received. Longer training periods allow teachers to become more confident in employing preventative behavioral strategies (Woodcock and Reupert, 2013), and Kurniawati et al (2014) suggest that in order for the benefits of inclusion training to be lasting, the training must occur for an extended period of time.

It is not simply the amount of training that determines its effectiveness, however. Shillingford and Karlin (2014) found that preservice teachers' self-efficacy did not increase with added coursework and knowledge of emotional and behavioral disorders. They suggested having the teachers in training participate in authentic field experiences and observe proper management and instruction strategies for students with these disabilities. Indeed, a study by Brady and Woolfson (2008) showed that when teachers had direct experience with students with special needs, they made more external attributions about the students' difficulties. Making more

external attributions rather than internal attributions has been shown to be characteristic of a higher sense of efficacy (Brady and Woolfson, 2008). By examining how people develop self-efficacy, it becomes clear why a relationship between hands-on training and teaching efficacy exists. One of the strongest sources of self-efficacy comes from mastery experiences: opportunities to try out a task for oneself (Tschannen-Moran and McMaster, 2009). Success at the task leads to greater self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found that teachers who participated in a training program on reading instruction experienced the greatest increases in self-efficacy when the program included a mastery experience as opposed to programs focused solely on coursework. Other studies have supported that these direct experiences are beneficial specifically when working with students with special needs like emotional and behavioral difficulties (Woodcock and Reupert, 2013; Kurniawati et al, 2014; Sharma and Sokal, 2015). The more inclusion training with an applied element that teachers receive, the more capable they appear to be at implementing their knowledge.

Not all aspects of inclusion training necessarily influence teachers for the better, however. Sharma and Sokal (2015) found that upon completion of an inclusive education training program, some teachers became more apprehensive about inclusion, even though their teaching efficacy still increased significantly. Their concerns were about how to practically implement their training in the classroom, so it is important that transfer of inclusive educational practices be emphasized in order for training to be effective. Apprehension is not the only aspect inclusion training should avoid imparting, however. Interestingly, Woolfson and Brady (2009), found that higher levels of sympathy for students with disabilities were negatively related to external attributions. They observed that more sympathy led teachers to view the children's difficulties as internal and therefore less able to be changed, which could lead to lower teacher

expectations. For teachers of students with disabilities then, it is necessary to develop inclusion training programs that promote efficacy and assuage anxiety without also increasing levels of sympathy.

All students with disabilities face obstacles in receiving an education in the least restrictive environment, but students with difficulties that place them in the emotional disturbance category seem to face unique and pervasive biases. It is possible that the hesitancy of teachers to include these students is due not to the actual capabilities of the students, but rather, due to the stigma of the emotional disturbance label. In general, labeling of any kind, whether about ability or not, can change how a person is viewed because it can cause expectancy effects. Braun (1976) explains how these effects can play out in an educational setting: if a teacher expects a certain type of behavior from a student, the teacher will perceive that child's behavior in such a way that matches their expectations. The child may sense the beliefs of the teacher and change their behavior to meet the teacher's expectations. The teacher communicates these expectations through both verbal and nonverbal cues; studies have shown teachers to be more responsive and encouraging to students they believe to be highly capable than to students that they believe have lower capabilities (Braun, 1976; Willis, 1970; Brophy and Good, 1970). Teachers appear more likely to accept poorer performance from students for whom they have low expectations, and even when these students succeed, their achievements are praised less than those of their high-performing peers (Brophy and Good, 1970) When forming these expectations about students, teachers seem to be more influenced by negative information than positive or neutral information (Mason, 1973). This can prove to be an issue for students with special needs because a disability label carries with it harmful and oftentimes inaccurate stereotypes.

There is a plethora of empirical evidence showing how labels regarding special educational needs can be detrimental to teacher-student interactions. Schwehr et al (2014) demonstrated that when teachers knew the disability status of a student, they rated students with disabilities as having poorer adaptive and social skills than students without one. Furthermore, even when looking at the same footage of normal behavior exhibited by a typically-developing child, participants rated the child's conduct in a more negative fashion when told that the child had a disability label than when informed that the child was normal-developing (Vogel and Karraker, 1991; Foster and Ysseldyke, 1976; Foster, Algozzine, and Ysseldyke, 1980). Bianco (2005) looked at how disability labels can lead teachers to overlook students' academic capabilities. Although rates of giftedness should be the same among people with disabilities as among people without disabilities, she explained that students with disabilities are underrepresented in gifted public school programs, and she found that teachers were much less willing to refer a student to such a program if that student was described as having emotional or behavioral difficulties or a learning disability. Teachers cannot perceive the conduct or achievement of labeled students in a completely unbiased manner; they are influenced, both consciously and unconsciously, by the expectations they have placed on different kinds of disabilities.

While any sort of marker of disability could lead to lowered teacher expectations, it is possible that some labels have a more negative influence than others. The emotional disturbance term in particular appears laden with stigma. Thelen, Burns, and Christiansen (2003) compared the effects of three disability labels, learning disabled, mild mental retardation, and emotionally disturbed, on participant expectations in different domains. Participants had unfavorable expectations for all of the disability categories, but expectations for those labeled emotionally

disturbed were the lowest, and were significantly so in the behavioral domain. Research by Mooney and Algozzine (1978) offers an explanation: teachers rated behaviors characteristic of students with emotional disturbance as more disturbing than behaviors characteristic of students with learning disabilities. The expectations that labels carry appear to be very salient, and even when a person doesn't exhibit behaviors characteristic of their assigned disability category, they are perceived as doing so. In fact, when a person does not conform to the expectations of a label, this deviance can cause them to be perceived in an even more negative fashion. Studies have shown that people are more accepting of behavior typical of a child with emotional and behavioral difficulties if they are told the child is emotionally disturbed rather than learning disabled (Algozzine and Sutherland, 1977; Algozzine, 1981). When the label didn't match the participants' expectations, they rated the child's behavior as more disturbing (Algozzine and Sutherland, 1977; Algozzine, 1981). These findings illustrate how limited all children with disabilities are by the categories of disorder placed upon them, and it is imperative that we work to reduce the stigma associated with them.

For the label of "emotional disturbance," part of its negative associations could be related to the specific wording of the term. Walker et al (2010) conducted a survey to find out the preferred term for what is currently called "emotional disturbance," and they found that very few people wanted to keep it as is. The majority opted for the slightly different wording of "emotional/behavioral disability." Additionally, Tisdale and Fowler (1983) found that teachers were more willing to use the label of behavior disorder rather than emotional handicap when asked to label children with difficulties of these sorts in their classes. The words "emotional" and "disturbance" appear aversive to many people, and this is not simply a matter of preference. The term used can translate into real-life opportunities lost for children with emotional and

behavioral difficulties. Feldman et al (1983) found that teachers in training and current teachers were more likely to support integration over segregation and have more positive attitudes overall for students labeled as behaviorally disordered rather than emotionally disturbed. Just the alteration of these two simple words appears to play a large role in teacher perceptions of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties and the decisions the teachers make about inclusion.

Students with emotional and behavioral difficulties clearly face many obstacles in accessing an education in the LRE, and it is important that more research be done to determine exactly what the barriers are and how to overcome them. In this study, I want to examine how the labeling of the educational disability category for these students affects general education teachers' sense of efficacy. General education teachers are largely responsible for the outcome of a student's inclusion in their classroom, and as previously discussed, teacher efficacy is integral in student success (Dembo and Gibson, 1985; MacFarlane and Woolfson, 2013). Because teacher efficacy is context dependent, however, it is important to analyze not the general concept of teacher efficacy, but rather the sense of efficacy teachers have for working with specific students as influenced by different disability labels (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy, 1998). Because "emotional disturbance" is not actually a neurological diagnosis (Burns, 2000), rather than apply the term directly to a child, I will focus on special education classroom labels in this study. Teachers will be presented with a hypothetical case study of a student who spends some of the school day in a special education classroom that is either labeled the "Emotionally Disturbed Class" or the "Self-Regulation Skills Class." The latter label was chosen as the potentially more neutral option because of its emphasis on the learning goal of this type of special education class rather than on the supposed disorder or abnormality of its students. In

addition, teachers will be asked about the amount of applied inclusion training that they have undergone, meaning it included direct experience with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties, in order to further explore the importance of these aspects in an effective training program.

Hypothesis 1 is that there will be a main effect for classroom label such that teacher efficacy will be lower in the “Emotionally Disturbed” label condition than in the “Self-Regulation Skills” label condition. Hypothesis 2 is that there will be a main effect of applied inclusion training such that teacher efficacy will be lower with less training. Lastly, hypothesis 3 is that applied inclusion training will moderate the relationship between classroom label and teacher efficacy such that increases in teacher efficacy in the “Self-Regulation Skills” label condition will be greater with more training.

Method

Participants

According to Cohen (1992), with an alpha level of .05, power of .80, and assuming a small effect size, the number of participants needed will be 788. They will be general education teachers from a school district in Northern California, and based on the demographics from the 2016/2017 school year, 646 (82%) of the teachers will be white, 59 (7.5%) will be Latinx, 33 (4.2%) will be Asian or Asian American, 12 (1.6%) will be African American/Black, and 23 (2.9%) will not identify with one of the previously presented categories (Education Data Partnership, 2018). Five hundred seventy-six (73%) of the teachers will be female, and the other 212 (26.8%) participants will be male (Education Data Partnership, 2018). Permission to recruit participants will be granted by the school district, and information about the study will go out

through the district listserv. If additional school-specific permission is granted, flyers will be put up around campus, and announcements will be made before staff meetings. Teachers will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card as compensation for participating in the study.

Materials

Vignette. The participants will be presented with one of two versions of a vignette describing a student. The vignette will remain the same across conditions except for the name of the classroom from which the student is reported as having received some of his education. It will read as follows: “M.K. is transferring to your school this year. At his previous school, he received part of his instruction in a mainstream class setting and part of his instruction in a (Self-Regulation Skills/ Emotionally Disturbed) special day class. He performs at grade level in both mathematics and language arts. His past teachers have reported that he sometimes has trouble maintaining attention, sitting for long periods of time, following instructions, and working well with peers.”

Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale. The Student-Specific Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy by Zee et al (2016) will be used to measure how capable teachers believe themselves to be to educate the student described in the vignette. It has 25 items measured on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 1 (nothing) to 7 (a great deal). This scale is an adaptation of the long version of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy’s (2001) Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale, which has an alpha coefficient of 0.94, which suggests high reliability.

Applied Inclusion Training. The participants will be asked to report the number of hours of inclusion training they have received, both pre-service and in-service, that involved direct experience working with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Procedure

The study will be sent out as an online survey. The first page will be a consent form, and if the participant consents, they will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions (versions of the vignette). They will read the student case study and then complete the measures of teacher efficacy and applied inclusion training. They will then provide basic demographic information, and, upon completion, they will be thanked and debriefed.

Ethics

My proposed study involves voluntary participation on the part of public school teachers. They are not a protected population, they will not be asked to provide sensitive information, nor will they be subjected to deception. In order to do the study, they will have to provide consent, and compensation will be adequate but minimal in order to ensure that no one feels forced to participate. I believe my study is at or below the level of minimal risk because it does not present teachers with scenarios dissimilar to those that they deal with on a day-to-day basis. It is part of their job to examine how they would handle a range of students.

The study will be administered online, and the data submitted will be confidential. In order to compensate the participants, I will need to know at least the emails of each participant. They will not be required to submit information that could identify them beyond basic demographic questions, but given that the study will be available to only a certain school district, it may be possible for someone to ascertain a person's identity from the minimal information they provide. As such, the data collected will remain on a secure server that only I will have access to.

I believe the benefits of this study far outweigh the minimal potential risks to participants. School districts persist in using the “emotionally disturbed” label to describe their special education programs, and this could be having negative impacts on the students in these classes. Determining whether this is the case and what those effects could be is important in order to create school environments that are beneficial to not only the students with emotional and behavioral difficulties but also for the typically developing students and the teachers, such as the ones participating in the study.

Predicted Results

The composite variables for teachers’ sense of efficacy scores will first be computed. Then an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) will be conducted to examine hypothesis 1 about the effect of classroom label while controlling for the applied inclusion training measure. There will be a main effect such that sense of efficacy scores will be lower in the “Emotionally Disturbed” classroom label condition than in the “Self-Regulation Skills” classroom label condition. Past research suggests that teacher efficacy is context-dependent, so the classroom label will have an impact on how confident teachers are in their ability to teach a certain student (Schwehr et al, 2014; Feldman et al, 1983; Tisdale and Fowler, 1983).

An ANCOVA will also be conducted to test hypothesis 2 about the relationship between applied inclusion training and teachers’ sense of efficacy scores. A main effect is predicted to show that sense of efficacy scores will be lower with less training received. Previous findings have indicated that both how much training a teacher has regarding students with different learning needs is important, and also that this training is the most effective when it involves

interactions with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Woodcock and Reupert, 2013; Kurniawati et al, 2014).

Lastly, the ANCOVA will be applied to test hypothesis 3 about the interaction between classroom label and applied inclusion training. Consistent with the previous hypotheses, it is predicted that teacher efficacy will increase from the “Emotionally Disturbed” classroom label condition to the “Self-Regulation Skills” classroom condition, but this increase will be moderated in strength by amount of applied inclusion training. Teachers who have received more training will experience greater gains in efficacy in the “Self-Regulation Skills” classroom condition than teachers who have received less training.

Conclusion

With the ever-increasing awareness of disability in this country, it is disappointing that the needs of children with emotional and behavioral difficulties have yet to come to the forefront of the conversation. If we truly support the law guaranteeing every child a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, we need to critically examine the barriers that prevent such access. A simple but effective way to help these students could be to change classroom labels. “Emotional disturbance” is not only an antiquated term but also a potentially harmful one. There are many alternative terms that do not carry the same stigma, and there is room for more innovation. Changing this label could not only help students with emotional and behavioral difficulties get into general education classrooms, it could also help them be more successful when they get there. If teachers are not biased against them from the start and have higher efficacy in regards to teaching them, they will be able to include these students in general education classrooms more effectively and at higher rates. The benefits of this shift will not be

limited to students with emotional and behavioral difficulties but will also extend to the typically developing students as well. They will gain exposure to disabilities, which will grow their empathy and social skills without taking away from their education (Gasser, Malti, and Buholzer, 2013; MacMillan et al, 2014).

Changing classroom labels alone will not ensure that students with emotional and behavioral difficulties are successful in the general education classroom, however, which is why it is important that teachers receive proper training on including students with varying levels of ability. Quality training along with the reduction of stigma through a label change would put general education teachers in the best position to feel efficacious in serving children with emotional and behavioral special needs. Furthermore, the benefits of this training would extend beyond the inclusion prospects of these specific students. The skills the teachers gain could be applied to all students and to a variety of situations, so it is in teachers' best interest to have this exposure.

This study is limited in several ways, the first regarding labeling. Because of the wide variability of labeling in special education classrooms, comparing only two different classroom labels does not give the full picture of the issue. The ultimate goal is to figure out the best name for the special day classroom designed for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in order to reduce stigma and increase their chances of success in the general education classroom. Clearly, "Emotionally Disturbed" is not the correct choice, but whether "Self-Regulation Skills" is the best or only good in comparison to "Emotionally Disturbed" remains to be seen. Future research should further explore alternative options to determine which classroom label evokes the smallest negative reaction and why this is the case.

Another limiting factor involves assessing the quality of inclusion training. In this study, only one aspect was analyzed: hours of applied training with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. It is important to understand which parts of inclusion training most contribute to teachers' sense of efficacy for working with these students, so future research should identify other influential characteristics. It will be necessary to investigate how students with disabilities related to emotion and behavior were discussed in the training programs. Was the "emotionally disturbed" label used in the training, or were students described in another way, such as having behavioral and emotional difficulties? If a teacher has had no prior experience with the label "emotionally disturbed," they may report lower feelings of teacher efficacy purely due to misunderstanding the description. If so, this would serve as further support that the term "emotionally disturbed" has a much more negative connotation than some may assume.

It is additionally necessary to further investigate the interaction between classroom label and applied inclusion training and their effect on teacher efficacy to determine whether it is consistent with the prediction of this study. Although it is hypothesized that greater changes in teacher efficacy between the two label conditions will occur as applied inclusion training increases, it could be that the opposite is true: classroom label will have a greater impact on teacher efficacy for those who have not had much inclusion training. Inclusion training may mitigate the negative feelings inspired by the emotionally disturbed label so that the effect of classroom label is not reflected as strongly in scores of teacher efficacy for those teachers with more training. In this case, the teachers who have had less training will show the greater difference in teacher efficacy scores across the two conditions, albeit still consistent with the general pattern predicted in this study.

The effects of both predictor variables on teachers' sense of efficacy should be corroborated with different types of experimental designs. This study relies only on self-report measures and, as such, the results will probably be affected by response biases. Adding behavioral measures and observational designs to the study of this topic would allow for a more accurate understanding of how teachers interact with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties as related to their sense of efficacy.

Although our public school system guarantees an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for every child, too often this is a promise left unfulfilled. Students with emotional and behavioral difficulties remain in the margins, and they should not have to face so much resistance while attempting to access an education that is rightfully theirs. Determining how best to serve each individual student with a disability of this kind is not a simple, straightforward problem, but there are simple and straightforward steps that can be taken to improve the situation for everyone involved. Teachers are responsible for creating a welcoming and rigorous classroom environment for all students, regardless of ability, but they can't be expected to do so successfully if they aren't appropriately trained. It is therefore imperative to develop effective inclusion training programs that improve teacher efficacy. Furthermore, classroom labels must be changed so that they no longer place the expectation of abnormality upon the students that they serve. Children with emotional and behavioral difficulties face many challenges throughout their lives, and they should not be further burdened by the choices of the same educational system that purports to support them.

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