

Contact:

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Third Grade General Education Teacher in a Co-teaching Inclusion Model

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### I. Question

What impact will there be on the reading abilities and self-esteem of third grade exceptional education students who have looped with their teacher and engage in cooperative learning activities?

### II. Problem (Rational and Background)

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) has evolved dramatically over the past two decades. These changes are due to the growing concern that traditional, isolated educational approaches to teaching students with disabilities were failing in the public schools in the United States. Typically, students with disabilities perform poorly in school (particularly in the area of reading), have low self-esteem, and low graduation rates. These negative outcomes of ESE programs have resulted in a shift in the paradigm regarding the education of this special population of students that has impacted federal and state laws. These laws now require that students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom, a practice called inclusion.

As a second year inclusion teacher, I have been interested in the impact the inclusive setting has on my elementary students with disabilities. This study was conducted in a third grade classroom at a large Title 1 urban public school in Miami-Dade County, Florida. This study focuses on five ESE students, four of whom are identified as having a specific learning disability (LD), and one of which is identified as educably mentally handicapped (EMH). All of the students are minorities. Four of the students have English as a second language (ESL) and have been exited from the program for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). All of the students qualify for the government run free or reduced lunch program and therefore represent a low socioeconomic level.

### III. Tools/Data

The data sources analyzed include standardized tests, norm-referenced tests, the Woodcock Johnson IQ assessment, the goals on the students' individualized education plans (IEP), interviews with the ESE teacher, lesson plans, and a personal journal. The findings from the data collected for this study have been validated using triangulation of the data instruments.

### IV. Analysis/ Results

In order to analyze the data collected for this study, I organized the information into three categories. The categories reflected improvements in the students' reading fluency, reading comprehension, and self-esteem. The results of this study developed patterns that indicate that looping with ESE students in inclusive settings has a positive impact on all

of the aforementioned categories. Also, the results demonstrate the benefits of using cooperative learning in inclusive settings. In addition, an unexpected pattern of higher expectations set by both the general education teacher and the ESE teacher was revealed through data analysis.

#### V. Policy Recommendations

Implications of the findings of this study include modifications for the implementation of inclusion programs in schools. The data supports that the practices of looping and using cooperative learning techniques in inclusion classes result in high achievement for students with disabilities and high self-esteem. Therefore, I would recommend the implementation of looping practices more often in inclusive settings. In addition, I would recommend further research in the area of best practices in inclusive settings.