



NCLID Research Brief

Perspectives of Effective Teachers of Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities

Many studies have examined the characteristics of excellent general education and even special education teachers. However, comparatively few studies have examined the characteristics of excellent teachers in the field of low-incidence disabilities. It is important to learn about the characteristics of this relatively small group of teachers in order to positively impact the education of this group of students. This research brief describes the results of a qualitative research project designed to investigate the characteristics of excellent teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities.

Participants

Outstanding teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities were contacted to determine willingness share information about their teaching practices and beliefs by participating in an interview. The teachers were selected for participation because they had been recipients of the Excellence in Education award, sponsored by the National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities (NCLID). Nominees for this award were asked submit an application packet including personal reflections and letters of reference. The award recipients were selected through a review process established by NCLID, which included anonymous review and direct observation. This award was sponsored in the state of Colorado for the 2001-2002 school year, and 14 states within the western region for the 2002-2003 year.

Interviews

Each participant was asked a series of 13 interview questions. Interview questions were generated from a brainstorming session of NCLID staff, including professors and graduate students working and publishing in the field of low-incidence disabilities. Once the questions were finalized, interviews were conducted. The interview sessions were conducted using a semi-structured format so that it was permissible for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to elicit further information or clarification to previous responses. Participating teachers worked in a variety of rural, urban, and suburban communities. Because of the wide range of physical locations, a combination of telephone and online interviews was used. The telephone interviews were conducted one-on-one at the participant's convenience. These interviews were recorded on audiotape then transcribed by the interviewer. Online interviews were conducted over the Internet, again at the participant's convenience. A log of the chat session was made, providing an automatic transcript. Each telephone interview lasted between 45-60 minutes, and each Internet interview took between 90-120 minutes.

Results

Analysis of the interviews revealed several characteristics of excellent teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities. As these exceptional teachers considered the aspects of their instruction and philosophy that are unique, five elements came out as commonalities. These teachers held **high expectations** for themselves, their students, and the families and professionals they work with. These expectations are made explicit through the behaviors and words of the teachers. Participating teachers work diligently on improving their **communication** skills. They emphasized the importance of communicating effectively with students using various methods, and the critical role active listening plays in good communication. **Respect** for teachers, students, and families was an area of concern for these teachers. They valued individual contributions to the classroom and to society, and encouraged individuals in the larger community to share this respect for individual contributions. **Professional knowledge** was described as a cornerstone for educating students with low-incidence disabilities. Participants reminded educators that increasing professional knowledge must be a lifelong process. Finally, these teachers were focused on building **relationships**. Positive relationships with students, families, colleagues, and self were all seen as necessary to foster the successful education of students with low-incidence disabilities.

Learn More

For more information about this research project, please contact:

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The above information is also available online.

Please visit: <http://www.nclid.unco.edu/Research/exed.html>