

Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms:
General Elementary Educators' Learning Experiences

Abstract

Many school districts have made it a priority to fully include students with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers (Harrington, 1997). This purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how ten general elementary educators from one such school district learned to teach students in inclusive classrooms. This study took place in Bundaberg School District where students with mild, moderate and severe disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers throughout the school day. Data were collected throughout a four-month duration. Teachers participated in four in-depth interviews that were be supplemented with classroom participant observation. Data analysis was conducted by developing a coding schemata that revealed themes that suggested answers to the following research question: How have general elementary educators who are currently teaching in inclusive settings perceived that they learned to teach the wide heterogeneity of students in their classrooms? Answers to this research question revealed that teachers (a) initiated their own independent reading and research; (b) learned from their students; (c) reflected on their teaching practices; and (d) learned from special educators. Findings also suggested that as teachers learned information about inclusion, they experienced an adult learning process defined by Mezirow (1997) as Transformative Learning Theory.