

Title: Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusion: Including Students with Autism in Elementary Classrooms

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This qualitative study sought to identify the attitudes of elementary principals toward the inclusion of students with autism in regular education classrooms and the relationship between their attitudes and their placement recommendations for children with autism. The perspectives of elementary principals (administrators with a minimum of three years of experience) were gathered through semi-structured interviews. This research was designed to (a) identify the concerns of elementary principals regarding the inclusion of students with autism in meeting the academic standards in the general curriculum, (b) understand how personal and professional experiences and professional development influence elementary principals' concerns relating to the inclusion of students with autism, and (c) identify attitudes of elementary principals concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities versus the inclusion of students with autism in regular education classrooms.

The purposive sample for this study consisted of six elementary principals from school districts in western Pennsylvania. Prior to the formal study, the researcher piloted the interview protocol with two elementary principals outside of the formal participant pool. The participants' feedback provided evidence of the study's reliability

and validity. Following the success of the pilot study, the formal study was conducted and its data underwent analysis.

Participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to students with general disabilities and then students with autism. In addition, participants were asked to make placement recommendations based on scenario situations depicting students with autism. Results were analyzed and it was determined that the most noteworthy factor in predicting a positive attitude toward the inclusion of children with disabilities and less restrictive placement recommendations for children with autism was the principal's belief that children with autism could successfully be included in a regular education classroom.