ECEs Supporting Children in Their Classrooms Who Have Exceptionalities

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Abstract

Results and Discussion

"Providing education to those with special needs has increasingly become an issue of moral necessity over the last few decades" (Karska & Boyle, 2014, p. 228). There has been an increase in the number of children requiring additional support within classroom settings. Educators are often exposed to children with various sets of needs within their classrooms. Therefore, educators need to have a certain level of knowledge and understanding with regard to the various types of exceptionalities amongst children. This is a qualitative study that is intended to investigate and analyze concepts surrounding ECEs' supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities. For this study, data was collected through the process of five individual semistructured interviews with ECEs' consisting of a set of ten open-ended questions. Through the data analysis process, three predominant concepts were discussed, thus creating the study's core themes. Concepts surrounding professional development amongst ECEs, supporting inclusion and challenges ECEs faced working with children who have exceptionalities were evident.

Introduction

The present study explored ECEs' responses to open-ended questions that allowed them to share their current and past experiences working with children who have various needs. The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the concepts surrounding educators supporting children who have exceptionalities in their classrooms. The research question addressed in this study is how are ECEs supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities?

Literature Review

Children with exceptionalities are defined as children who may struggle because of learning/academic needs, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Those who have clear challenges that require additional school support to function at their maximum potential (Nye, Gardner, Hansford, Edwards, Hayes & Ford 2016). This is a qualitative study that is intended to investigate and analyze concepts surrounding ECEs' supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities. For this study, data was collected through the process of five individual semistructured interviews with ECEs' consisting of a set of ten open-ended questions. Through the data analysis process, three predominant concepts were discussed, thus creating the study's core themes. Concepts surrounding professional development amongst ECEs, supporting inclusion and challenges ECEs faced working with children who have exceptionalities were evident.

Research Design

The selected methodology for this research study is a qualitative approach.

Instrument

Individual semistructured interviews consisted of a set of ten open-ended questions. Each interview was about 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews explored the perspectives and practices of educators supporting children in their classroom who have exceptionalities.

Procedure

- Sheridan's REB approval to complete the research and select participants was obtained.
- Participants were selected to complete interviews.
- Participants were provided with a letter of invitation and informed consent.
- Participants who provided consent were contacted via phone call to schedule time and location for the interview.
- Meetings were conducted at Sheridan college in the private study rooms.
- Scheduling, arranging and completing each interview took approximately a week and a half to complete.
- It took a week to transcribe and analyze data.
- Trustworthiness was taken into consideration. The studies credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were reviewed.
- Participants who were contacted and completed "member check".
- Data triangulation and researcher triangulation was completed.

Participants

- Five female RECEs (one participant was also a behavioural teaching assistant).
- Participants had prior and current experiences working with children who have exceptionalities.
- Participants included Sheridan College students who work in various child care settings. From early childhood education centres to local school boards and community organizations.

Results:

- 100% of participants have not completed any professional development workshops or training with regards to children with special needs. 20% said they have participated in professional development programming due to the mandate of their current position.
- "Teacher training and teacher quality are an important part of the education system, therefore there is a need for new training programs for teachers to gain new knowledge and skills and to support their professional development" (Akalain & Succuoglu, 2015, p. 739).

Discussion:

Professional Development

As seen in figure 1, Have you done any professional development classes/workshops regarding children with special needs? 80% of participants have not partaken in any form of professional development workshops or training with regards to children with special needs. 20% said they have participated in professional development programming due to the mandate of their current position.

Supporting Inclusion

From figure 1, Sandra's unique perspective on inclusion (perspective from an RECE/BTA) Sandra brought a new perspective on the term inclusive. She shares a scenario of a child who has autism and is sensitive to touch and sound. If they were in a busy kindergarten classroom with 30 children, the environment would not be inclusive for them considering the noise level in the room. Children with exceptionalities have integrated into an inclusive education system, rather than having to attend specific institutions to accommodate their needs (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Can children of that specific scenario reach their full potential in a classroom?

Challenges ECEs face

- 100% of participants in this study have experienced challenges supporting children who have exceptionalities in their classrooms. Educators experience children's failure to form relationships with adults and/or their peers, their trouble engaging in learning activities and their struggles to regulate emotions (Gebbie, Ceglowaski, Taylor & Miel, 2012).
- Educators can experience problematic behaviours such as children's failure to form relationships with adults and peers, trouble engaging in learning activities and struggles to regulate emotions (Gebbie, Ceglowaski, Taylor & Miel, 2012).
- Educators need to have a certain level of knowledge and understanding with regard to the various types of exceptionalities amongst children. This is a qualitative study that is intended to investigate and analyze concepts surrounding ECEs' supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities. For this study, data was collected through the process of five individual semistructured interviews with ECEs' consisting of a set of ten open-ended questions. Through the data analysis process, three predominant concepts were discussed, thus creating the study's core themes. Concepts surrounding professional development amongst ECEs, supporting inclusion and challenges ECEs faced working with children who have exceptionalities were evident.

Recommendation & Implications

Sandra's perspective on inclusive education can be used to further research on the topic of inclusion.

- Further study on mainstreaming practices within the public education system.

- Share study with The Ministry of Education “policy makers”, School administration, trustees and parents.