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Poster: Perspectives of Pre-Service Teachers on Students with Emotional Disabilities

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Perspectives of Pre-Service Teachers on Students with Emotional Disabilities

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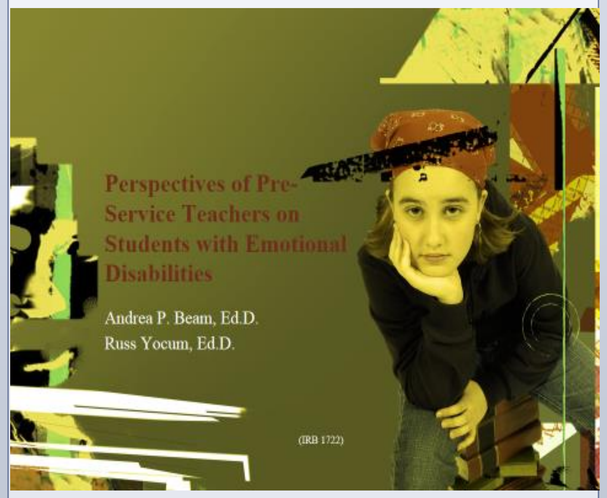
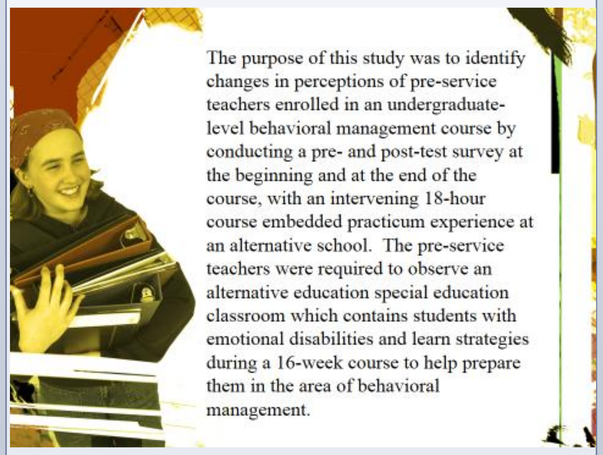
Introduction



Abstract

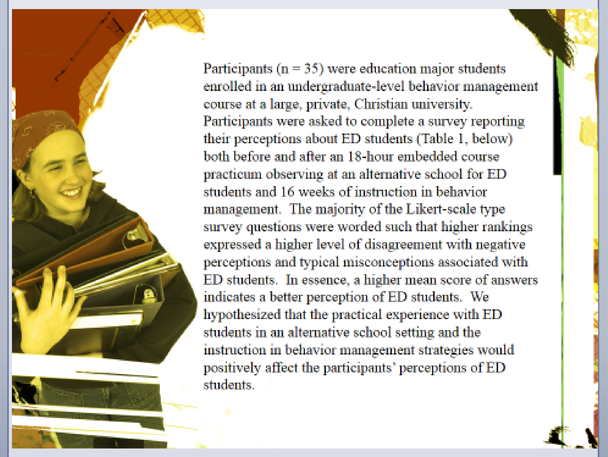
The purpose of this pre-test/post-test research quantitative study was to identity changes in perceptions of pre-service teachers enrolled in an undergraduate-level behavioral management course by conducting a pre- and post-test survey at the beginning and at the end of the course, which included an 18-hour course embedded practicum. The pre-service teachers were required to observe an alternative education special education classroom which contained students with emotional disabilities (ED) and learn strategies during a 16-week course to help prepare them in the area of behavioral management. The data collected by the research provided insight to both the perspectives of future educators working with students with ED, and concerns that did or did not diminish after the practicum and coursework. This allowed college level professors suggestions for addressing issues of concern. Some previously enrolled students in this course, under instruction of the principal investigator (PI), completed pilot surveys under the auspices of action research, as this data collection was part of the normal responsibilities of the PI as regards to seeking continuous improvement of course delivery. Collected pilot survey ex-post facto data was also included in this study.

Purpose



The purpose of this study was to identify changes in perceptions of pre-service teachers enrolled in an undergraduate-level behavioral management course by conducting a pre- and post-test survey at the beginning and at the end of the course, with an intervening 18-hour course embedded practicum experience at an alternative school. The pre-service teachers were required to observe an alternative education special education classroom which contains students with emotional disabilities and learn strategies during a 16-week course to help prepare them in the area of behavioral management.

Methodology



Participants (n = 35) were education major students enrolled in an undergraduate-level behavior management course at a large, private, Christian university. Participants were asked to complete a survey reporting their perceptions about ED students (Table 1, below) both before and after an 18-hour embedded course practicum observing at an alternative school for ED students and 16 weeks of instruction in behavior management. The majority of the Likert-scale type survey questions were worded such that higher rankings expressed a higher level of disagreement with negative perceptions and typical misconceptions associated with ED students. In essence, a higher mean score of answers indicates a better perception of ED students. We hypothesized that the practical experience with ED students in an alternative school setting and the instruction in behavior management strategies would positively affect the participants' perceptions of ED students.

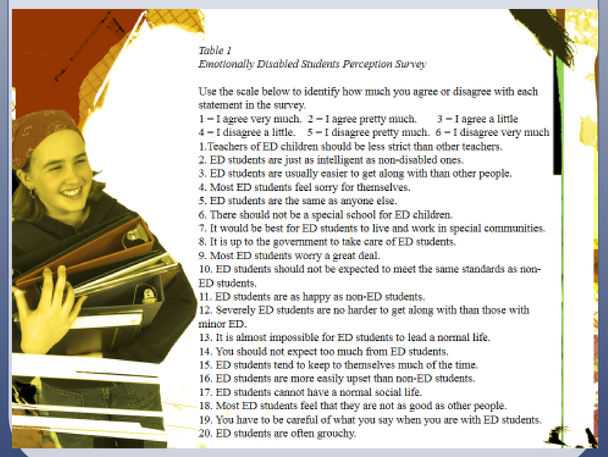


Table 1
Emotionally Disabled Students Perception Survey

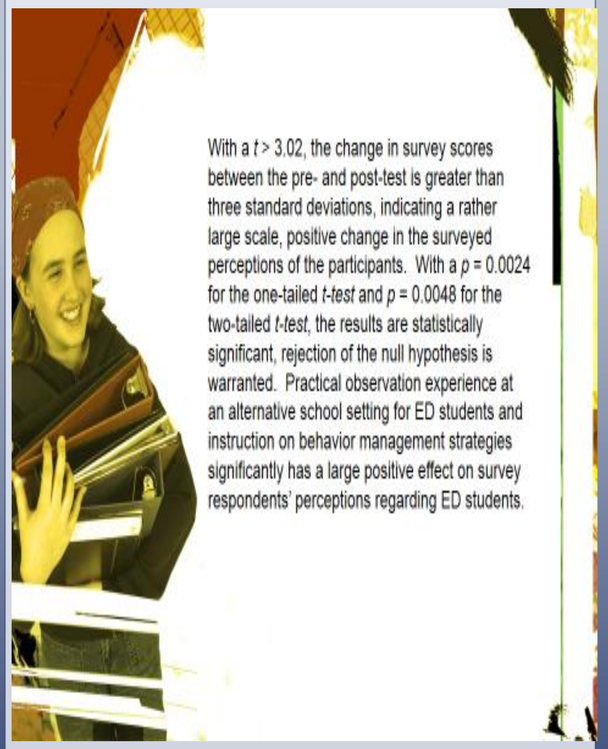
Use the scale below to identify how much you agree or disagree with each statement in the survey.
1 = I agree very much. 2 = I agree pretty much. 3 = I agree a little
4 = I disagree a little. 5 = I disagree pretty much. 6 = I disagree very much
1.Teachers of ED children should be less strict than other teachers.
2. ED students are just as intelligent as non-disabled ones.
3. ED students are usually easier to get along with than other people.
4. Most ED students feel sorry for themselves.
5. ED students are the same as anyone else.
6. There should not be a special school for ED children.
7. It would be best for ED students to live and work in special communities.
8. It is up to the government to take care of ED students.
9. Most ED students worry a great deal.
10. ED students should not be expected to meet the same standards as non-ED students.
11. ED students are as happy as non-ED students.
12. Severely ED students are no harder to get along with than those with minor ED.
13. It is almost impossible for ED students to lead a normal life.
14. You should not expect too much from ED students.
15. ED students tend to keep to themselves much of the time.
16. ED students are more easily upset than non-ED students.
17. ED students cannot have a normal social life.
18. Most ED students feel that they are not as good as other people.
19. You have to be careful of what you say when you are with ED students.
20. ED students are often grouchy.

Results

Each participant's 20 survey responses were averaged and a paired *t-test* was conducted on the matching pre- and post-test survey means for each of the 35 participants (see Table 2, below). An analysis of the means of the responses for each individual question was also conducted to determine if there were any outliers.

Table 2

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	POST TEST AVG	PRE TEST AVG
Mean	3.960571429	3.787714286
Variance	0.135023193	0.116241681
Observations	35	35
Pearson Correlation	0.545138332	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	34	
t Stat	3.019875002	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002386575	
t Critical one-tail	1.690924255	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.004773149	
t Critical two-tail	2.032244509	



With a $t > 3.02$, the change in survey scores between the pre- and post-test is greater than three standard deviations, indicating a rather large scale, positive change in the surveyed perceptions of the participants. With a $p = 0.0024$ for the one-tailed *t-test* and $p = 0.0048$ for the two-tailed *t-test*, the results are statistically significant, rejection of the null hypothesis is warranted. Practical observation experience at an alternative school setting for ED students and instruction on behavior management strategies significantly has a large positive effect on survey respondents' perceptions regarding ED students.

Implications

As indicated above, this research gives telling evidence about the value of practical field experiences in education programs. It would be useful to replicate this study with revised survey questions and a larger, more diverse sample. It would also be interesting to conduct similar surveys to gauge the usefulness of field experiences in other settings where such field experiences are not often conducted. While the value of field experiences has been researched for nursing and medical school students, other fields could benefit from such inquiry.

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