

# DEVELOPMENT OF ONE EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR ALL SCHOOL CHILDREN: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES<sup>1</sup>

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A number of factors impact on the achievement of children with special needs who are mainstreamed into normal schools. Teacher attitudes play an important part in the achievement of students with special needs and may well be one of the factors which determine the success of mainstreaming in Trinidad and Tobago schools. The study investigated attitudes of 260 primary and secondary school teachers in Trinidad toward mainstreaming of children with special needs into the normal schools. Attitudes were compared on such variables as sex, teaching level, experience, training and support services received using the "Attitude Toward Mainstreaming Scale" (1980). Findings suggest that teachers had a relatively neutral attitude toward mainstreaming of children with special needs. The paper identifies those factors which impact on teacher attitudes and presents recommendations for the development of appropriate approaches for bringing about the mainstreaming of children with special needs.

This paper argues that effective and successful mainstreaming points the way to One Education System for all school children.

## **Background**

The education system in Trinidad and Tobago is a dual one with respect to its provision for handicapped students. Some students with handicaps are catered for in special schools while others attend the regular primary and secondary schools. There are no special schools at the secondary level; these exist only at the primary level. The Ministry of Education is directly responsible for the administration of education in Trinidad and Tobago. Special education in Trinidad and Tobago did not evolve in exactly the same way as did the education of normal children. It was started by voluntary philanthropic organizations that recognized the plight of handicapped students who could not attend the regular public

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schools. Special schools were started and maintained by these organizations.

One of the most significant events in the evolution of special education in this country took place in 1966, when "Provision for Special Schools" was enacted in the 1966 Education Act. This advocated the establishment of special schools, classes and services, either as separate units or in connection with approved public institutions, and brought special education under the aegis of the Ministry of Education for the first time.

In 1979, Cabinet agreed to formally incorporate five institutional schools into the public education system of Trinidad and Tobago (Cabinet Note EC (80) 307, p. 3). This was followed by the formation of a Special Education Unit in 1980 together with a Special Advisory Committee on Special Education. Between 1984 and 1990 two special education projects were undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago. In a major project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), teachers were sensitized, in 3-week workshops, to the needs of children with disabilities. These were purely theoretical exercises.

In this country, there are no laws that mandate assignment of students with disabilities to regular schools, with programmes that are adapted to accommodate their needs. One can refer to the Education Plan, 1985-1990 (1985), which acknowledges that Government accepts its role as the responsible agency for providing special education services at all levels of the education system, but which advises that "mainstreaming in Trinidad and Tobago should be achieved by gradually adjusting the mainstream schools to meet the needs of those special children already in them" (p. 64).

This advice came directly as a result of the Marge Report (1984), which surveyed handicapped children and youth in Trinidad and Tobago. This report was done because the provision of services for children with special needs must necessarily take into account the number of such children in the school system. It revealed that of the total population of 3-16 year olds, as obtained from the 1980 census, 27,275 children had one of seven categories of disability (see Appendix I). This figure does not distinguish those children who are disabled but not handicapped, and does not include the slow learners, and those with disabilities not detected in the Marge survey. Special schools exist for only 1,000

children. In 1989, 5,000 were known to be on the waiting list for special schools.

In recent years, many handicapped pupils have been successful at the Common Entrance Examination. These were primarily students from the Schools for the Deaf and the Princess Elizabeth Centre for the Physically Handicapped. As a result, some handicapped students have been mainstreamed into the regular secondary schools. As suggested by Martin (1974) writing about a similar situation in America, we do this while "failing to develop our approach to mainstreaming with a full recognition of the barriers which must be overcome" (p. 151). The barriers referred to are "administrative, architectural, curricular and attitudinal" (Durojaiye, 1990). This study was directed to the attitudinal barrier as it pertained to teachers, and factors related to it.

### **Mainstreaming**

Mainstreaming has been described as "the placement of students with academic and physical handicaps in regular schools and classrooms" (Madden and Slavin, 1983, p. 519).

It is a process for achieving the goals of education for students who are disabled. In Trinidad and Tobago, we are now seeking to develop a system of education that will encompass mainstreaming and we must be careful not to simply adopt the practices of other countries, but to base it on research-based analyses of all factors involved in mainstreaming. One such factor being the attitudes of teachers toward mainstreaming.

### **Teacher Attitude to Mainstreaming**

One definition that includes many of the central ideas of attitude theorists is "an attitude is an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions to a particular class of social situations" (Triandis, 1971, p. 25).

This definition suggests that an attitude has three components, namely, cognitive, affective, and behavioural. It is the behavioural component that is expected to mediate the effect of teacher attitudes to mainstreaming on the performance and well being of disabled children.

A response toward an attitude object, for example, mainstreaming, cannot occur in a vacuum. It cannot be divorced from within the context of the social, philosophical, and psychological issues about which we also have attitudes. It is, therefore, important that one focuses not only on attitudes toward mainstreaming but also on the definition of the situational conditions. For example, school climate is believed to be related to the attitudes of teachers toward many aspects of school life. Hoy and Miskel (1982) thought of climate as the personality of the school. They described it as "the set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another and influences the behaviour of people in it" (p. 85).

School climate can also be described in terms of a climate continuum, which has as its extremities, openness and closedness. In a school which displays an open climate, teachers and principal are committed to the task at hand. Teachers are interested in the school and how students and parents feel about the school (Kannan, 1974 cited in Hoy and Miskel, 1982). They are more loyal and satisfied with their school. Teachers, therefore, develop a positive attitude to school and what goes on in it. In this context, mainstreaming is viewed as just another task to be accomplished. On the other hand, a closed climate displayed by a school, will show teachers having negative or neutral attitudes to many aspects of school life. Teachers could become frustrated and apathetic. Mainstreaming in this climate is seen as a task too burdensome to handle. It could show teachers developing negative attitudes to mainstreaming, and in some cases remaining neutral about its implementation.

Horne (1985) investigated attitudes toward mainstreaming issues, of 139 elementary classroom teachers undertaking an introductory course in special education. Her findings support the need for comprehensive inservice training programmes designed to modify attitudes of regular teachers toward the mainstreaming of handicapped children. Shotel, Iano, and Mc. Gettigan (1972) showed that planned integration, taking into account additional strategies such as inservice workshops on methods and techniques for working with the handicapped, and support services, considerably affected teachers' attitudes and the success of the integration exercise. Several other authors have reported no correlations between length of teaching experience and attitude or effect of age on attitude (Casey, 1978).

Zigmond, Levin and Laurie (1985) undertook four studies in twelve high schools. These studies revealed that most teachers would prefer not to have learning disabled students in their classes. When they did get them in their classes, the only provision made was manipulation of the grades to allow them to pass. No extra help was given to these pupils in the regular classes; information was presented in large-group sessions to the students; students used textbooks and worksheets 51% of the time, and tests were administered to the large group. Although many of the students received passing grades, close to 85% of failed grades were received by students with poor attendance records. These passing grades did not indicate whether or not they were learning in the mainstream. What the results do, overall, is reinforce the notion of the disabled child as incompetent and the secondary school teacher as unenthusiastic about problem learners (Biklen, 1985).

In spite of the history of education in Trinidad and Tobago, one must recognize the weaknesses of the present normal school system. Where are the children with special educational needs to be educated? Already, very few people are pleased with the Junior and Senior Secondary School system. Teachers complain about their inability to cope with indiscipline and slow learners. Can they manage more children with special needs including those with observable handicaps without proper training and support? Is "sensitization" sufficient to prepare teachers to facilitate mainstreamed students in their quest to learn in normal classes? What are the attitudes of these teachers to children with special needs? What are teachers' attitudes to mainstreaming? We cannot fool ourselves into believing the promises of mainstreaming if we do not answer these questions and make provisions for the pain and work that must come out of negative answers. The present study sought to answer some of them. The paper will now describe an empirical study of the attitudes of teachers, both primary and secondary, toward mainstreaming.

### **The Attitude of Teachers in Trinidad Toward Mainstreaming**

This study was designed to study the relationship between the dependent variable, "attitudes toward mainstreaming" as measured by scores on the "Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming Scale," and the independent variables, (a) teachers' sex, (b) teaching level, that is, primary or secondary, (c) knowledge of special education as obtained through workshops/course

work, (d) knowledge and experience of children with special educational needs, (e) special support services, and (f) school climate. School climate was measured by a researcher-made scale.

A single questionnaire was administered to 260 primary and secondary school teachers from thirteen schools drawn from three of the seven educational districts. Table 1 shows the distribution of independent variables over the population of teachers used.

**TABLE 1**  
**Distribution of Independent Variables in the Sample**

	GENDER		NUMOFCOR		SPEDEX		SPEDSS	
	MALE	FEMALE	1	2	YES	NO	YES	NO
PRIMARY	20	86	57	45	71	35	35	71
col %	23.3	49.4	36.5	45.5	34.5	64.8	32.4	47
SECONDARY	66	88	99	54	135	19	73	81
col %	76.7	50.6	63.5	54.5	65.6	35.2	67.6	53
TOTAL N	86	174	156	99	206	54	108	152
TOTAL %	33.1	66.9	61.2	38.8	79.2	20.8	41.5	58.5

NUMOFCOR: No of courses taken: 1 = none, 2 = one or more  
 SPEDEX: special education experience  
 SPEDSS: special education support services

Number of subjects in the sample = 260

The questionnaire comprised three sections: Section A, demographic data, contained four multiple choice type questions, and Section C contained ten multiple choice questions which were designed to measure school climate. Section B, called the ATMS, was made up of eighteen six-point Likert type items, a definition of mainstreaming, instructions to the subjects and a rating scale. The entire questionnaire was closed, requiring the subjects to choose answers. Sections A and C of the questionnaire were researcher-designed. Section B, the ATMS, Attitude

Toward Mainstreaming Scale was modified to make it more appropriate in the Trinidad context by changing the definition of mainstreaming in the introductory statement. Thus instead of: "The scale concerns 'mainstreaming' as one method of meeting the current legal requirements for placing students in the 'least restrictive environment' for educational purposes," it read "The scale concerns 'mainstreaming' as the placement of students with academic and physical handicaps in regular schools and classrooms."

The scale showed satisfactory reliability ( $r=.93$ ), split half followed by Spearman-Brown, and validity. Factor analysis procedures gave alpha coefficients for factors as .71 to .82. Two cross validation exercises were carried out on the scale. Teachers found no difficulty in completing the questionnaire. All data were analyzed by computer. Table 2 gives the mean scores of the attitudes of teachers in the thirteen participating schools, to mainstreaming of students with special educational needs.

TABLE 2

Mean Scores (Attitudes) of Teachers in Each School

MEAN SCORE	SCHOOL ID	MEAN SCORE	SCHOOL ID
3.37394	01	3.84848	08
3.03955	02	3.35713	09
3.26955	03	3.49260	10
3.25898	04	3.16373	11
3.68437	05	3.27165	12
3.08050	06	3.44187	13
3.34804	07	GRAND MEAN=3.35618	
Lowest possible mean score = 1.00000 - positive attitude Highest possible mean score = 6.00000 - negative attitude			

The sample was then divided in terms of the gender and teaching level variables and the t-test was applied to test the significance of the difference between the scores. Table 3 presents the result of comparing teachers by sex.

TABLE 3

**T-Test for Comparing Means of Attitude Scores  
for Male and Female Teachers**

GROUPS	NO. OF CASES	MEAN	STD. DEV.	T-VALUE	df
MALE	86	3.4473	0.827	1.76	258
FEMALE	174	3.2647	0.772		

Critical value of  $t=1.96$ ,  $p=.05$ , and  $df>120$ .

Table 4 compares primary school teachers by sex.

TABLE 4

**T-Test for Comparing Means of Attitude Scores  
for Male and Female Primary School Teachers**

GROUPS	NO. OF CASES	MEAN	STD. DEV.	T-VALUE PROB.	df	2-TAIL
Male	20	3.4814	.939	0.05	104	0.960
Female	86	3.4720	.701			

Critical value of  $t=1.98$ ,  $p=.05$ , and  $df=104$



Table 5 presents the result of comparing teachers by teaching level.

**TABLE 5**

**T-Test for Comparing Means of Attitude Scores  
for Primary and Secondary Teachers**

GROUPS	NO. OF CASES	MEAN	STD. DEV.	T-VALUE	df
Primary	106	3.4738	0.747	*	258
Secondary	154	3.2234	0.813	2.52	
Critical value of $t=1.96$ , $p=.05$ , and $df>120$ .					

Table 6 compares secondary school teachers by sex.

**TABLE 6**

**T-Test for Comparing Means of Attitude Scores  
for Male and Female Secondary School Teachers**

GROUPS	NO. OF CASES	MEAN	STD. DEV.	T-VALUE	df
Male	66	3.4386	0.803	*	152
Female	88	3.0620	0.787	2.91	
Critical value of $t=1.96$ , $p=.05$ , $df>120$ .					

The Chi-square test of independence with probability  $p=.05$  was used to determine whether there was any association between teaching level and gender of teachers, special education training, special education experience and special education support services.

The relationship between attitude scores and special education support services (SPEDSS), special education training (NUMOFCOR), school climate (SCHCL), and special education experience (SPEDEX) was investigated for the entire sample. Table 7 gives correlation coefficients,  $r$ , for these relationships.

TABLE 7

**Correlation Coefficient Between Attitude Scores  
and Special Education Support Services,  
Training, School Climate and Experience**

	SPEDSS	NUOFCOR	SPEDEX	SCHCL
$r$				
ATTITUDE	-0.064	-0.006	0.007	-0.044

$p=.05$

### Interpretation and Discussion

The results revealed that there is a significant difference in the attitude scores toward mainstreaming between (1) primary and secondary school teachers, and (2) between male and female secondary school teachers. Secondary school teachers and female teachers have more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming. There is also a significant difference in (a) the special education experience of primary and secondary school teachers and (b) the special education support services in primary and secondary schools. However, there is no significant relationship between attitude scores of teachers and the provision of special education support services or their special education experience, school climate and special education training.

The literature (Bibby, 1990; Duke, 1989; Thomas, 1990) reveals the many benefits that have been obtained by teachers, students, and parents by the provision of special education support services. It contends that these services, by their very nature, can come in many forms and that they must be properly managed if teachers are to benefit from them. It was noted that some kinds of support made teachers rely more on outside

help and so increased the chance that they would be negative about mainstreaming. This result could point to the nature of the support that is supplied in the schools in Trinidad, that is, the presence of a guidance officer in some schools. This support is very unlike that received by teachers discussed in previous research studies. Nevertheless, research evidence about special education support services is inconclusive.

The previous research and opinions about short intensive courses in special education which showed that sensitized teachers did not develop positive attitudes toward mainstreaming because they usually had very little opportunity to practice what they learnt is also supported (Dessent, 1988). These results may be explained by a suggestion made by Leyser (1988), that training must include practical and field experiences if it is to be effective in improving attitudes toward mainstreaming. In this country, the majority of primary and secondary school teachers have attended only short courses aimed at sensitizing teachers.

School climate appears to have no relationship to attitude toward mainstreaming. This result should be taken with caution for the following reason: The instrument used to measure school climate was probably not sufficiently sensitive to tease out any relationships that might exist between the psychological tone of the school; the morale of teachers; the cultural ethos of the school; the organizational structure of the school administration; the social feelings among teachers, between pupils, teachers and parents; the public image of the school; its sense of achievement, purpose and mission, all of which make up the school climate on the one hand, and teachers' attitude toward mainstreaming of the child with special needs on the other. Further investigation could concentrate on this important multifaceted phenomenon "school climate" and its relationship to mainstreaming.

The present study supports one earlier study by Casey (1978) who found low correlation between attitude and contact with exceptional children. It was not in agreement with research projects studied by Donaldson (1980) and Biklen (1985). Overall, female secondary school teachers have more positive attitude scores toward mainstreaming than all other teachers at these two teaching levels.

The findings of this study show that attitude scores of teachers toward mainstreaming are effectively neutral, occupying a very small range in

the middle of the scale. One must, therefore, be very cautious when making generalizations about any group of teachers based on differences between the scores obtained. This study, although it supports many previous research projects on attitudes toward mainstreaming, also made comparisons not previously made by other researchers. Further research studies in Trinidad must necessarily be done before coming to more definite conclusions. The attitudes of teachers in the mainstream must be addressed, and ways must be found for improving these before mainstreaming can be fully and successfully implemented. The right decisions concerning all factors related to attitudes toward mainstreaming must be made now to prevent attitudes from becoming negative.

### **Toward the Development of One Education System for All School Children**

This paper has identified the number of children in the ordinary schools who have special needs as estimated by the Marge Report (1984). It has also shown how many other children may have special needs as evidenced by the poor academic performance of the majority of our students at all levels. Our teachers need help and special training to achieve success with these students. Student achievement is directly related to teacher attitude (Wineburg, 1987) and to student self-concept (Combs, 1982). A high sense of academic futility was identified as the key determinant of student failure in schools where overall expectations were low (Brookover, 1978 cited in Newberg & Loue, 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983). Brookover believes that the phenomenon occurs when students "feel they have no control over their success or failure in the school system, teachers do not care if they succeed or not, and their fellow students punish them if they do succeed" (Newberg & Loue, 1982, p. 499). Disabled children will be placed in this position if teachers' expectations of them are not high (Martin, 1988), thereby creating a vicious circle where disabled students become low achievers, teachers' expectations are lowered, and their attitudes towards these children become more negative.

Teacher attitude toward mainstreaming had to be investigated because the need to change from a dual system to one in which all students are educated in a single system was evident. The need now exists since many special needs students from special schools are successful at the Common

Entrance Examination, which allows them to attend secondary schools of their choice. As was stated previously in this paper, there are no special secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Although teachers at these secondary schools complain about their inability to cope with indiscipline and slow learners, they are proud of the many successes of students who are labeled handicapped.

Take for example, Helen, a severely hearing-impaired student who never attended a special school and who presently attends a normal secondary school: She wears powerful amplification and uses speech for communication. She is a challenge to all her teachers, especially her foreign language teachers. They are proud of every success and, although not specially trained to teach the severely hearing-impaired, have through their experiences, devised strategies to satisfy her needs. In so doing, they have come to realize that they are catering, at the same time, to other students in the class who have learning difficulties. The teachers' positive attitude to Helen has allowed her to be educated in the mainstream. This is possible for all handicapped students who can be mainstreamed if teacher attitudes are addressed in teacher training programmes, seminars and workshops.

Successful mainstreaming is the beginning of the institution of one education system for all children. It asks normal education not just to add special education but to change to a single system which provides "the raison d'être for evolving all the way, satisfactory, equal, equitable and quality educational provision for all children of all needs and abilities" (Durojaiye, 1990, p. 20).

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## APPENDIX I

**Estimated Prevalence in Numbers of Children, 3-16,  
by Type of Disability.**

TOTAL POPULATION, 3 TO 16, (1980 CENSUS)		169,420
PHYSICAL DISABILITIES	(1.78%)	2,880
HEARING IMPAIRED	(4.6%)	7,793
VISUAL DISABILITIES	(0.7%)	1,186
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISABILITIES	(4.1%)	6,946
MENTAL RETARDATION	(1.0%)	1,694
LEARNING DISABILITIES	(2.1%)	3,388
MENTALLY HANDICAPPED	(2.0%)	3,388
TOTAL	(100%)	27,275

Marge Report, p. 28b, October 1984.