Ethnography Study Project

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Introduction

An ethnography, or ethnographic study, is performed in order to gather information about a particular selection of people who are grouped by one or more common, unifying, characteristic. These studies are performed in a deliberately casual way, typically through collection of observed data and/or informal collection of anecdotal information, in order to keep the study as objective as possible and, therefore, to collect the most authentic data. According to Crossman (http://sociology.about.com/od/E_Index/g/Ethnography.htm), an ethnography is a "descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do. It is a research method that is used by sociologists often when studying groups, organizations, and communities that are a part of a larger complex society, such as religious cults, ethnic neighborhoods, or urban gangs". Culture is defined as the arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought considered as a unit, especially with regard to a particular time or social group and/or the set of predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize a group or organization. (dictionary.search.yahoo.com)

By these definitions, schools as a whole fit the definition of a culture and each is filled with a plethora of sub-cultures. Aside from the most obvious groups of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and age, other groups can be found at all levels. From administrative groups (boards of education, superintendents, and building-level administrators), leveled buildings (primary, elementary, middle school, and high school), inter-building disciplines and departments (math, history, and english), sports groups, student groups, and extracurricular groups, each group shares common interests, beliefs, practices, vocabulary, and other norms and values that are generally shared by others in the group.

Where most of these cultures are obvious and well studied, especially the culture of certain student groups identified by academic achievement (or lack thereof), one subgroup that is less often recognized or addressed is the culture of special education teachers and staff in mainstream, public schools.

Purpose of the Study

This ethnography seeks to study the culture of high school, special education, subject-area teachers in a large suburban high school on Long Island. In order to equitably examine the special education culture and discern the qualities that differentiate it from that of general education teachers, I have chosen to survey only teachers who teach both a subject-area, special education self-contained class and also at least one collaborative / Integrated Co-Teaching class taught jointly by both a general education teacher and a special educator. General education teachers who share these ITC classes will also be studied to compare the experiences.

Issues being sought include informants perceptions regarding:

- Autonomy
- Respect (social, administrative, peer, and student)
- Inclusion
- Workload

Description of Ethnographic Informants

Special Education teachers - 9 teachers, each with >10 total years teaching and > 5 years team teaching with a gen ed partner in an ITC class. These teachers will be referred to as SE1 through SE9.

General Education teachers - 8 teachers (1 of the 8 gen-ed teachers teams with two different special educators each day), each has >10 total years teaching and >5 years team teaching in an ICT classroom. These teachers will be referred to as GE1-8.

Subject areas represented in both groups included:

- Global Studies 9 & 10 Regents
- US History & Gov't 11 Regents
- English 10 & 11 Regents
- Living Environment Regents
- Earth Science Regents

Methodology

Google Forms Surveys (Attachment A.) were emailed to all participants with an explanation of the study, its purpose, and 8 questions covering the following areas:

General Demographics:

1. Primary area of teaching experience (Sp-Ed or Gen-Ed)
2. Subject area
3. Total Years teaching experience
4. Number of classes taught (sped, gen ed, collab

Study specific data from both sp-ed and ITC experience:

4. Pre-collab interest/ enthusiasm
5. Increase/decrease/constant #4
6. Willingness to teach collab again
7. Perceived level of respect from students (sp-ed v gen-ed students)
8. Perceived level of respect from BL administrators
9. Perceived level of respect from DO-Level administrators
10. Perception of inclusion in subject area dept
11. Perception of inclusion in special ed dept.

Informants were assured anonymity to assure more reliable reporting.
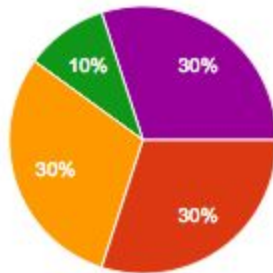
Findings

You identify primarily as a
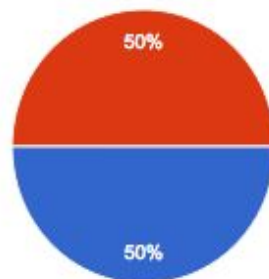
Special Education Teacher	5	50%
General Education Teacher	5	50%

What is the primary academic subject that you teach?

ELA	4	40%
Math	1	10%
Science	3	30%
Social Studies	2	20%

How many years have you been teaching?

1-5	0	0%
6-10	3	30%
11-15	3	30%
16-20	1	10%
21-30	3	30%

How many General Education classes do you teach daily?
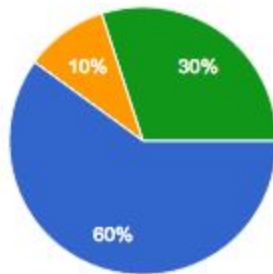
0	6	60%
1	0	0%
2	1	10%
3	3	30%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
6	0	0%

How many collaborative / Integrated Co-Teaching classes do you teach daily?
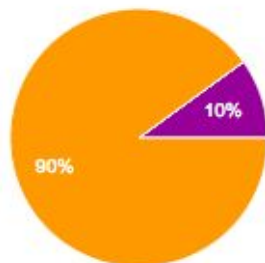
|		
0	0	0%
1	0	0%
2	9	90%
3	0	0%
4	1	10%
5	0	0%
6	0	0%

Compared to students in your solo classes, you feel that you get the same amount of respect from students in your collab. class

|		
1 = Absolutely not	2	20%
2= Not really	2	20%
3= About the same	2	20%
4= Pretty Much	3	30%
5= Absolutely	1	10%

Do you feel that special educators get the same level of professional respect from District office-level administrators as general educators get
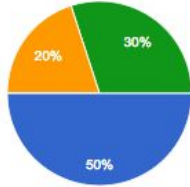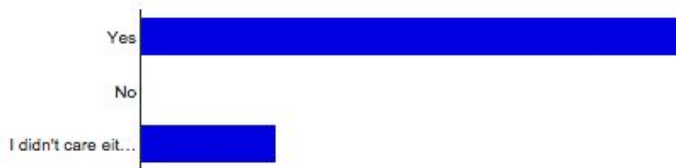

1 = Absolutely not	5	50%
2= Not really	0	0%
3= About the same	2	20%
4= Pretty much	3	30%
5= Absolutely	0	0%

How many Special Education, Self-contained classes do you teach daily?
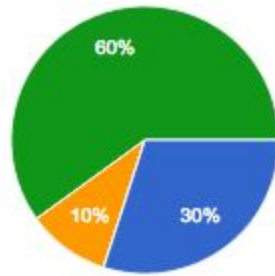
0	3	30%
1	0	0%
2	1	10%
3	6	60%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
6	0	0%

Before co-teaching a collab class, were you interested or enthusiastic about it?
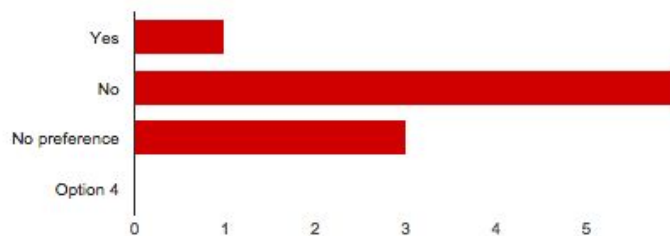

Yes	8	80%
No	0	0%
I didn't care either way.	2	20%

Over time, has your interest or enthusiasm about teaching in a collaborative class

Increased	0	0%
Decreased	7	70%
Remained the same	3	30%

If you could pick your schedule next year, would you choose to teach in a collab class?

Yes	1	10%
No	6	60%
No preference	3	30%
Option 4	0	0%