

Ed Studies Junior Research Plan

Name: Christina Raiti

Major(s)/Concentration: Educational Studies/Special Education

Last updated: 3/27/15

1) What is your proposed research question, and how is it significant to educational studies, broadly defined?

My proposed research question is: What are the effects of inclusion into a general education classroom on children with autism? This is relevant to educational studies because it analyzes the internal structure of schooling and how it affects children who have autism. It will also analyze relationships between the general ed children and the children with autism and the skills they may or may not achieve. I am interested in exploring the benefits of the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment).

2) What courses, experiences, and/or readings inspired you to choose this question?

Specifically, Special Education with Professor Mackey, Spectacle of Disability with Professor Paulin, and Child Development with Professor Anselmi inspired me to focus on this topic. I have always had a passion for working with children who have autism and at the end of my Special Education course, I created a hypothetical summer camp for children with autism. I completed the project and it was not until I took Spectacle of Disability that I thought of altering my hypothetical camp to include children without Autism. The Spectacle of Disability also taught me that, while in our socially constructed culture, autism may seem to be a disability, it is a blessing in many ways. For this reason, I became interested in the school system and ways that children with autism can benefit from a system created for “normal” children.

Three sources that have helped me with the development of this topic:

a) Blew, P. A., I. S. Schwartz, and S. C. Luce. 1985. ‘Teaching Functional Community Skills to Autistic Children Using Nonhandicapped Peer Tutors.’ *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 18(4):337-42.

This is a study that looked at two children with autism who were paired with two children without autism. I would say this is primarily based on observation and analysis. It looks at the consumption of social skills through modeling, baseline, and peer tutoring. It was found that the children with autism benefited the most from the peer tutoring. The goals of the social skills were based on community learning skills. This is relevant because it would allow for an understanding of the benefits children with autism could potentially have

when being included in a general education class. It was also compared to previous studies, which aids in the article's validity.

b) Hale, Heather B. n.d. 'Peer-Mediated Interventions to Facilitate Social Interaction for Children with Autism'. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.

This journal entry served to build on former research dealing with the characteristics of social interactions and social relationships among young children with Autism. This is interesting because my project deals with the benefits of inclusion in a classroom. I am looking for what the child can gain that could be noticeable by his/her parents. Relationships with the mother and father are significant and this article suggests they could possibly be enhanced by the different types of inclusion. The article first draws on previous studies and reviews the previous literature. It then suggests possibilities for future research and finally, the part most important to my project, makes recommendations for educational practices that are supported by this research.

c) Harrower, J. K. and G. Dunlap. 2001. 'Including Children with Autism in General Education Classrooms: A Review of Effective Strategies'. *Behavior Modification* 25(5):762-84.

This article recognizes the negatives and positives of inclusion in the general ed classroom. It reviews the research that promotes a healthy and successful inclusion program. There are various strategies mentioned and types of interventions. I think this article will be extremely relevant because it relates directly to the in school problem which I wish to address. I am looking to see if inclusion is successful and if it is, what type of inclusion, and what benefits are gained. The findings in this article may allow it to be my strongest resource thus far.

3) What prior methods training do you have, and what primary sources and methods will you use to answer this question?

I am currently enrolled in Research Methods of Social Science. I am in the process of learning how to conduct interviews, code observations, and create my own research proposal. We have not yet conducted an actual study but I have had practice at local coffee shops in terms of jotting, field notes, coding, and then writing memos. I have not yet been partially submersed into the study, meaning I have only been an outside observer so that can be a challenge for me. I will need to decide how many children I can focus on. I am considering two children with autism who have inclusion specified in their IEPs and two children with autism who are strictly in an ABA class. I will need to be in constant contact with the teachers and I am working with Professor Mackey to determine the possibility of me speaking with parents once my observations have begun, in order to determine change in behaviors. I am a bit concerned because depending on the functioning level of the children I choose to study, they may or may not be able to communicate the way they feel about being in a general ed classroom. I will primarily have qualitative data because it will be based on observations, interviews, and detailed

field notes. I will also be looking at historical research dealing with the inclusion of children with Autism in the public school system.

3) Does your plan include research with human subjects?

Yes, my research will include research with approximately four children, their teachers, and potentially their parents.

5) Does your research plan require access to a school or organization?

Yes, my research plan requires access to a school.

So far I have contacted two people in the Simsbury School District, one coordinator from HMTCA, seven from the Glastonbury School District, one from Moylan Elementary, and one from a preschool in Granby. So far, the teacher in Granby has approved, it is my assistant basketball coach's daughter's preschool class and there is forced inclusion into her class. I also received the below email from the Glastonbury School District. I am currently in the process of applying, through the registrars' office, for an internship at one of their schools.

Nancy Taylor <taylor@glastonburyus.org>
To: Raiti, Christina L. (2016) <Christina.Raiti@trincoll.edu>
Re: Trinity Senior Research Project

April 1, 2015 7:51 AM

Hi Christina,

It sounds like you have a good idea so I looked into our district practice for these requests. In Glastonbury, we have some requirements that must be met in these cases which are:

1. are already assigned to our schools in an approved student teacher or intern capacity, AND
2. have completed, submitted, and had approved a research plan that is based on our local requirements.

This information was provided to me by our Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Rosemary Tralli.

My best wishes to you as you move forward in your education,
Nancy Taylor

On Tue, Mar 31, 2015 at 10:56 AM, Raiti, Christina L. (2016) <Christina.Raiti@trincoll.edu> wrote:
Good Morning Ms. Taylor,

My name is Christina Raiti and I am an upcoming Senior at Trinity College. I play basketball at Trinity and I am an Educational Studies Major with a concentration in Special Education. Part of my senior requirement, consists of a research project under the supervision of Professor Jack Daugherty, dealing with a topic I am extremely passionate about. I want to study the affects of the inclusion in a general ed classroom on children with Autism. My research will be primarily based on qualitative data (observations, interviews, and field notes) so I would need to be in a classroom. I was wondering if it were at all possible for me to observe in one of your schools. I have taken a special ed course with Professor Mackey, who suggested your school as the perfect fit. I also am very good family friends with the Dinitales who have worked in the Glastonbury School District for years. I have done a lot of research on your special ed program and I think it sounds like one of the best. I hope you consider having me because I really feel my research can make a difference.

Thank you,

Christina Raiti