

Author: Johnson, Amber, M.

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STUDENT:

NAME Amber M. Johnson DATE: 8/1/12

ADVISER: (Committee Chair if MS Plan A or EdS Thesis or Field Project/Problem):

NAME James Lehmann DATE: 8/1/2012

**This section for MS Plan A Thesis or EdS Thesis/Field Project papers only
Committee members (other than your adviser who is listed in the section above)**

1. CMTE MEMBER'S NAME: DATE:

2. CMTE MEMBER'S NAME: DATE:

3. CMTE MEMBER'S NAME: DATE:

This section to be completed by the Graduate School

This final research report has been approved by the Graduate School.

Director, Office of Graduate Studies:

DATE:

Johnson, Amber M. *A Comprehensive Study on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusion of Children with Special Needs into General Education Classrooms*

Abstract

Over the past 30 years, inclusion has caused controversy in education among teachers, administrators, and parents. Inclusion is a fundamental philosophy and key practice of including children with special needs into the regular education classroom. The purpose of this study was to examine the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion and look at more detailed concepts of inclusion. This study included a comprehensive review and critical analysis of research and literature concerning the issue of inclusion and collaboration, factors that lead to inclusion, why inclusion is controversial, inclusion versus mainstreaming, what individualized education programs and least restrictive environments are, response to intervention and inclusion, models of inclusion, what inclusion looks like, and advantages and disadvantages for students with disabilities, regular education students, and teachers when placing students with special needs into a regular education classroom.

Research promotes inclusion and suggests that students with disabilities should be placed in a regular education setting and be removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in that setting. When inclusive practices are implemented properly, inclusion can provide many advantages for all students and teachers involved in the process.

There can also be disadvantages of inclusion for students and teachers when inclusion is implemented without proper training and resources. When this occurs, it can lead to an unpleasant school environment for all students and teachers involved.

Inclusive programs can be successful. The researcher provided recommendations for teachers and administrators to assist in implementing an inclusionary program so everyone involved is comfortable and gaining new skills from the process.

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Chapter I: Introduction

According to *What the Numbers Say* (2004), the number of children qualifying for special education programs has increased about 40% over the past 10 years, which means that over 6.5 million students ages 3 to 21 have been diagnosed as having special school needs. What does this mean? The number of children with disabilities and special needs has increased dramatically and they will be included into general education classrooms with typically developing children their age.

Inclusion is the philosophy that children with special needs be included into general education classrooms whether or not they can meet traditional curricular standards. Inclusion is the idea that children begin learning in their general education classrooms and should only be removed when special services are needed and cannot be provided in the general education settings (Berg, 2004). When students are removed, they receive instruction that is individual to their needs in their least restrictive environment (LRE). Many children with special needs attend general education classrooms most of the school day. Some students may only leave for a short period of time or during certain subject areas. A special education teacher comes to the classroom and pulls out an individual student or a small group of students for instruction based on the children's needs (Barnes, 2007).

The history of inclusion is essential to take a look at while examining its importance. "Special education programs in the United States were made mandatory in 1975 when congress passed the Education of the Handicapped ACT (EHA) in response to discriminatory treatment by public educational agencies against students with disabilities" (Wikipedia, 2007, p. 1). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 under the revision process.

According to Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011), in 1986, the foundation for inclusion in early education was established. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was reauthorized to additionally cover infants and toddlers below the age of 2 who had special needs. This also meant that they would provide Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP). Individual family service plans are prepared documents to ensure individualized special services to families of infants and toddlers. These families are allowed services at home and possibly in other locations where their children can receive appropriate assistance to prepare them for their future.

In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) strengthened its policy and made it mandatory that public schools include children with disabilities into general education classrooms no matter their strengths or weaknesses. According to Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011), the basic right of IDEA is that children be provided with free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to allow them to become part of a larger social community.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act, required academic performance of all school children, including those with special needs (Hulgin & Drake, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act also called for 100% proficiency in reading and math by the year 2012.

In 2004, IDEA underwent another reauthorization process. This changed learning disability identification procedures and required high qualification standards for special education teachers. This reauthorization also made it clear that all students with special needs participate in annual state or district testing or documented alternate assessments (Hulgin & Drake, 2009).

O'Connor & Yasik (2007) explained that a team of professionals and parents meet to ensure that children are receiving free and appropriate public education in their least restrictive environment. During the meetings, they determine the student's unique educational needs, develop annual goals for the child, and determine special services the student needs through the development of an individualized education program (IEP).

Prior to IDEA's implementation, approximately one million children with disabilities were shut out of schools and another four million were denied appropriate services (Egnor, 1996). Previously, children with developmental disabilities were segregated and those with severe disabilities were housed in state institutions (Egnor, 1996). Since then, these children are no longer placed in those settings. According to Egnor (1996), children with or without disabilities attend school together and infants and toddlers receive early intervention services.

Inclusion of children with special needs may bring up controversy among school communities because of differing opinions and experiences. Some parents may feel that their children are not receiving proper education and some may feel that their child is excelling in an inclusive classroom. You may also find teachers who are excellent educators in a classroom of inclusion and others who feel that they are not receiving enough additional teacher support. Some children may even feel excluded from certain classroom experiences, while others enjoy working with their diverse peers. Children, parents, and teachers may have different views on the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion. Individuals hold their own opinions and have their own experiences in the educational setting. Therefore, it is critical to examine these attitudes to further understand inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

There has been ongoing controversy in the field of education on inclusion of children with special needs into general education classrooms. Inclusion of young children with disabilities into programs with their typically developing peers continues to be a challenge in many ways (Brault, Brotherson, Erwin, Hanson, Soodak, Turnbull, & Winton, 2002; Guralnick, 2001). Each child, parent, and teacher will have different experiences with inclusion. Research needs to be completed to find a possible common ground based on the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion along with other factors of inclusive education.

Purpose of the Study

This study will explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with inclusion to determine if all children benefit by placing students with varying disabilities into general education classrooms according to children with special needs, children without special needs, parents of children with special needs, parents of children without special needs, and teachers in early childhood education settings. This will be achieved by conducting a literature review, an analysis of the research, and a critique of the findings related to inclusion of children with special needs into general education classrooms over the past 10 years.

Assumptions of the Study

An assumption of this study is that there will be conflicting views of inclusion of children with special needs from many perspectives. It is also assumed that there is a variety of suggested ways of including students, but not one that is the most effective.

Definition of Terms

For clarification and understanding, the following definitions are defined.

At-risk. Students who are at-risk have characteristics, live in environments or have experiences that make them more likely than others to fail in school.

Collaboration. To work jointly or collaborate with others especially in an intellectual endeavor. A team effort based on the idea of working together effectively and providing mutual emotional, mental, and physical support for one another.

Inclusion. The act or practice of inclusion is providing learning experiences for children with special needs in the same setting as children without special needs.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). Each public school child who is eligible for special education is given a written document called an individual education plan. An individual education plan is created through a team effort and reviewed at least once a year.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA is the federal law governing education for children with special needs, formerly Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Learning disability. Any of various conditions or learning disabilities that interfere with an individual's ability to learn and so result in impaired functioning in language, reasoning, or academic skills that are thought to be caused by difficulties in processing and integrating information.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A child's least restrictive environment is in their natural setting needing the least amount of assistance while maintaining daily routines and activities. According to IDEA (2004), the least restrictive environment for every child may be different depending on that child's learning and behavioral needs and characteristics.

Mainstreaming. To place a child with disabilities or mainstream into regular school classes.

Natural Environment. A place where children should receive services in their natural environment where typically developing peers would be.

Related services. Assistance required or related services required to ensure a student benefits from special education.

Response to Intervention (RTI). Tiered models of instruction and intervention to address goals in improving inclusion.

School-Level Team. A school-level team is a leadership council consisting of highly respected members of the school faculty, staff, and community to oversee the inclusive process.

Special education. Classes or instruction designed for students with special education needs.

Students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are eligible according to state and federal guidelines to receive special education services.

Limitations of the Study

While there is a lot of information regarding inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms, there is not one simple answer as to how this can be done most effectively. A limitation to this study is that there so many different experiences with inclusion that all of those involved in education can't agree on the most effective way to include children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Methodology

A thorough literature review will be conducted and an analysis of the literature review will be completed to help identify the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion of children with special needs and to determine concluding findings. The analysis of the literature review will be critical in examining all aspects of inclusion and determining if inclusive education is beneficial or detrimental to all students. I hypothesize that there will be a wide range of information and opinions on inclusive education and that there will not be one exact answer or direction since education is always changing and growing along with students and their needs.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter is a comprehensive review of research and literature associated with the inclusion of children with special needs into general education classrooms. The focus of this chapter will be on what inclusion and collaboration is, what factors may lead to inclusion, why inclusion is controversial, inclusion versus mainstreaming, what individualized education programs and least restrictive environments are, RTI and inclusion, models of inclusion, what inclusion looks like, and advantages and disadvantages for both students with special needs and general education students, and teachers.

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion in education has been developed as a fundamental philosophy and key practice throughout many organizations and schools (Peters, Johnstone, & Ferguson, 2005). The definitions of inclusion have changed, but inclusive education continues to be a guiding principle for reaching the goals of basic education for all children. Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011) explained that inclusion takes many different forms and has multiple meanings, but is essentially about belonging, participating, and reaching one's full potential in a diverse society.

Over the past fifteen years, many authors have presented definitions of inclusion.

Although variations exist among these definitions, most advocates agree that inclusive learning environments are those in which everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met. (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000, p. 4)

According to Brucker (1994), inclusion refers to the commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent possible in the school and classroom he or she would have otherwise been attending. Brucker (1994) also suggested that inclusion brings the support services to the student and requires only that the student benefit from participating in the general education classroom. Eason (1998) believed that inclusion means that all children are educated in a regular education classroom and are given enhanced opportunities and necessary services while the regular education teachers are being supported by appropriate resources. He also explained that students with disabilities should follow the same schedule as their non-disabled peers and be involved in age-appropriate activities while teachers encourage friendships and teach all children to accept human differences. According to Berg (2004, p. 7), "Inclusion is not necessarily just focused on students with disabilities. When implemented correctly, it is also designed to accommodate and respond to the needs of regular education students as well." Sandall & Schwartz (2002) suggested that inclusion is active participation of all children in the same classroom. Children should be provided the services and support needed to accomplish their individual goals and social relationships by a team of professionals (Sandall & Schwarz, 2002).

Inclusion is, "the practice of providing programs that include children with and without special needs in the same setting, offering the best opportunity for healthy social growth and for the proper sequential development of learning skills," (Moore, 2009, p. 1). Inclusive education has changed over the years, but has always needed efforts from everyone in the educational setting to make it work. Collaboration from all individuals working in an inclusive setting is very important to ensure that all children are reaching their potential.

What is Collaboration?

When working in an inclusive setting, collaboration needs to take place. Effective collaboration is when two or more individuals work together towards the same goals (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). When children with disabilities are placed into a general education classroom, multiple teachers and therapists work with those children towards meeting their individualized education plan (IEP) goals. Generally, each teacher or therapist bring different skills and techniques into the classroom. Professionals need to share their ideas and experiences with each other to benefit the children that they are teaching. These collaborative relationships also need to be based on respect and understand that no person is valued more than another. Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011) stated that collaboration is a cornerstone of high-quality inclusion.

In order to understand inclusion in regular education, we need to look at its history and factors that have led states to provide these types of programs to all children. The history of inclusive education is extensive and always changing, but the number of schools implementing inclusion for students with disabilities has increased significantly.

Factors that Lead to Inclusion

Inclusion in education for all children has been influenced by research and legislation. According to Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, and Pretti-Frontczak (2005), the history of inclusive programs dates back to the 1965 when the Head Start program was signed into law. In the early 1970's, Head Start mandated that 10% of its enrollment slots needed to be reserved for children with disabilities. This was a result of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The Education for All Handicapped Children ACT (EHA) was passed in 1975 and provided incentives for programs to serve all children, with or without disabilities, ages 5 through 21. The EHA

mandated for states to provide services for children with disabilities ages 3-5 years in 1986. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated that early childhood centers could not exclude children with disabilities unless a particular child presented a health or safety risk and was renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). During that time, the law expanded to include autism and traumatic brain injury as recognized disabilities. IDEA was updated again in 1997 and reauthorized by federal law in 2004 (Moore, 2009). Since this research and legislation, more than 35 states in 2004 had a publicly funded early education program (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). The current version of the law became effective on July 1, 2005.

There are many factors that have led to the research of inclusion in education. Research has been completed and will continue to be completed on inclusive education because it has been an ongoing, controversial issue. Inclusion of children with disabilities into programs and classrooms with their typically developing peers continues to be an ongoing challenge due to controversy (Brault, Brotherson, Erwin, Hanson, Soodak, Turnbull, & Winton, 2002). The wide variety of values and beliefs of inclusion leads to some of this controversy.

Why is Inclusion so Controversial?

Hulgin & Drake (2009, p. 1) stated, “Inclusive education has been challenging to adopt as the approach involves fundamentally different assumptions, structures and practices from dominant education and cultural ideologies.” At times, free and appropriate education (FAPE) and the least restrictive environment (LRE) seem to conflict since a regular education setting may not provide the most appropriate education for students with disabilities (Mitchell, Drasgow, 1999). Many students in special education have experienced failure in these classrooms (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Inclusion is often

debated over whether or not children with special needs are received appropriate education in the general education setting. The principal of the least restrictive environment (LRE) and the tension between the LRE and free and appropriate education (FAPE) “have provoked more confusion and controversy than any other issue in special education” (Mitchell, & Drasgow, 1999, p. 2).

The interests and willingness of general education teachers to educate children with disabilities in the general education classroom can cause conflict (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). For years, special education students were taught in separate classrooms because they were perceived as difficult to teach allowing general education teachers to focus their attention to a smaller range of students. Change can be very difficult for schools and causes controversy.

Inclusion is also controversial because of the increasing complex needs and diversity of students (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). General education classrooms have so many varied needs as it is and when special education students are added into the mix, it can be more difficult to provide adequate services. Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011, p. 347) stated, “Specialized instruction, interventions, and supports are key components of high-quality inclusion and essential in reaching desired outcomes for children with and without disabilities.”

Another reason inclusion is so controversial is because inclusion is fairly new to many schools and the research is still somewhat limited (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Professionals argue whether or not inclusion is what is best for students. Inclusive programs will differ in every state and so will the opinions of inclusive education.

Although inclusion may look different in all programs, they still have the same objective in mind.

A wide variety of factors such as attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, child and adult characteristics, policies, and resources can influence how inclusion is implemented and viewed by families and practitioners (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). Inclusion is often misinterpreted as mainstreaming, but the two concepts are quite different when looked at more closely.

Inclusion versus Mainstreaming

Inclusion and mainstreaming are often used interchangeably, but are two totally different concepts. Inclusion is when students with special needs attend a general education classroom for most of the day working on multiple skill areas (Gordon, 2005). When a child is in an inclusive setting, the program does not change because it is driven by the goals and objectives on a child's Individualized Education Plan (Brucker, 1994). Inclusion is a way to redesign the delivery of special education services in a regular education classroom. Supportive services are brought to children with special needs so they can benefit from participating in a regular education classroom. With inclusion, a child's goals and objectives can be met in a regular education classroom even if they are different from the goals of other children in the classroom.

Mainstreaming occurs when students with disabilities attend a general education classroom for part of the day generally for social interaction (Gordon, 2005). It is a selective placement of children with special needs in a regular education classroom for specific times (Brucker, 1994). Some children have more severe needs and may only benefit for being with their typically developing peers for part of the day. A child's Individualized Education Plan will indicate if a child will be involved in inclusion or mainstreaming.

What is an Individualized Education Program?

“The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed to meet the specific and distinctive needs of the child” (O’Connor & Yasik, 2007, p. 133). Students with disabilities need an IEP to help them grow in their least restrictive environment (LRE). An IEP is written based on information given after the school has completed evaluations on the child to see if they qualify for services.

A team composed of parents, teachers, therapists and school liaisons develop an annual IEP together based on evaluations. An IEP should include information about a child’s present levels of performance, detailed goals to be met during a school year and a statement of specific services the child should receive along with the extent of time that child will participate in the regular education classroom (Egnor, 1996). Individualized Education Plans should also include appropriate evaluation procedures to determine whether a child is meeting their goals.

What is the Least Restrictive Environment?

Since the late 1960’s, the least restrictive environment (LRE) has guided services for children with special needs and it has been incorporated into the state and federal policy (Taylor, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that free and appropriate education (FAPE) for children with disabilities must be provided in the least restrictive environment (Gordon, 2002).

Section 612 of the Senate bill explains that the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is where a child should be placed to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...are educated with children who are nondisabled and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of a child’s disability is

such that education in regular classes with the use of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Senate Bill, Section 612(a)(5)).

There is not one least restrictive environment (LRE) for all children. There should be a continuum of alternative placements depending on the individual child's needs. The least restrictive environment is easier to identify in school-age children than in preschool education (Dinnebeil & McInerney, 2011). Preschool education is voluntary so it is more difficult to identify what the least restrictive environment is for children with disabilities. The least restrictive environment for preschool children is explained by their natural environment. A child's natural environment is where early intervention services are provided in both home and community settings where typically developing preschool children are being served. The special education continuum of placement options may range from homebound instruction, playgroups, childcare centers, story times, special schools, regular education classes and special education classes (Taylor, 2004). The least restrictive environment (LRE) continuum is a federal mandate which reads:

Each public agency shall insure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of handicapped children for special education and related services...The continuum...must include...(instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions)...(Federal Register, 1977, p. 42497)

Figure 1: The Special Education Continuum (Taylor, 2004)

| More Restrictive | | | | | | | Less Restrictive |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Hospital Or Public Institution | Residential School | Homebound Instruction | Special School | Special Class in Regular School | Part-Time Special Class | Regular Class with Resource Room | Full-Time Regular Class |

Since there are so many different ways to provide the least restrictive environment (LRE), there are three models of what inclusion may look like in a school setting. The model schools choose to use depends on school size, student numbers, and resources available. There is not one model that is better than the others; schools and programs need to decide which model is a better fit for them.

RTI and Inclusion

The quality of inclusion has been improved by implementing tiered models of instruction and intervention called Response to Intervention (RTI) (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). RTI practices have a dual focus on improving the quality of instruction for all students as well as providing additional instruction and behavioral supports for some students to ensure that every child succeeds in a classroom. There are key features to use when following the RTI approach. This involves gathering information on skills of the students to assist teachers in planning and organizing instruction, providing evidence-based interventions and supports, and monitoring student progress in learning. Research indicates that RTI approaches are effective for addressing learning difficulties of school-aged children, especially in reading and math (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011).

Models of Inclusion

The majority of schools today are moving towards inclusive practices. There are many different models in which schools may use to help guide them when teaching with inclusion. Lipsky & Garter (1997) identified three models for general education teachers and special education teachers to follow.

The first model is a consultant model. This model is for schools with low student population as well as special education students and is used more with students with less severe

disabilities. A special education teacher is made available to help students practice new skills and to review difficult skills for the students. This model is non-intrusive and provides children with special needs at least two teachers to work with on individual goals. With this model, regularly scheduled meetings are recommended to assure the students are receiving appropriate services.

The second model is the teaming model. When this model is used, a special education teacher is assigned to one grade level team and one planning period per week with the team. The special education teacher provides the team with student information, possible instructional strategies, modification ideas and behavior modification strategies. The grade level team meets on a regular basis and needs to keep consistent communication among the team. This model is to ensure that all teachers, both regular education and special education, are working together to help students achieve their goals.

The third model is the collaborative or co-teaching model. This model is used when a regular education teacher and a special education teacher work together to teach both regular education students and special education students in a shared classroom. Both teachers are responsible for instruction planning and delivery, student achievement, assessment and discipline. This model provides less scheduling difficulties, continuous and ongoing communication between teachers and lower student to teacher ratios.

Service delivery also has a continuum of inclusive methods. McWilliam & Casey (2008), identify six models of service delivery ranging from individual pull-out to pure consultation. Each of these models depends on the individual needs of a child and how they can be serviced most appropriately to meet their individual goals.

The first model of service delivery is individual pull-out. This is where a specialist takes a child out of the classroom and received one-to-one services. This model has to regard to classroom activities and has no peer involvement. When using the individual pull-out model, teachers may or may not receive information from the specialist on the child's progress at the end of each session. If the teacher does receive information, it is generally brief and lacks demonstration.

The second service delivery model is small-group pull-out. This model also takes place outside of the classroom, but the specialist takes the focus child with at least one other student. The second student may or may not have special needs and can be beneficial as a peer model or assist in socialization. As in the individual pull-out model, the teacher may or may not receive information regarding progress at the end of each therapy session.

A third model of service delivery is the one-on-one in the classroom model. This is when the specialist stays in the classroom and works with a child individually in a separate area of the room. Peers are present in the classroom with this model, but they are not intended to be involved in the therapy session. The teacher in the classroom conducts activities with the other children in the classroom so the specialist can focus on the child being served. With this model, the teacher may or may not receive information about the child progress when the session is over, but may have a better idea what the specialist is working on with that child.

The fourth model of service delivery is group activity. With this model, services are provided during group activities when the specialist is in the classroom. Generally, the specialist has an agenda in mind for the session, but may use some child-initiated activities as well. Peer involvement is the main focus in this model as the specialist leads the group of students. The group activities should be developmentally appropriate and contain some opportunities for

practice. With this model, the teacher is helping, watching, and observing the group for how other group activities can be organized.

The fifth model is individualized within routines. This approach to service delivery is when a specialist is in the classroom, participating in the ongoing classroom routines. Activities should be developmentally appropriate and designed to enhance engagement. The level of peer involvement depends on the routine and how the child chooses to participate. The teacher demonstrates an activity and strategies that can be used and watches the specialist to learn new strategies. This model is the most useful approach to service delivery because classroom routines are not interrupted and specialists can assess a child in their natural environment. The specialist also has the opportunity to work with more than one child at a time and can work within their engagement in the classroom. This model has high potential for peer involvement and the teacher can see how interventions can work in a regular classroom.

The sixth and final model of service delivery is pure consultation. This model does not involve the child or peers. The specialist and teacher evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, discuss the needs of the child, and work together to formulate solutions. These discussions may take place in the classroom or in another location when other children are not present. This model is used so teachers can ask specialists for help, share ideas and information, and develop new goals and strategies for the teacher to use with the child.

What Does Inclusion Look Like?

Inclusive classrooms may look different because of the environment that is created by interactions among teachers and students as a whole group. The goals of inclusive education are to reduce all learning obstacles for students and to create the best environment for all children (Margaritoui, 2010). All children need nurturing and stimulating environments, but for children

with special needs, typical experiences need to be modified to assist in their development (Gould & Sullivan, 1999).

A positive inclusive classroom will provide many different hands-on activities that keep students engaged. Many of the children will be working on different tasks based on their abilities and interests. There will also be proper support staff in the room assisting the teacher and students. An inclusive classroom will have a variety of learning centers. The students are allowed to make many choices and can decide to participate in activities and centers. There are many small group activities encouraging peer help and support. A large factor in inclusive classrooms is social interaction. These classrooms are very student-centered, where the children assist in creating the community of the classroom and designing structure, rules, and expectations. The feel of an inclusive education classroom is a sense of community, where children learn from each other and are able to grow and develop skills based on their needs and interests.

Vogt (2005) explained that teachers help students develop lifelong habits that value tolerance and diversity in inclusive classrooms. These teachers help to maximize the potential of all learners, regardless of their gender, native tongue, religious background, and ethnicity. Teachers cannot create this type of classroom all by themselves. They need ongoing and relevant professional development that is supported in the classrooms and by expert mentors.

There are ways to support students with special needs in general education classrooms. According to experts in the field (Berkeley, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2007), three effective methods for improving the learning of all students are peer assistance, cooperative learning, and class wide peer tutoring. Peer assistance includes helping others read instructions, gather materials, or navigate the classroom. Peer assistance also promotes social responsibility and

understanding. Cooperative learning incorporates students working in small groups on projects, experiments, or presentations. Cooperative learning also requires careful monitoring to ensure equal responsibility and behavior. Class wide peer tutoring is explained through a paired reading model and different curriculum enhancements. All of these methods are to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of inclusive classrooms.

According to Barnes (2006), all it takes to create an inclusive classroom is a little extra effort to help children with special needs feel comfortable and accepted in your classroom. Barnes (2006) also suggested possible modifications to make the transition of a general education classroom to an inclusive classroom run smoothly.

1. Wean students from IEP modifications – Many children with special needs will have IEP's. As their abilities increase, expect more from them so they don't take their IEP's for granted and take advantage of you.
2. Set realistic expectations – Base your expectations on a child's ability level and needs. Don't expect too much or too little from them.
3. Work with parents – Remind parents that a teacher's role is to prepare their child for life after school and use positive phrases.
4. Minimize labeling – Give modified assignments to all students so it isn't obvious which are with special needs. Also, allow the special education teacher to work with the whole class.

Every inclusive classroom will look differently. The way a classroom is set up will depend on the teacher and the diversity of the students in the classroom. A teacher may try and develop the classroom community after the children have begun school to get a feel for the students.

Advantages of Inclusion for Students with Special Needs

There are many positive outcomes that may occur when students with special needs are placed into general education classrooms. According to *What Teachers Think* (2004), 85% of general education teachers feel that their students with special needs make significant academic progress over the course of one school year. This may be due to the advantages children with special needs are receiving by being included into general education classrooms.

According to *Inclusion* (2004), there are benefits of inclusion for children with special needs. These children feel a sense of belonging. They are not left out by learning at a different school or in a different setting as their same-age peers. All children are involved in classroom activities which helps them to feel as if they are part of the classroom. Inclusion provides a diverse stimulating environment in which to grow and learn. Children learn by watching others and practicing using their own skills. With a diverse group of learners in a classroom, children can grow by watching and helping their peers. Children in inclusive classrooms evolve feelings of being a member of a diverse community. The classroom is diverse and so is the world. By beginning their lives in a diverse classroom, children will learn how to be a member of a diverse world. These children also develop friendships. Students are able to work with their peers and learn similar interests of one another which will lead to friendships. Inclusion also provides opportunities to develop neighborhood friends. Children with special needs attend similar schools as the other children that they live near. Children need to have friends around them at home so they can grow and learn in that setting as well. Inclusion enhances self-respect. Children with special needs feel that they are worth something when they are allowed in the same classroom as every other child. Inclusive classrooms provide affirmations of individuality. Children can see the differences between themselves and their peers and they can prove their

strengths in the classroom to show their individuality. Inclusion in classrooms provides children with disabilities peer models. Children learn from one another by watching. They can also teach their classmates using their strengths. Lastly, Inclusion provides opportunities for children with special needs to be educated with their same-age peers. They are able to exercise their basic right to be educated with peers and feel unconditional acceptance (Moore, 2009). This also helps to minimize the effects of labeling in schools.

Inclusion in the early childhood setting allows children to be surrounded by other students with a range of abilities. O'Shea (1999) indicated that students with special needs often gain an understanding of their own capabilities while also understanding their peers' capabilities when receiving age-appropriate education. Children learn from each other by watching and practicing the skills that their peers are using. It is beneficial to allow children to work alongside diverse, age-appropriate peers. Children are models for each other which also allows them to better understand what their own strengths and weaknesses are. They are then able to teach their peers using their strengths and build on their weaknesses through practice while learning from the strengths of their peers. Each child can learn from one another and model appropriate behavior and learning strategies.

O'Shea (1999) also suggested many children increase their communication skills as they receive specially designed activities that encourage cooperation and participation among their peers, which also leads to gains in academic achievement. Children need to learn how to cooperate and participate with their peers because they learn from each other. Through communication and participation, children can ask each other for help, work in small and large groups, and learn to respect each other as individuals. When feeling a sense of community in a

classroom, children can excel in their academics because they feel they can communicate and participate.

According to Eason (1998), research shows that children do better, academically and socially, in integrated settings. Typically, these children are provided with the same opportunities as other students to develop relationships. Children enjoy learning alongside their peers from their local community. Inclusion in early childhood settings allows them to develop friendships that may be long-lasting throughout their lifetime. This can also benefit the students because they may feel a positive self-worth by having relationships and friendships. Having positive self-esteem will encourage children to want to succeed even further.

Eason (1998) also indicated including children with special needs into general education classrooms will keep children from being fearful, ignorant, and breed prejudices. When children are separated because of individual needs, they tend to develop judgments against others with differences. When children are judging each other, they may not feel that they are part of a community, which could minimize student learning and growth. Children may then focus all of their attention on what their weaknesses are instead of building on them.

Another advantage to inclusive education is that children are able to participate in a variety of activities that help prepare them for life. When children are cared for, experience a sense of belonging, and feel that they are part of their community, they can develop lifelong skills needed to fulfill their lives. Children in inclusive classrooms start to learn that people have different kinds of abilities and they learn to value differences in themselves. This again, will lead to positive self-esteem, which will benefit the whole child overall.

These many advantages can benefit children with varying disabilities deeply in an early childhood inclusion setting. Many of these positive outcomes will also provide advantages to

students in the general education classroom. Some advantages will be similar to children with special needs and some will be different, but all children may benefit from inclusion.

Advantages of Inclusion for General Education Students

General education students also have advantages to an inclusive classroom along with children with disabilities. Research suggests that typically developing children make similar developmental gains in inclusive programs (Odom, Buysse & Soukakou, 2011). One advantage is that these students build caring relationships and gain genuine friendships (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin & Williams, 2000). In the inclusive setting, high expectations are set for students to learn cooperation, peer support and personal responsibility. General education students learn fundamental communication skills and develop relationships with all children, with or without disabilities. They learn to work together to problem solve and resolve conflict no matter what differences they have.

Another advantage for general education students according to Walther-Thomas et al. (2000) is that there is a sense of belonging for all students in an inclusive classroom. In these classrooms, there is encouragement to nurture a strong sense of belonging by all participants – students, families, educators, administrators and staff. This sense of belonging values the unique characteristics that each individual provides to the inclusive setting. Each child's contribution may be different, but they are all recognized, appreciated and celebrated.

One last advantage according to Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, and Williams (2000) is general education students are provided with holistic, heterogeneous, and flexible learning opportunities. These opportunities provide an appropriate balance in the classroom to protect the educational rights of all students. General education students also have a wide range of abilities and this allows students to participate in multilevel learning through shared activities.

In these inclusive classrooms, teachers and specialists work together to provide learning experiences for all students to progress at their own rate.

General education students that are in an inclusive classroom with special education students will “develop lifelong habits that value tolerance and diversity” (Vogt, 2005, p. 2). Inclusive classrooms can help general education students understand individual differences and the needs of others. The world is a diverse place and general education students need to begin to learn these acceptance skills at a young age in order to become productive citizens in the future.

Inclusive classrooms may not only benefit children, but teachers as well. Teachers may have different benefits of inclusion than students, but all individuals involved may grow from this type of setting. Teachers and students may also have similar advantages in an inclusive classroom.

Advantages of Inclusion for Teachers

Inclusive classrooms not only affect students, but teachers as well. One advantage that teachers have in an inclusive classroom is the sharing of staff experience (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Monsen, 2003). When teachers are involved in inclusion, it forces them to communicate with colleagues and ask questions on what works for their classrooms. Sharing of ideas is important to grow as a professional. With collaboration, teachers are able to learn from each other (McWilliam, 1996). When sharing ideas and experiences, teachers gain insights in classroom management and strategies.

According to Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, and Monsen (2003) another advantage is the changing of attitudes and values in the school system. When all teachers are forced to work with students of all ability levels, it can give them a new and improved attitude towards children. Their values in the classroom may change by teaching in a classroom of inclusion.

One last advantage for teachers is that they “have a broader focus” (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Monsen, 2003, p. 50). Children aren’t the only pupils growing and learning in education. Teachers need to continually grow and learn as well. By participating in inclusion, teachers are forced to broaden their focus in education and learn more about students with special needs.

There are many advantages for children and teachers working in an inclusive classroom, but it is important to take a look at the opposite side of the spectrum. There can also be pitfalls when looking at inclusion for children and teachers. Children with disabilities have various gains in an inclusive setting, but some may also see negative aspects of inclusion.

Disadvantages of Inclusion for Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs may have disadvantages when involved in an inclusive classroom. One disadvantage may deal with social concerns and bullying (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Monsen, 2003). Children with disabilities are often looked at more than their general education peers as being different. At times, these students are more likely to be bullied and ridiculed.

A second disadvantage of inclusion for children with disabilities is that some settings may not meet specific needs of these children (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Inclusive classrooms may not always restructure the educational environment to accommodate the needs of the small number of students with disabilities.

Another disadvantage towards inclusion is that some general educators have not developed an empathetic understanding of disabilities and may not appear to be ready to accept children with special needs (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Many general education teachers have been trained to teach regular education and are not ready to accept students with

disabilities into their classrooms. This can have an affect on children with disabilities as they may be treated differently not only by their peers, but by teachers as well. Children with disabilities may be penalized by inappropriate instruction, limited attention and unrealistic expectations from general education teachers (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

A third disadvantage is that students with disabilities may not receive the most intensive and individualized instruction that is needed (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). If these students fail to learn fundamental skills at an early age, they may not catch up with their peers and develop the necessary skills to succeed in the future.

Disadvantages of Inclusion for General Education Students

General education students may have disadvantages by attending an inclusive classroom. “Many students with disabilities need more attention from classroom teachers” (Gordon, 2005, p. 213). With increased class sizes and growing budget cuts, schools aren’t able to hire as many teachers and support staff which causes children to have less supports in schools. If proper assistance is not available, the complex needs of some special education students may jeopardize the learning of general education students (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). In an inclusive classroom, teachers are not always able to focus on the general education students since some special education students require more time.

Another disadvantage for general education students in an inclusive setting is that children with severe disabilities may be disruptive in class to the extent where the other students’ learning is impacted (Gordon, 2005). Some children with special needs have more difficult behaviors than others that can lead to many disruptions throughout a school day. General education students can become distracted easily which may impede their learning.

Disadvantages of Inclusion for Teachers

All teachers have different views and opinions on inclusion, but research shows that there can be disadvantages of inclusion for teachers as well as students. One disadvantage is that “teachers feel threatened by the process of inclusion” (Margaritoiu, 2010, p. 84). Teachers feel that they may lose their jobs if they are not correctly educated or certified to teach children with special needs. Most teachers desire to work independently (McWilliam, 1996). When working in an inclusive setting, collaboration between many professionals needs to take place and some teachers want a stand-alone classroom. This also leads to threats of professional identity (McWilliam, 1996). When there are multiple teachers and therapists working with students, teachers can feel a lack of importance and identity.

Another disadvantage is that teachers feel that they are not properly prepared to teach an inclusive classroom (Margaritoiu, 2010). Teachers may have sufficient subject knowledge, but some may need more training in teaching skills necessary for teaching a diverse population. Some of these skills may include teaching strategies, differentiating curriculum and managing challenging behavior. According to Teacher Magazine (“What Teachers Think”, March/April 2004) only 45% of general education teachers feel prepared to teach special education students compared to 95% of special education teachers.

A third disadvantage that teachers may face is more planning and preparation to accommodate all of their students (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Monsen, 2003). The more range of ability levels leads to more modifications and interventions needed to teach curriculum goals. With more demands and responsibilities on teachers, there is less planning and preparation time which is needed to be sure that all students in the inclusive setting are receiving appropriate education. The inclusive setting leads to more work for teachers (McWilliam, 1996).

Teachers are given more work due to budget cuts and teaching in an inclusive classroom can also add to the work load.

One last disadvantage that teachers face by teaching in an inclusive school is that they are labeled as low-performing (Margaritoiu, 2010). “The balance in education generally had shifted towards academic rather than social outcomes” (Margaritoiu, 2010, p. 84). Schools are measured by academic state tests and are not being measured by social outcomes. Generally, inclusive schools test lower on state tests because children with special needs are taking the tests as well as general education students and the scores seem to be lower, diminishing the quality of the school. According to Teacher Magazine (“What Teachers Think”, March/April 2004) 89% of teachers agree that it is unfair to evaluate students with disabilities on state tests.

Chapter III: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study and summarizes the information found in the Review of Literature chapter. A critical analysis of the findings has been provided, along with recommendations.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine literature pertaining to inclusion and explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with inclusion to determine if all children benefit by placing students with varying disabilities into general education classrooms. Other aspects pertaining to inclusion were also researched such as collaboration, factors that lead to inclusive education, why inclusion is controversial, inclusion versus mainstreaming, what individualized education programs and least restrictive environments are, what response to intervention is, models of inclusion, and what inclusion looks like in schools. Based on the research studied, the researcher was able to pose a critical analysis along with recommendations for schools and programs that are seeking to use inclusion in their classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

Inclusive education has come a long way, but still has a long way to go. While there is a lot of information regarding inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms, there is not one simple answer as to how this can be done most effectively. A limitation to this study is that there so many different experiences with inclusion that all of those involved in education can't agree on the most effective way to include children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Critical Analysis

Inclusion is a controversial topic in education. Children, teachers, and parents have varying opinions and mixed reactions. The interests and willingness of general education teachers to educate children with special needs in the general education classroom can be a factor when implementing inclusive education (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). These attitudes may relate to the success of implementing inclusive classrooms into public schools. Effective school and program leadership is essential when developing inclusive programs (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

When inclusion is adopted appropriately in a school or program, research has shown that there are many advantages for children with and without disabilities as well as teachers. The inclusion model has been accepted as the best way to educate children with disabilities (Gould & Sullivan, 1999). Children can benefit both academically and socially by inclusive education. These advantages can extend beyond the classroom and far beyond a child's time in school.

Inclusive education needs to be carried out with proper training and resources. Many teachers feel that they are not properly prepared to teach an inclusive classroom (Margaritoiu, 2010). Without these components, research has also shown that there can be disadvantages on children with special needs, regular education students, and teachers. When this happens, many students, parents, and professionals have a negative view of inclusion and can be more unwilling to put forth the appropriate effort it takes to make inclusive education successful.

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the many factors that have lead towards schools adopting inclusive education. Some of these factors include research and legislation and dates back to 1965 (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). These factors, along with others, have lead schools and programs towards believing that all children can learn

together and have different educational goals. They have also shown that it is important for all students to have opportunities to share the same school experiences, interact with each other, and develop friendships. All children have the right to be educated with their peers and feel unconditional acceptance (Moore, 2009). Inclusive practices vary among children with special needs and may not be appropriate for all students so it is important to look at each individual child to determine what is best for their goals and future success. It is unfair to force all children into inclusive education if it is not what is most appropriate as exclusion once was many years ago.

Inclusive education continues to be portrayed in multiple ways and offers a wide variety of perspectives (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). The foundations and models of inclusion, as well as challenges associated with inclusive education were examined in the previous two chapters. Students, parents, and professionals will continue to have varying opinions on inclusion, but these ideas may conform if inclusion is put into practice consistently and with the proper guidance and resources (Margaritoiu, 2010). The researcher found that academic performance and social progress continues to be the main priorities in our schools. Administrators and teachers will continue to strive for achievement in these areas by using models that are most appropriate for all children.

Recommendations

Schools and programs are leaning more towards inclusive education based on research and legislation (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Wililams, 2000). Research has shown that the advantages of inclusion can outweigh the disadvantages if implemented appropriately. The effects that inclusion has on all children is more positive than negative. Prior to inclusive education, many students with disabilities fell through the cracks in the public

education system (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). The benefits of inclusion will not occur without purposeful and careful support systems to promote them. The results of this comprehensive analysis of the literature review have led me to the following recommendations regarding the issue of inclusion in schools:

School-Level Teams

Programs should build school-level teams to plan and monitor the initial implementation of inclusion (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). A school-level team is a leadership council consisting of highly respected members of the school faculty, staff, and community to oversee the inclusive process. These teams should include administrators, teachers, and community members to plan for inclusive education based on local needs and resources. These teams should also help to define inclusion, correct misconceptions, and problem-solve issues that may arise. Administrators play a key role in setting the tone for inclusion and keeping the staff and community committed to making it work effectively. These school-level teams also need to begin planning early for the following school year to ensure that student placements are appropriate for each child and all other important issues are addressed. Collaboration between parents, teachers, and administrators is necessary.

Supports and Services

Inclusive education requires adequate supports and services for students. Schools should begin inclusive practices with capable and willing professionals to help serve as role models (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). These professionals need to work together collaboratively to master new skills and learn from each other. Schools also need sufficient funding so they can develop appropriate programs for students. In order for schools and programs to provide the best services for students, they need supports and materials to make

the inclusive process work properly. When students with disabilities are placed into a general education setting without adequate resources, it is not inclusion (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). With inclusive education, psychological, human, and fiscal resources are needed as well as policies and procedures to educate students with disabilities in an inclusive setting (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Inclusive programs need enough teachers, therapists, and other staff members to ensure that all children are receiving appropriate services. These programs also need to provide transportation along with specialized services and equipment depending on the needs of the students involved (Wolery & Odom, 2000).

Individualized Education Programs

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for each student should provide services that are needed for that individual child. Each child is different and will need different services or supports to help them achieve their individual goals. Classroom rosters need to be balanced in order for each child to receive appropriate services according to their IEP. Inclusive classrooms should reflect the larger society in which we live and have a heterogeneous mix of students who perform at different levels, have unique talents, and can learn together. To ensure a proper balance of students, approximately 10 to 20% of students may have special needs, 10 to 20% may be high-performing, and 60 to 70% should be students who are considered “typical” (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Changes in IEP’s and classroom rosters need to be made as needed.

Professional Development

Programs need to provide staff with ongoing professional development along with implementation support (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). This will

help programs and schools to provide optimal services for all students (Wolery & Odom, 2000). Staff should be given diverse and specialized professional development options so they can choose training that best fits their individual needs. “Service providers need to have knowledge in many areas related to inclusion, and they must apply their knowledge to their particular setting” (Wolery & Odom, 2000, p. 77). Professional development options should be well-planned and provide strong models of inclusion, supervised practice, classroom coaching, time to reflect, and problem solving support (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). There are a variety of ways to provide professional development. Wolery and Odom (2000) suggested that programs should have two or three goals each year that are easily measured and evaluated regularly. Professional development options can be provided during in-service activities. Wolery and Odom (2000) indicated that options that are the most likely to result in change of practice are live observations, small-group discussions, demonstrations or modeling, on-the-job follow-up assistance, and video-taping of trainee implementing a practice. Training programs need to be critically evaluated for their effectiveness in preparing professionals to work with children with special needs in the most productive ways. The basic goal of professional development should be for participants to acquire new knowledge and apply it to their practice so that all services are improved (Wolery, Odom, 2000).

Planning Time

Schools and programs need to provide teachers time each week to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students when using the inclusion model. Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, and Williams (2000, p. 124) stated that, “one of the most critical components in successful collaboration is regularly scheduled time for partner.” Teachers should have at least one hour of uninterrupted time each week to share information, monitor student progress, solve individual

and group problems, plan lessons, and develop interventions. Collaborative planning time in schools is often during time that students are at specials such as art, library, physical education, computer lab, and any other special classes schools may provide (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Some schools arrange these times into larger blocks of 45 minutes to provide staff with longer planning and preparation times. Other schools set aside one day each week for specialists to test, plan, and consult with other teachers and parents. Collaborative planning time also allows teachers to broaden their knowledge and skills while increasing support for students.

Inclusion in education can be successful when used using these recommendations. All children and professionals can have advantages when including children with disabilities into the general education classroom. Schools and programs need to ensure that everyone involved in inclusion has the drive to make it work through constant collaboration. Education will continue to change as will best practices for inclusive education. As long as professionals are willing to change and have the proper resources, all children will be successful in their inclusive setting.

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