DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 663 EC 305 687

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TITLE Inclusion: What It Is and How It Works Best.
INSTITUTION Fort Hays State Univ., Kans.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Learning; Cultural Differences; Definitions; Delivery Systems; *Disabilities; *Educational Principles; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Inservice Teacher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Mainstreaming; Program Effectiveness; Recordkeeping; Regular and Special Education Relationship; Student Placement; *Teacher Collaboration; Teaching Models; *Team Teaching; Technical Assistance

ABSTRACT

Inclusion is a way of providing a normalized educational experience for all children with disabilities. Educators differ, however, on the meaning of inclusion, from full-inclusion advocates to those who assert "inclusive" means that learning needs are met in a range of service delivery contexts. Three components of inclusionary schooling that are identified include support networking, collaborative consultation and teaming, and cooperative learning. Research and experience have also identified specific organizational, procedural, and instructional elements of responsible inclusion. Organizational elements include a democratic school philosophy, availability of technical assistance to faculty and staff, adequate resources, and safeguards for nondisabled students. Procedural elements include on-going deliberate planning, systematic documentation of students' instruction and progress, knowledgeable multidisciplinary teams, encouragement of regular class teacher participation, and gradual introduction of the student into the regular classroom. Finally, instructional elements include teaching teachers to analyze curricular skill requirements and learner strengths and needs, to use collaboration skills and a variety of instructional models. According to the literature review, also important for successful inclusion is consideration of the student's cultural affiliation and self-identification. Contains 15 references. (DB)

INCLUSION: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS BEST

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Inclusion is a way of providing a normalized educational experience for all children with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) is the legislation which mandates this approach to educating children with disabilities and is based on the philosophy of *normalization*, which was originally enacted in Scandinavia and Canada, and adopted in the United States in the 1960's and early 1970's (Waldron, 1996). Normalization is the belief that all individuals with disabilities should be provided the opportunity to live as normally as possible in daily society and be full participants in social, educational, and vocational settings (Wolfensberger, 1971). One outcome of the normalization philosophy within IDEA has been the concept of the *least restrictive environment*, which emphasizes the placement of students with disabilities within the most normalized version of the regular education setting that the student is able to experience success and to do this to the greatest extent possible.

The Problems of Inclusion:

The least restrictive environment emphasis found within IDEA has provided the conceptual framework for the movement toward an inclusive educational system. However, individuals differ widely in practical interpretation of the meaning of ***"inclusive"*** (O'Neil, 1994/1995). Polarization of positions regarding interpretation of this concept has occurred.

Some maintain that "*inclusive*" means nothing less than *full-inclusion*. Full-inclusion advocates suggest that children with disabilities, regardless of type or severity, should be educated in general education classrooms at all times and that essentially no separate educational delivery channels should be maintained outside of the regular classroom environment (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1990). Proponents of this view feel that anything short of full integration is relegation to second-class status and creates "*learned helplessness*" in a world that is often not tolerant of individual differences. They advocate adjustment of the environment to the student's needs and not the adjustment of the student to the needs of the institution (O'Neil, 1994/1995).

Some educators take an opposite stance that full inclusion is not always appropriate, especially for those students displaying severe or profound levels of disabling conditions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994/1995; Shanker, 1994/1995). The "*rush*" to full inclusion has been noticed by this group to be the delusional educational equivalent of a"*one size fits all*" approach, which is perceived by them to be frequently ill-conceived and implemented by service providers that are inadequately trained or prepared for the tasks and challenges that await them in this pursuit. Both nondisabled and disabled students are noticed to be poorly served, as are their parents and often frustrated service providers (Shanker, 1994/1995).

Other educators take a more moderate stance and assert that "*inclusive*" means that the learning needs of children with disabilities may be best met in a range of educational service delivery contexts. Among proponents of this interpretation the regular classroom environment serves as but one option, being the final and ultimately least restrictive selection in a continuum of increasingly more restrictive instructional settings, *i.e.*, resource room

class, self-contained class, etc.. The restriction of the instructional setting is primarily found to be due to less involvement with nondisabled students and minimized integration into a *"real world,"* which will contain these nondisabled peers.

Toward Inclusionary Practice:

While debate continues over the extent to which full-inclusion should be required for all students with disabilities or whether a continuum of service delivery options should be maintained, few seriously question the benefits of a thoughtful inclusive educational system where all persons have the opportunity to learn together in an environment which encourages recognition and appreciation of the unique contribution each individual brings to the educational setting. The degree and level of inclusion within the regular education environment is a decision that is to be made on a case-by-case basis as mandated by current law by an individual multidisciplinary team charged with oversight of a student's academic program.

Characteristics of *"Best"* Inclusion Practice:

There are three interdependent practical components in inclusive schooling (Karagiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, 1996). The success or failure of any component of inclusionary practice is dependent on the extent to which the school, in general, and the regular education classroom, specifically, links itself with ongoing restructuring efforts that seek to provide each student with opportunities for success (O'Neil, 1994/1995). Inclusion is unlikely to work if the academic environment and/or the service providers do not support the concept of inclusion and actively work to make it succeed for each student.

The first component in inclusionary schooling practice is **support networking**, the organizational component, which involves coordination of teams and individuals who support each other and which are motivated by a committed school administration. The second component is **collaborative consultation and teaming**, the procedural component, which allows individuals with a variety of expertise to work together to plan and implement programs for learners with disabilities. The third component is **cooperative learning**, the instructional component, which refers to classroom learning strategies and techniques which allow students of varying abilities to achieve to their potential.

Based on research findings and the cumulative experience of schools and teachers who have attempted to create inclusive educational environments for all students, both with and without disabilities, a number of principles, strategies, and practices seem to optimize inclusive learning experiences and environments. These may be categorized as organizational, procedural, and instructional components of successful, responsible inclusion.

Organizational:

1. The school administration must guide the school and its faculty and staff toward developing a school philosophy based on the democratic, egalitarian principles of inclusion and provide strong leadership to ensure that decisions are made consistent with the school's philosophy. "*To lead an inclusive school requires a personal belief that all children can learn and a commitment to providing all children equal access to a rich core curriculum and quality instruction*" (Servatius, Fellows, & Kelly, 1992).
2. The school administration must develop comprehensive technical assistance for faculty and staff including access to resource professionals, both within and outside

the school district, such as a designated person or team to serve as an inclusion support facilitator or facilitator group. In addition, the administration's role is one of:

- Providing leadership in developing an accessible library of resource materials.
- Providing an ongoing plan of in-service programming.
- Providing regular opportunities for educators to plan together and share expertise within and across school boundaries.
- Supporting a mentorship program for new or inexperienced faculty and staff.
- Supporting any service provider who finds that the challenges presented by some student are outside of his/her level of ability.

3. The school administration must allocate resources which reflect a recognition that successful inclusion is best supported by small class size and additional teaching assistants.

4. Safeguards need to be implemented to monitor and protect against detrimental effects on the academic and developmental progress of nondisabled students (Staub & Peck, 1994/1995).

Procedural:

1. There must be a deliberate planning process that is on-going - not an isolated, annual, or semiannual event. Teams need to meet on a routine and regular basis so that a student's supports and educational modifications can be continually monitored in a proactive way (Schaffner & Buswell, 1996).

2. Multidisciplinary teams must be prepared to require of themselves, systematic documentation that students have received quality, direct instruction, relevant to the student's learning needs, and active monitoring of progress.

3. Multidisciplinary team members must possess and continue to develop the professional knowledge, teaching skills, and collaboration expertise to act as a resource to faculty and staff. Areas of importance include information about assessment, learning strengths and needs, learning styles, remedial and compensatory strategies, alternate activities, and ways to modify curricular content.

4. Initially, regular education teachers should be allowed to choose to participate in inclusive classrooms and self-select the level of their involvement. Administration should be actively involved by providing incentives and reinforcement to those working in inclusive educational settings.

5. Gradual reintroduction into the regular class environment when the student's academic skills and behavior approach the desired level is typically better than *"total immersion"* (Barry, 1994/1995). A *"pull-in"* program of joint meetings of classes or student groups based on collaboration between special education and regular education teachers enhances and optimizes the chances of individual student success since the student is not *"abandoned."* This approach also allows monitoring of problems between individual students, monitoring for a mismatch between instructional styles and student learning styles, and adaptations that may be necessary or beneficial to promote success within the regular education class.

Instructional:

1. Teachers must, in collaboration with others, be able to task analyze curricular skill requirements and learner strengths and needs. This includes:

   - Delineating learning abilities and those enabling skills which the

student needs to perform given school-related tasks.

- Clearly describing learning tasks being engaged in by students in behavioral terms, *i.e.*, terms that are readily observable, measurable, and quantifiable by all service providers.
- Listing and sequencing the skills that the student must demonstrate to meet objectives.
- Assessing informally and in an ongoing manner to determine which skills the student possesses and the mastery level attained.
- Teaching sequential skills in the hierarchy.

2. Teachers must possess the interpersonal skills and inherent willingness to collaborate with other professionals to make inclusion work.

3. Teachers must be knowledgeable of needed curricular adaptations and proficient at modifications of daily activities which allow sustained inclusion.

4. Teachers must be able to monitor and direct a variety of tasks and events occurring simultaneously in the same classroom.

5. Teachers must be able to use and maximize the effectiveness of a variety of instructional models including direct instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and co-teaching.

In addition to important organizational, procedural, and instructional characteristics of schools and teachers which optimize the success of inclusive schools; critical student characteristics which support learning in an inclusive classroom include:

- Attention to task
- Skill in understanding and using spoken language
- Accomplishment of basic skills in reading, written language, and math
- Study and organizational skills
- Appropriate social behaviors
- Personal interest level and motivation to be successful in the regular education classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992).

An aspect of each student, whether disabled or nondisabled, that cannot be overlooked is his/her cultural affiliation and self-identification. Featherstone (1975) observed over two decades ago that "schools that carelessly mislabel poor children are very likely to mislabel middle-class children as dyslexic or hyperkinetic" (p. 14). This change in paradigms would result in the current move toward multicultural assessments, which are impacted by numerous factors, *e.g.*, level of identification, pigmentation, language, etc. Recently there is a growing awareness that apart from cognitive disabilities what may be perceived by educational service providers as symptomatic and indicative of an affective or behavior disability may actually be better explained and understood as a variance between the values of the institution, *i.e.*, the school and/or the dominant culture of the community, and the values expressed and practiced within the student's home (Peterson & Ishii-Jordan, 1994).

At the school level, goals which should be discussed in order to provide coordinated support for culturally and linguistically diverse students include:

- The development of a culture in the school of a "learning community";
- The incorporation of current best practices as described in the effective schools and inclusion literature, with specific attention to the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic characteristics and relative instructional needs of the students;
- Support for and emphasis on the prevention of serious learning problems and disabilities via curricular adaptation, improved classroom management, and the use of alternative assessment procedures; and
- Shared responsibility for all students (Baca, Valenzuela, and Garcia, 1996).

Conclusion:

Inclusive schooling is based on the philosophy that everyone, regardless of talent, disability, socioeconomic background, and/or cultural origin, can be educated in supportive

mainstream schools and classrooms where all student needs are potentially met. Making this philosophy work for individual children with unique learning strengths and needs is a challenging one which can be accomplished if optimal organizational, procedural, and instructional components are in place and if documented student progress remains the first priority in evaluating the nature and extent of implementing the ideal of inclusive education (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

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