INCLUSION: WHO REALLY BENEFITS?

Dylinda Wilson-Younger

Alcorn State University
November 18, 2009

Abstract

Since the reauthorization of 2003, schools across the nation are mandated to educate students within the regular educational environment. What impact does this merger have on students and teachers? Who really benefits from this merger of regular education and special education? This article discusses the attitudes of general education teachers towards the inclusive mandates required under the reauthorization of 2003. It also describes best practices for helping general education teachers help all students to achieve in an inclusive environment.

INCLUSION-WHO REALLY BENEFITS?

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of disabled students into the regular classroom has increased dramatically due to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), and the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2003. No longer are students mandated to remain in isolation. They have now received the approval from the federal government that mandates that they be included in the regular classroom environment. This involvement within the regular educational environment has been appropriately named “Inclusion”. Monahan and Marino (2000) defined inclusion as the extent in which children with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers. The Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) ,the Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-476), and IDEA (2003) mandate that every student with special needs be provided with a wealth of services through inclusion. The increased usage of inclusion can be attributed to current school reform efforts in regular education and administration. Although debates continue to focus on the extent to which children with disabilities should be educated in the general classroom there appears to be a general assumption that inclusion is a positive intervention for students with and without disabilities (Stockall & Gartin, 2002). It is often championed as a means to remove barriers, improve outcomes and remove discrimination (Lindsay, 2003).

Although the idea of inclusion has many positive advantages for students, it poses significant challenges for school personnel. When regular education teachers have not received the formal training required to work with special needs students in an inclusive setting they often feel overwhelmed and abandoned by the administration.

Studies by Larrivee and Cook (1979) have indicated that teachers generally hold negative attitudes toward inclusion. Teachers reported that disabled students placed in the regular classroom were often disobedient, restless, physically aggressive, poor listeners, had difficulty concentrating, were bullies and defied authority figures (Poulou & Norwich, 2000). These behaviors often resulted in a fragmented approach to the delivery of educational services. Additionally, general educators claim that much of their discourse with inclusion stems from a lack of support from the administrators and the special education personnel. Teachers, according to Scruggs and Mastropieri (as cited in McNally, Cole, & Waugh, 2001), claim that support in the form of specialist teachers, aides, para-professionals and volunteers were not available to support inclusive students.

Also, the lack of time, space, and personnel has caused negative attitudes toward inclusion to change very little. Research, conducted by Weisel and Tur-Kaspa (2002), emphasize that the success of inclusion depends considerably on the teachers' and administrators' positive attitudes. Coleman (1972) defined attitudes as an individual's tendency to positively or negatively respond toward an object, person, institution, or any distinct aspect in one's life. Previous research has suggested that teachers' and administrators' attitudes are crucial to the success of inclusion.

Monahan and Marino (2000) reported that full inclusion and student success involves positive attitudes by teachers and administrators. However, early studies proved that these attitudes were not always positive. This was mainly due to their apprehension about the quality of the academic work that children with disabilities could produce. They also expressed a number of other fears, including concerns about their own levels of preparation for inclusion and the amount of individualized time children with learning disabilities required. Educators generally agreed that in order to change the negative attitudes associated with inclusion, the training and retraining of regular class teachers and administrators should be given top priority.

Lieberman (1985) asserted that a decent working description of the difference between regular and special education is that in regular education, the system dictates the curriculum: in special education, the child dictates the curriculum. Stephens and Braun (1980) conducted a study to measure regular classroom teachers' attitudes toward handicapped children. The study concluded that primary and middle grade teachers were more willing to integrate handicapped students than were teachers of grades seven and eight. Teachers who had taken courses in special education were more willing to accept handicapped students into their classes, than were those who had not taken such courses.

Blazovic (1972) surveyed 247 regular classroom teachers concerning their attitudes about educating disabled students. He found that regular education teachers perceived greater social and vocational benefits to special classes than to regular classes. In contrast to Blazovic's study, DeLeo (1976) surveyed 227 regular classroom teachers and administrators to determine differences in the perception of disabled students in the regular classroom. DeLeo concluded that administrators were more perceptive of the inclusion of disabled students into regular classroom than general education teachers.

Another study conducted by Vacc and Kirst (1977) included a sample of 102 randomly selected regular classroom teachers. Teachers in this western New York district also agreed with Blazovic's earlier study. They believed that students with disabilities should be placed in special classes away from the regular classroom. Their perception was that the placement of disabled students into a regular classroom would have a negative effect on non-disabled students. Teachers in this study also believed that regular education teachers should have taken a class in special education before students were placed in their classes.

Brophy and Good (1970) concluded that teachers had a higher expectation for non-disabled students than they did for students with disabilities. They also found that higher expectation and teacher encouragement contributed to higher student achievement in non-disabled students and produced greater student results. However, Shotel, Iano, and McGettigan (1972) asserted that negative educator attitudes were often based upon the preconceived notions of disabled students being significantly different than their non-disabled peers.

According to Johnson (1976) general education teachers reported that they have not been adequately trained to teach disabled students. Vacc and Kirst (1977) concurred with Johnson's earlier study. Vacc and Kirst's study examined the attitudes of regular education teachers toward emotionally disturbed students in the regular classroom. Ninety-one percent of the regular classroom teachers, who participated in the study, believed students with emotional disturbances should be educated in separate classes.

Gaad & Khan (2007), suggested that general education teachers should incorporate workshops and training sessions that address the needs of special needs students within the regular educational environment. Teachers should also modify their instruction so that individual learning styles are incorporated into the curriculum.

The benefit of including special needs students into the general educational environment far outweighs the negatives. The Center on Human Policy (2009), lists several advantages of an inclusive classroom. The advantages to the student are: They become part of the community, peers serve as role models, and peers provide a reason to communicate. Special needs students also acquire motor skills, communication & other skills within a natural setting.

REFERENCES

Brophy, J. E. & Good, J. L. (1970). Teachers' communication of differential exceptations for children's classroom performance. Journal of Educational Psychology, 61, pp. 365-374.

Coleman, J. C. (1972). Abonormal psychology and modern life Fourth Edition Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Mass: Allyn and Bacon.

DeLoe, R. (1976). The attitudes of public school administrators and teachers toward the integration of children with special needs into regular education programs.

Dissertation Abstract International, 37, p. 915.

Larrives, B., & Cook, L. (1979). Mainstreaming: A Study of the variables affecting

teacher attitudes. *Journal of Special Education. 13*(3), 315-324.

Lieberman, L. (1985). Special education and regular education: A merger made in heaven?

Exceptional Children, 51, 513-516.

Lindsay, G. (2003). Inclusive education: A critical perspective. *British Journal of Special*

Education 30(1).

Marino, S., Miller, R., & Monahan (2000). Teacher attitudes toward inclusion: Implications for education in schools 2000. *Education, 117*(2).

Poulou, M., & Norwich, B. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties: severity and prevalence. *European Journal of Special Needs Education 15*(2), 171-187.

Scruggs, T., & Mastropeiri, M. (1996). Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion. Exceptional Children, 63, (1), 59-72.

Stockall, N., & Gartin, B. (2002). The nature of inclusion in a blue ribbon school: A revelatory case. *Exceptionality, 10*(3), 171-188.

Vacc, N. & Kirst, N. (1977). Emotionally disturbed children and regular class teachers. The Elementary School Journal, 77, 309-317.

Weisel, A., & Tur-Kaspa, H. (2002). Effects of labels and personal contact on teachers' attitudes toward students with special needs. *Exceptionality, 10*(1), 1-10.