

Document Resume

Title: **The Inclusive Classroom: How Inclusive is Inclusion?**

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Abstract

This paper presents the position that inclusion is limited; inclusion does not go far enough. The inclusive classroom has been assessed to be of benefit both to the teacher and student. There are, however, limits set on inclusion. In most classrooms only children with learning disability are included omitting those with severe disabilities, children of low socio-economic status and various ethnic background. A fully inclusive educational setting requires planning, trained teachers, and other supporting staff. Such an inclusive classroom is challenging but has the possibility of being effective.

Introduction

It is important to support the right of each child to play and learn in an inclusive environment that meets the needs of children with and without disabilities. Each child's culture, language, ethnicity and family structure are to be recognized and valued in the program (Copple, 2006).

My first experience in school, as a child, began in a school system where I was not exposed to discrimination and or bias. I was introduced to diversity, inclusion and equality in education. This was an environment which was safe, friendly and enhanced learning. I had the opportunity of being in classrooms with a diverse population. My classmates included children who had learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and children of varied socio-economic status as well as children from different ethnic backgrounds. Although my classrooms were not called inclusive, they were inclusive. Inclusion was not limited to including children with learning disabilities into the main stream.

History of Inclusion

Historically, the inclusive school movement grew out of a parent-initiated effort that focused on the rights of children with disabilities to participate with their non-disabled peers. Educators supported the parents in their belief 'that separating children on any characteristic,

such as ability or race inherently leads to an inferior education for those, who are “tracked” out of the mainstream’ (Soodak, Autumn 2003, p. 328). The research shows that if the children are only allowed part-time involvement in targeted subject areas based on their readiness to participate, the result would not be favorable. The decision was then made for commitment for full-time membership in age-appropriate, general education classes. In the 1970’s, inclusion was used as a practice for educating children with and without disabilities. This has its genesis in many of the early intervention pioneer programs. One of these programs is the Peabody Group which was headed by William and Diane Bricker. The program was called developmental integration and included both children with and without disabilities (Brennan, July, 2005).

Inclusion began in part because of the lack of success achieved by children with disabilities when they were placed in ability groups and kept in these groups for long periods of time. They had little opportunity to interact with children who were moving at a faster pace academically. Inclusion is not intended to return children with disabilities to general education classrooms where they will be grouped with other children with similar instructional needs for most or all of the day (McLesky, 2000). The aim of inclusive education is to include all children in regular classrooms regardless of their abilities or their inabilities. This move is supported by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which requires that all early childhood programs make reasonable accommodation to provide access for children with disabilities or developmental delays. This legal right reflects the growing consensus that young children with disabilities are best served in the same community settings where their typically developing peers are found (Copple, 2006). Teachers should know who these children are so that they are not missed or overlooked. No longer should these children be locked away and kept out of sight.

Experiencing Inclusion

My second experience with the inclusive classroom was when I did field work which was required for fulfillment of a particular course in college. The children who were included had learning disabilities. Some were not in the class for the full day but spent half the day in the regular classroom then were returned to their original classroom. I frequently ask myself, “Who chooses those who are to be included and who excludes those who are not included?” The Americans with Disabilities Act makes it clear that all groups should be included. However, one problem with inclusive education has proven to be that there is not a consistent idea of what conditions should be included. Inclusion is often discussed as “special” education students with behavior problems or lower academic abilities, mainstreamed in the regular classroom (Beauchamp, 1995). However, it is apparent that inclusive education has a different meaning to various individuals. The debate comes in different forms; sometimes it’s theoretical, philosophical, practical and other times, very emotional. Those who are advocates for inclusive education are more concerned about the role of education as opposed to whether or not to include people. The question being debated is, “Should education be seen as a social mission, or, should the role of education be seen as an academic mission. Many educators have classified this as a social justice issue. They have concluded that the “separate” education of “special” education students is not only unequal but is also detrimental to the development of all students (Beauchamp, 1995).

Teachers must be cognizant of the fact that this limited definition of inclusion is unacceptable. It is a teacher’s responsibility to provide care and education in settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each child. Teachers must be committed to supporting children’s development and learning; respecting individual differences; and helping

children to live, play and work cooperatively. They must promote children's self-awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency and physical well being (Reyes, 2008). Teachers can only fulfill this most essential role in the absence of exclusion.

When I went to primary school, the teacher takes whoever comes to school. The children were equally as valuable but not equally as skilled or able at schooling. To the teacher this meant that instruction should be different. There may be students in the class who could read and other in the same class what could not read at all. These teachers were not familiar with the formal discourse on inclusive or peer tutoring. Yet they would organize students in groups so that a child with high ability could help a child whose ability was not as high. It is unfortunate that today classes are being organized according to ability and children who are doing well are group together and then ones who are not doing well are grouped together.

The lower ability group is usually joined by a group of students who are unremarkable for their skills or abilities. These children had behavior problems. Instead of inclusion, in which students will have the opportunity to experience positive interaction with peers they are isolated and condemned to a classroom of students in their same ability group. Research shows that teachers are also tracked. Some work with high ability group; others work with low ability groups. This results in what is called homogeneous grouping. The research has also shown low ability students are treated as low deserving students. They are given the last preferred teachers – often teachers teach inside their own subject area. They are also subjected to the lowest standards for achievement and behavior. The children react accordingly. They stay in school the lowest number of years. They frequently skip school when they should be in classes (Beauchamp, 1995).

Teachers should not accept this as the fate of children. Teachers, have an ethical responsibility to make certain that no harm comes to children. When a system does not do what is best for its children, it is harming them. If teachers do nothing about it, they become the enablers and are just as responsible. They have failed the children. The effective teacher must be an advocate for children.

Codell recounts a conversation with her principal when she was teaching for the very first time. “I’m sick of what kids get away with at this school,” she said. “The kids are maniacs!” “Don’t let the parents hear you say that,” said the principal. “I don’t come to work to be called derogatory names,” she said. “Isn’t it a part of your job to see that teachers aren’t subjected to such behavior?” “Is it my job to spend all day disciplining so the children who want to learn can have a fighting chance?” The principal replied, “You don’t understand. They’re black.” “So I shouldn’t expect them to learn?” she responded. “It’s just the way black people are. The black child is different,” he said (Codell, 2009). The children become the victim if the teacher doesn’t reach out and help.

There are various outside factors which affect the ability of children to learn. However, teachers need to understand that the family and society continue to put the responsibility for creating well-rounded individuals on the school. The society expects miracles from schools and teachers while simultaneously blaming them for all sorts of wrong doings. It is important to note that teachers are not the only influence on the academic or social success of students. Research indicates that there are many other factors at play such as television, home videos, single parent families and poverty (Beauchamp, 1995).

Recently the Rhode Island News (February 24, 2010) carried the headline “Every Central Falls Teacher Fired: Labor Outraged.” The article indicates that 93 staff members were fired.

This number included 74 classroom teachers, the principal, 3 assistant principals and the school psychologist. The Department of Education secretary, Arne Duncan, said, “When schools continue to struggle we have a collective obligation to take action.” He now requires states to identify their lowest 5% of schools, those with chronically poor performance and graduation rates. He also said that children only have one chance for education (Jordan, 2010). It is sad that there are many who were robbed of that one chance. The article, however, did not mention what steps were taken for improvement prior to the dismissal of the entire staff. Could it be that the school was seen as low ability and low deserving? Schools found in poor neighborhoods are often seen as low deserving. It is not known what kinds of classroom structure they had. However, an integrated curriculum in an inclusive classroom requires total teacher involvement as well as the teacher knowing the children as individuals. Hence, this strategy enhances learning, promotes excellence and improves morale.

Teachers’ Responsibilities and Preparation

There is a compelling need for departments of education, school districts and colleges and universities to provide pre-service and in-service training for educators. Educators need this kind of training so as to work effectively with children of varied abilities and disabilities (Malloy, 1994).

Special education certification is mandatory, it prohibits the common practice of exposing special education students to a number of teachers who were not trained or who have been unsuccessful in general education. It is unfortunate that the ratification requirement is geared towards the unpopular model of self-contained special services. More consideration needs to be given to revising certification requirements to encompass the trend toward increase the number of children served in general education classes. Due to the 1975 federal regulation and

state mandates, presently 95% of identified students with disabilities receive at least a portion of their education in general education settings. Hence, more educators need to be trained to work in an inclusive setting (Malloy, 1994).

Sometimes educators are faced with challenging behaviors in these settings which sometimes lead to frustration and need to be empowered to address challenging behaviors. The research shows that “the process for problem solving situations, developing supports, and building positive relationships is the same for any student with or without labels and whether or not they present intensive behavior challenges.” However, the educator understands that the specific nature of the supports will vary from student to student based upon their individual needs (Topper, January, 1994).

The teaching style of the teacher will impact the effect created by the limits set. It has been found that a teaching style which is predominantly democratic is most effective in addressing challenging behaviors. This style allows for the student to experience freedom within limits (Topper, January, 1994).

The ability of the teacher to promote social competence in an inclusive setting is of utmost importance for a productive successful life. Vygotsky highlights the importance of social interactions of overall cognitive development and viewed learning as a social process. The record has shown that children with social skills are resilient. On the other hand children who are deficient in social skills are likely to be delinquent, drop out of school, and abuse substances. Social skills deficient in children are also considered to be the single best predictor of mental health problem in adulthood (Mccay, Winter, 2001/02).

Most children are able to perceive a teacher’s negative or uneasy feelings about differences, whether of language, skin color, cultural mannerisms or disabilities. The teacher’s

unconditional acceptance of all the children in the class has an essential role to play in the development of the children's social competence. They can model respectful interactions by their actions, words, nonverbal gestures, and tone of voice. The teachers must be able to examine their own feelings about having children with special needs in the class. It is important for them to learn about the specific disabilities represented in their classrooms. The information can be obtained from the parents, reference books or the children themselves.

The children need the ability to successfully and appropriately select and carry out their own interpersonal goals. They will need to focus on the areas of independence assertiveness, social sensitivity, friendship building and social problem solving. Independence helps children learn to direct their own activities, make decisions, and follow through on their own plans. According to Erickson, "Children in the early elementary years need to be given opportunities to accomplish tasks on their own in order to develop a sense of 'industry verses inferiority'". Independence must be balanced by social sensitivity.

Assertiveness skills are some of the most essential yet difficult social skills to teach. Children see aggressive confrontations regularly for example in the movies as well as in everyday life. Owing to this, they sometimes have difficulty comprehending the difference between appropriate assertiveness and aggressive violence. The result of this confusion is seen in tragic incidents such as children being involved with guns. The story was told of a 6 year old child in a Detroit suburb who brought a gun to school to settle an argument with a classmate. Social sensitivity helps children to learn how to interpret and understand the needs and feelings of other people and develop respectful behavior toward them. Friendship building is a major part of social competence and a concern of children throughout childhood. They want to know that their peers like and respect them (McCay, Winter, 2001/02).

Educators should have a good strategy or good teaching practice based on the needs of the children. Inclusion planning becomes more structured as the needs of their children change. Teaching should have a foundation in real learning that is based on contextualization or authentic examples. Since reading, writing, listening, and speaking define 90 % of special education programs, it is advised to let Spanish speakers take risk in English. The teaching should incorporate instances where all students are included in this lesson. The teacher should allow for longer wait response times from the special needs child. The child may be allowed up to 40 seconds to respond to higher-level questions in order to accommodate his or her processing needs. Extra classroom time would also be given to complete assignments. The expectation of the child's performance is not diminished. However, modifications were done so that learning would take place. If the child is bilingual, the teacher would pair him or her with a bilingual child who has better English skills and could assist the child when needed. The teacher should use several inert language strategies such as reiterating information and checking for vocabulary understanding. This will serve to reinforce language comprehension, maintain on task behavior, and learn English as a context subject. The classroom teacher should collaborate with teachers and discuss the progress of the children in the inclusive setting (Miller, Summer, 2000).

If inclusion must be more than a passing trend, there must be planning and preparation, appropriate communication, training, and inservicing of educational staff, and a significant commitment by the administrator to support the inclusive classroom. The IDEA requires children to receive the best service in a least restrictive environment. However, when teachers do not feel positive about children with special needs; when general education teachers and special educators have not been involved in how services are to be delivered; when they have not been

adequately prepared, this results in a less appropriate education with a more restrictive environment.

When teachers and other staff are not provided the skills to implement inclusion successfully, one should anticipate frustration and resentment by teacher and staff toward the inclusion model. There may also be resentment toward the included student. If training and inservice is not provided to meet the needs of students included in the general education classroom, one should expect that inclusion will be less successful than if appropriate preparation and inservice are done (Miller, Summer, 2000). In a research study on how teachers perceive a successful inclusion, (Dlugosh and Smith, 1999) the researcher notes that training, class load, support and time are essential to success. Some teachers state emphatically that their undergraduate training did “nothing” to prepare them for inclusion. One teacher with a Master’s in early childhood felt that graduate training helped with inclusion. However, they all agreed that inservice training gave them the necessary preparation for inclusion (Dlugosh, April ,1999).

If each student is a child with a special need there is a greater need for all teachers to be prepared to work in an inclusive setting because all classrooms would be an inclusive setting.

Traditionally, special education has always been credited with the knowledge and understandings of teaching and learning practices that can enable even students who have learning difficulties to learn. Their curriculum is usually taught at a simpler level. All students including students with learning difficulties have a need to learn more about the world around them and attain knowledge about the content areas that have been traditionally watered down in special education classrooms such as mathematics and science. Educators must emphasize teaching excellence and a commitment to the idea when students with special needs are included in the regular classroom (Vaidya, Summer, 1997).

The research (Vaidya, 1997) indicates that general education teachers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs especially those with learning disabilities. In other instances, preservice student teachers have indicated that they have “felt scared “at the thought of having students with disabilities in their classes. However, education in the form of course work for preservice teachers (PST) that enables students to understand disabilities can result in substantial changes. There must be commitment to ongoing teacher education so that educators can meet the challenges of inclusive classroom (Vaidya, Summer,1997).

Teachers must understand the most common types of learning and physical disabilities and the typical symptoms of manifestation. They must also understand that there are individual differences among students with learning disabilities. One student with attention deficit disorder may be a student with average ability, while another student may be a gifted student with high intelligence. The types of curricular and instructional adaptations for these students are likely to vary because the gifted student also needs challenge. The teachers must understand how to implement inclusive practices, by teaching techniques such as hands-on activities, group work, and computer based learning for all students. They must also understand the process of collaboration and team teaching with other teachers (Vaidya, Summer,1997).

The teacher’s job is not an easy task. The teacher will observe that there are student differences but must know what to do about the differences that will help students to become learners. It is important for the teacher to know the length of time that students are able to stay focused on a task. Since there are also differences in the time some children take to learn. Some students have differences outside of academic differences. Some children are taught at home the

ways which will help them fit in to public behavior. Others have very few social graces (Beauchamp, 1995).

The teacher can engage various methodologies to ensure that inclusion is successful. The following are some techniques which are implemented by teachers.(a) teach and support-one teacher teaches the lesson and the other lends support.(b) teach and compliment-one teacher teaches the content the other teaches a complimentary skill.(c)Speak, write and show- one teacher teaches content and the other teacher demonstrates.(d) Parallel teaching- one teaches subject content, one teaches parallel.(e) Station Teaching-Teachers teach different things at the different centers and the students rotate within the centers. These different teaching techniques will allow all children regardless of their learning styles to gain some benefits from the lessons taught (Familia-Garcia, 2001).

The Benefits of Inclusion

Proponents of inclusion have long maintained that one of the central benefits of inclusion for all students is the social integration of children with disabilities (Keyes, Winter 2001/02).

The critical features of inclusion are: The inclusive classroom setting is an integrated setting in which all children learn together. The inclusive classroom setting does not unduly label inclusive or identify students as special needs learners. The inclusive classroom maximizes educational benefit. The inclusive classroom minimizes the need for a separate curriculum (Miller, Summer 2000).

The benefit of the inclusion will only be experienced after the teachers are provided with the tools to include students successfully. The inclusion plan should specifically designate the level of inclusion on a scale from physical inclusion to full academic participation with peers. It should identify the amount of support from education staff, including paraprofessionals that will

be needed to maximize the opportunity of the student to be successful in the inclusive setting. If there is specificity in developing the plan there will be less chance of having disagreements about who is accountable and time or where in the classroom instruction will take place. The administrators must allow for teacher and paraprofessionals to meet, discuss, plan as well as modify instruction. Educators must be aware that planning requires time, effort and commitment. The inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classes provides an opportunity for teachers to identify classroom management policies and practices that promote diversity and community. Community-building management strategies that facilitate friendship, collaboration, parent involvement, and address challenging behaviors in a positive, practice manner are consistent with the goals of inclusive education (Soodak, Autumn 2003).

Inclusive school communities focus on social and academic outcomes for children. Friendships matter to the children, their parents and teachers because it provides the children with the opportunity to develop important skills and attitudes. They also enhance the quality of life for children and their families. We are aware of the benefits of having friends and the negative effects of being socially isolated. Many schools strive to foster friendship among children. Various strategies are used to promote friendship e.g. setting up classroom rules to encourage respect, such as requiring taking turns or not permitting any child to be excluded.

Inclusive schools seek to encourage collaboration among teacher for the purposes of planning, teaching and supporting students. The positive interaction among teachers and students contribute to a sense of classroom community (Soodak, Autumn 2003). The students' needs are carefully incorporated into the curriculum preparation. Non-traditional scheduling allows time for the faculty and cohort to be together for extended periods of time, thus creating a sense of community – a community of learners. The classroom seating is also designed to facilitate

learning and collaboration. Some teachers have expressed how they have developed just working with the inclusive area. The new teacher discovers new ideas and new ways of thinking and also learns new discipline by trying new teaching techniques (Collier, LoRe, & Phillips, March, 1998).

A principle goal of education is to prepare all students to be peaceable, moral and productive members of our community. Educators are cognizant of the fact that separate education will not connect students to a broad social perspective. It has been observed that many students of various exceptionalities are socially disadvantaged because of bias and negative peer attitudes that comes with labeling. If learning implies defectiveness perhaps proponents of separate education need to assess the ramification of the negative stereotyping. It is extremely important for children to have the opportunity to develop in an environment that represents the world they will later live in. The inclusive setting mimics that world (Reganick, 1995).

Inclusive education gives students and staff learning and teaching opportunities that reflect the wide range of contributions by and roles open to people similar to and different from themselves. Inclusion covers all students including these with behavior problems, lower academic abilities and health conditions. Inclusion covers all students including these with behavior problems, low academic abilities and health conditions (Beauchamp, 1995). The research on the 'social effects of preschool inclusion' indicates that in pre-existing preschool inclusion programs that there are many long-term positive social behaviors that have roots in an early childhood inclusive experience. Researchers have looked at the relationship between involvement in inclusive classrooms and ideas about people with disabilities. They found out that the typically developing children's knowledge of disabilities, their overall acceptance of individuals without disabilities, and their participation in an inclusive class contributed

significantly and independently to their acceptance of children with disabilities (Brennan, July, 2005).

Preschool inclusion allows for an opportunity to learn social and developmental skills through modeling and imitation as well as setting to practice learned social skills with peers. It promotes the enhancement of self-worth for those students with special needs and increases the likelihood that general education students will choose their peers with disabilities as playmates. The inclusive preschool prepares both special education students and their typically developing peers for the inclusive settings that they will likely face throughout their primary and secondary education. It provides an opportunity for non-handicapped preschoolers to develop sensitivity to individual differences and overall acceptance of others. The teacher facilitates the social interactions and peer relationships and helps to promote an atmosphere of social acceptance and respect where children are valued for their individual talents (Brennan, July, 2005).

Who is included?

In any discussion about inclusion one should include questions such as: Do we value all children equally? What do we mean by inclusion? And are there some children for whom “inclusion” is inappropriate? Unfortunately, one educator views inclusion as “a policy driven by unrealistic expectation that many will be saved. He also argues that trying to force all students into the inclusion world is just as coercive and discriminating as trying to force all students into the world of a special education class or residential institution” (Schultz-Stout, 2007). It is important to consider the terminology used when discussing inclusion.

Mainstreaming refers to the selective placement of special education students in one or more “regular” education classes. Proponents of mainstreaming generally assume that a student must “earn” his or her opportunity to be placed in regular classes by demonstrating an ability to

“keep up” with the work assigned by the regular classroom teacher. This concept is closely linked to the traditional forms of special education service delivery. Inclusion is a term which expresses commitment to educating each child the best ways possible and appropriate in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise not attend. It invokes bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class rather than having to keep up with the other students. Proponents of inclusion generally favor newer forms of education service delivery (Schultz-Stout, 2007). Full inclusion means that all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, will be in a regular classroom program full time.

The federal laws which govern the education of children with disabilities require that a significant effort be made to find an inclusive placement. The laws did not specifically call for inclusion. However, the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet their unique needs would be in a regular classroom. In developing the Individual Education Program for a child with disabilities, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the IEP team to consider placement in the regular classroom as the starting point in determining the appropriate placement for the child. If the IEP team determines that the least restrictive environment appropriate for a particular child is not the regular education classroom for all or part of the IEP, the IEP team must include an explanation in the IEP as to why the regular education classroom is not appropriate (Schultz-Stout, 2007).

A case study on early childhood teachers’ perception of successful inclusion suggests that some teachers believe that children who are in an inclusive setting are not just students with a special education diagnosis or label. The teachers makes comments such as “we all have special needs” and “there’s not a child in our classroom who is not at risk,” indicating a conviction that

while the focus was on children who are identified as having special needs, the teachers considered that any student who has demonstrated a particular need – behaviorally, emotionally, educationally or physically as a student with special needs even though a special education label has not been assigned (Dlugosh, April , 1999).

Health conditions must be considered when discussing the inclusion of all students into the regular classroom. These include some health conditions such as Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis, sickle cell anemia, asthma, and cystic fibrosis; infections conditions such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), hepatitis B, and cytomegalovirus and conditions in which cases the child to be fragile such as child in final stages of AIDS, leukemia, renal failure. They also include body and stem deformities such as amputation, craniofacial conditions, bones, conditions that require the assistance of technology such as ventilators, gastrostomy tubes, tracheotomy tubes, and catheterization tubes and neurological conditions such as seizure disorders meningitis, and brain tumors (Beauchamp, 1995).

The necessary training and preparation must be made because the inclusion of these children will impact the community of learners and the school community. The school will need to discuss health care, emergency plans, how teachers and paraprofessional will communicate, how their curriculum will be shaped, how they can deal with school absences and how transition into a regular classroom should be accomplished.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in a policy statement declared that CEC believes children, youth, and young adults with disabilities should be served whenever possible in general education classrooms in inclusive settings. Inclusion involves services in the general education classroom with the educational, supports provided to ensure student learning and success. An important point to note is that one of the tenets of the inclusion movement has been

the “zero rejection” philosophy. This philosophy informs that no student would be deemed too disabled and no disability classification deemed to severe, not to be included in general classrooms (Miller, Summer 2000).

Voices of the Excluded

Research (Harris, Miske, & Attig, 2000) has shown that inclusive does mean including children with disabilities in general classroom. Although it implies the inclusion of children who have difficulties in seeing, hearing and those who are unable to walk, to a great extent it is limited to the children who are learning disabled. However, inclusive means all the children who are left out or excluded from school. These children may not speak the language of the classroom are at risk of dropping out because they are sick, hungry or not achieving well. They may be children who are affected by HIV/AIDS or children who should be in school but have paying jobs to help their families to survive. Inclusive means that as teachers, we have the responsibility to seek out all available support from school authorities, the community, families, children, educational institutions, health services as well as community teachers to help all children to learn (Harris, Miske, & Attig, 2000).

When we have found these children, we must look at the child first before the special need. All children must have the opportunity to grow in self-identity and self-esteem. Each child in the class must be valuable first and foremost as a special unique person and as a member of the classroom community. The diversity which we value and encourage our children to become comfortable with, includes families that live differently, people who look different from each other, and people who speak a variety of languages or dialects. The richness of diversity also includes people who move about differently, people who think in differently and children who grow at different rates.

It is apparent that diversity however does not include poor children and or poor black or Latino children. Inclusion is reaching its arms out in an attempt to accommodate those children who have more than just a mild disability. Yet the arms of inclusion are not long or wide enough to embrace the poor black or Latino children. The language of Brown versus Board of Education should cause educators to reflect on their practice. Does the segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, “deprive the children of the minority race of equal educational opportunities?” “We believe it does.” To separate black children from white children of their age and qualifications based on their race “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone... In the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place...Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Kozol, 2005, p29).

The court’s actions may appear to be progressive. However, it is not progressive until the rhetoric is reflected in the policies of school boards. Middle class white city dwellers have fled from schools where large numbers of black and Hispanic children are enrolled. Organized parent groups at one point asked school officials for permission “to exclude thousands of poor black and Hispanic students who travel long distances” and make them attend schools in their neighborhoods. The wealthier parents covet the building as potential sites in which they can create new schools of higher quality to serve their own immediate communities (Kozol, 2005).

I often wonder why it is so difficult to see all children as human beings who should be treated fairly. Children are vulnerable; they depend on adults, teachers, the school board, and Congress to protect them. It is often said that it is the child’s responsibility to seize an education. However, it will be very difficult for a child who is in a school environment that does not enhance learning

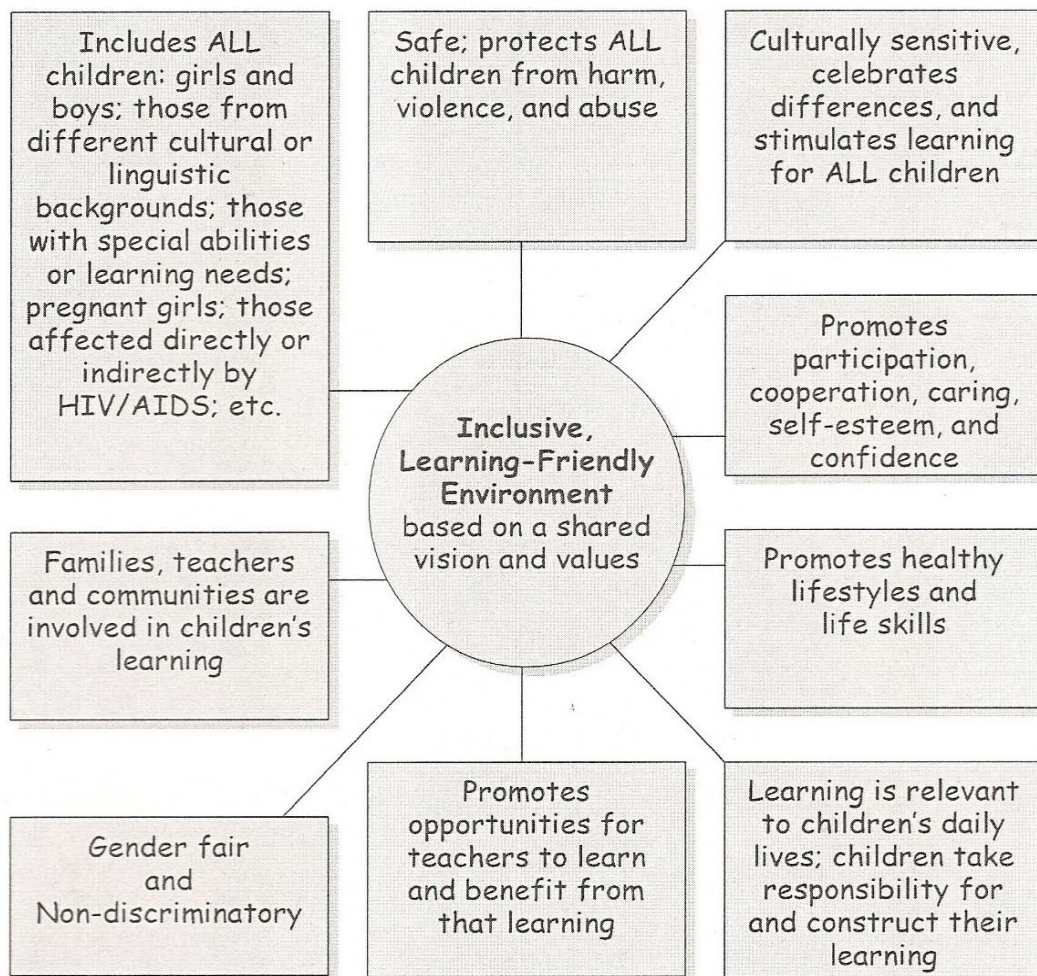
to engage the material and other students. A child, whose gym experience, is merely lining up in the mornings because the gym is unequipped. A child who really wants to learn to read but his/her parents has to choose between buying a book and feeding the child. There are no books to read in the classroom and there is no library at the school. The students are treated as less deserving and they do not do well in school because the system has failed them. There are teachers who are afraid to advocate for children. However, not advocating for them will not help them. The school will be cited as underachieving when the children fail to do well. The remedy for this is often the replacement of teachers. Some children are falling through the cracks of society and no one seems to care because they are excluded.

According to Noren Connell, when minority parents ask for something better for their kids, the assumption is that these are parents who can be discounted. These are kids who we do not value. The disrepair and overcrowding of these schools in the South Bronx would not have happened in a white Suburban school district like Scarsdale (Kozol, 2005). I believe history will judge, educators by the standards they have set but do not abide by. Educators have a professional and ethical responsibility to care for and educate children in positive emotional and social environments that are cognitively stimulating and that support each child's culture, language, ethnicity and family structure. Educators should not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits or excludes them from progress or activities on the basis of their race. Educators have a collective obligation to advocate for the best interests of children and to serve as a voice for young children everywhere (Feeney, 2005). It would appear that many times it is the children with the greatest need who are excluded. Teachers and administrators know that education need to be inclusive gender-fair non-discriminatory, sensitive to culture, as well to the daily lives of children and their families. Sadly, this knowledge is not

always being fleshed out in the policies they make or in the way they relate to children (Harris, Miske, & Attig, 2000).

Most educational policies in North America seem to try to speak two ways. On one hand, they offer the promise of advocating children with disabilities in regular classrooms with nondisabled peers. At the same time they promise to provide specialized programs for the brightest and most capable students. However, trying to hold both decisions at once can lead to policy conflicts (Parsons, 1995). The research (Winebrenner, 2001) has shown that historically some children who were identified as gifted were simply high achievers. They have failed to identify, truly gifted students who were non-productive in school. Some gifted students were not identified because they had learning disability that masked their gifted ability. Some have not been identified because their performance on standard identification instruments has been hampered by multicultural or socio-economic issues (Winebrenner, 2001).

Environment



Remember: Changing from a traditional school or classroom to one that is inclusive and learning-friendly is a process, not an event. It does not happen overnight. It takes time and teamwork. Yet, it can yield many benefits for us professionally and most importantly for our children, their families, and their communities.

Adapted from Harris, R., Miske, S., and Attig, G. (2000) Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments. Bangkok: UNESCO

Dumping or Inclusion

The physical placement of children in a regular classroom is not inclusion. Quality inclusion is not merely determined by student placement, but it is based on creating an environment that supports and includes all learned (Soodak, Autumn 2003). When there is a lack of planning, lack of collaboration, lack of support and poor funding there can be no inclusion. When the resources needed for the enhancement of the students learning is not available it is not inclusion, it is dumping. Unfortunately, sometimes special needs students are exposed to teachers who are not trained and who were unsuccessful in general education (Malloy, 1994).

When children are enrolled in school and are excluded from participation and learning in the classroom it is called dumping. Dumping is evident when textbooks are not written in their first language, when they are never asked to contribute in class, when they cannot see the black board or a textbook or cannot hear the teacher. Dumping is evident when children are not learning well and no attempt is made to help them. These children may sit at the back of the classroom and may soon dropout. Teachers have the responsibility of creating an environment where all children can learn. They must learn and they must feel included in our classrooms (Harris, Miske, & Attig, 2000).

School reformists believe that compliance with the federal law means that students with disabilities should be placed in the general classroom with supplementary aide and services if needed. Yet, student with disabilities are sometimes being placed into off campus building or portables away from the main school building. This kind of dumping sends the message that students with disabilities are not valued members of a diverse community. Dumping will go away when administrators or school districts stop focusing on what is wrong with students and start paying attention to their strengths. They must then create a positive environment where they

will be successful. Special education has not produced a better quality of life to children with disabilities. Instead it has produced a dropout rate twice that of general education, low rates of employment, and high rates of drug addiction and criminality. Special education may be a dysfunctional bureaucracy that cannot justify its own undesirable outcomes (Reganick, 1995).

It is important to understand what inclusion is not, before moving children into the integrated setting. Inclusion does not mean a) dumping students with disabilities into general classrooms without careful planning and adequate support. b) Reducing services or funding for special education services. c) Overloading any classroom with students who have disabilities or who are at risk. d) Teachers, being required to spend a disproportionate amount of time teaching or adapting curriculum for students with disabilities. e) Isolating students with disabilities, socially, physically or academically within the general education classroom. f) Jeopardizing the achievement of general education students through slower instruction or less challenging curriculum. g) Relegating special education teachers to the role of assistant in the general education classroom; or forcing general and special education teachers to team together without careful planning and well defined responsibilities (McLesky, 2000).

Conclusion

A principal goal of education is to prepare all students to be peaceable, moral and productive members of community. Teachers must understand that separate education will not connect students to a broad social perspective. There are educators who believe that separate education violates students' rights, compromises values, and impede student development (Kozol, 2005). Hence, there is a need for an integrated fully inclusive classroom. Before this is implemented, it is advised that a team consisting of teacher's administrators occupational and physical therapist, communication experts, school psychologists, an individual from a

marginalized group, person with a disability ,health care provider and student meet together and discuss and make suggestions for the children as well as the implementation of the new class. There must also be a commitment to ongoing teacher education. This means a continuous emphasis on new learning to meet the challenges of an inclusive classroom. Therefore, all education majors should be required to include in their professional development activities studies on teaching exceptional children. This would require them to understand the most common types of learning disabilities, the typical symptom of manifestation: as well as understanding that there are individual differences among students with learning disabilities. Understand how to implement inclusive practices, by teaching techniques such as hands on activities, group work, and computer based learning projects which are likely to improve learning for all students (Vaidya, Summer,1997).

The inclusive education setting has the potential to work well when the classroom teachers are well trained in dealing with the many and varied student needs; teachers are provided with resource personnel such as specialists who assist the regular classroom teacher by helping the classroom and or provide and teachers are given time to plan. If these are not in place frustration may occur (Goree, 1996).

Teachers must be cognizant of the fact that they have an ethical responsibility to children; to respect individual differences and helping children learn to live, play and work cooperatively. It their responsibility to ensure that no harm comes to children and not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitive or intimidating to children. If educators must flesh out these responsibilities they should begin by striving to remove the limits on inclusion. They are to be the voice of the

voiceless or the vulnerable. They should advocate for the ‘arms’ of inclusion to be swung wide open and embrace all children because they are human beings.

Children need to feel valued and respected to be successful both academically and socially. The lyrics of the song ‘Connection’ written by Eric Bibb’s describes the type diversity that educators should embrace in the learning community of an inclusive classroom; different but one. The laughter of this diverse population must be heard in the classrooms of our schools.

I got my own roots to water,
Got my own family tree,
Got my own set of heroes,
That mean something to me.
I got my own road to travel,
My own stories to tell—
In my own time.
Got my own way of talkin’,
Got my own way to smile,
Got my own way of walkin’
My own look and style.
Got my own way of prayin’,
My very own way to sing—
Still, I’m connected to you,
And every one and every
Thing

Eric Bibb, Connections (Mendoza, September, 2004)

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