

Okul Liderlerinin Birleşik Devletler Özel Eğitimindeki Yetersizliği

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Özet

Birleşik Devletler 'deki okul liderleri, yetersizliği olan öğrencilere onların ihtiyaçlarıyla uyumlu ve nitelikli bir eğitim sağlama hususunda güçlük çekmektedirler. Liderlerin, yetersizliği olan öğrencilerin genel eğitim ortamlarına dahili hakkındaki bilgileri sürecin yasal gereklerinden ibarettir. Liderliğe hazırlık programlarının asıl kaygısı, liderleri özel eğitimle alakalı yasalara uymamaktan doğan yasal yaptırımlardan uzak tutmaktır. Çalışmanın amacı, sıkça çeşitli olumsuzluklarla sonuçlanan bu durumun nedenlerini anlamak ve liderlere yetersizlikleriyle başa çıkabilmeleri için öneriler sunmaktır. Alan yazın incelemesi ile sorunlar irdelenir ve liderlerin benimsemesi gereken roller belirtilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: özel eğitim, liderlik, yetersizliği olan öğrenciler.

The Incompetence of School Leaders in the U.S. Special Education

Abstract

School leaders in the U.S. have difficulties providing students with disabilities with a quality education that complies with the needs of the children. Leaders' knowledge about including students with disabilities into general education settings consists of nothing but the legal requirements of the process. Leadership preparation programs' main concern is keeping leaders away from legal sanctions of incompliance with laws that govern special education. The aim of the study is to understand the reasons of this situation which often results in various problems and to propose recommendations to leaders in overcoming their incompetency. Through a literature review, problems are scrutinized, and the roles that leaders should embrace are defined.

Key Words: Special education, leadership, students with disabilities

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Introduction

Every child deserves a quality education that leads to a quality life. Some children may have special needs and others may not. Regardless of their handicaps, it is the school leaders' duty to provide children with appropriate services, and their success relies on the leaders' competencies in inclusive education. However, research indicates that leaders do not have enough knowledge in special education (Bays, 2004; Crockett, 2002; Voltz & Collins, 2010; McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy & Terry, 2010; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004), and leadership preparation programs fail to equip school leaders with the competencies they need in special education (Bays, 2004). Leadership preparation programs focus on legal rather than educational aspects of inclusive special education (McHatton et al., 2010). Leaders encounter problems that they do not know how to overcome them, so they waste their time seeking guidance from others (DiPaola, Moran & Thomas, 2004). They cannot make a commitment to improve education quality of students with disabilities and involve themselves in the inclusion process. This often results in a leader's loss of confidence, aggravation of children and parents, and no interaction with students with disabilities and their families. Therefore, leaders have no idea about children and parents' needs. They also do not have the opportunity to get feedback from the families about the inclusion process. These reduce the quality of education that students with disabilities get, so they cannot keep up with the requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) that laws mandate. More importantly, chances of being happy and productive members of the society for those students are lowered. Furthermore, academic achievements of students with disabilities suffer due to so-called inclusion or even exclusion. Since these students are included in the AYP too, leaders must ensure that they receive a quality education. Unfortunately, in some cases, schools that are failing to achieve AYP blame those students. This

paper is going to discuss the underlying reasons of leaders' lack of competencies in inclusive special education and make recommendations on how leaders can improve their skills in inclusive special education.

Legal Base

According to statistics, 6.608.446 or nearly 8% of children between ages 3 and 21 received services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2009 (ideadata.org). This is not a negligible amount of population since education is a basic right and every child has the power to change the world. The Civil Rights Movement was imbued with this idea, and it paved the way for inclusive education. Before the movement, principals did not have to include students with disabilities into general education classes leaving them no option other than attending special facilities where they received almost no education (Hehir, 2005). Furthermore, some court decisions such as the *Beattie v. Board of Education* of 1919, defended administrators who denied those students. The court was concerned about the quality of other children's education. However, so far, no study proved that inclusive education is detrimental to students without disabilities (McLaughlin, 2009). Unfortunately, this superstition is still common in public schools (LaNear & Frattura, 2007), and educators are prejudiced against students with disabilities (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004).

The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 1954 was a turning point in inclusive education, for it brought the idea of equality. After the decision, the legal base of inclusive education began to take form. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was altered in favor of handicapped children. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), the law that specifically governs principles of inclusive education, was enacted in 1975. After an evolution process, it was reenacted in 1990 with a new name: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Also, the No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) Act of 2001 requires schools to include students with disabilities into standards-based accountability. Besides these laws, many court decisions have shaped the fate of students with disabilities (Colarusso & O'Rourke, 2003; Ramanathan, 2008). Furthermore, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act govern inclusive education as well.

Historically, laws and court decisions mandated that school leaders adopt inclusive education to comply with legal obligations of it. Consequently, states and organizations that provide guidelines for leadership such as The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) require little or no knowledge in inclusive education for licensures, thus making leaders see it as a legal rather than educational issue (Crockett, 2002). Many leaders focus on complying with the law and neglect educational aspects of inclusive special education. Often, they have to delegate authority to special education teachers, for they have little information about how to include students with disabilities into general education classes. Despite Barth (1990) defends teacher lead schools, special education is a sensitive issue that cannot be omitted by leaders while research emphasizes leader support for it (Crockett, 2002; Bays, 2004).

Problems Of Leadership Preparation Programs

Legal mandates place a burden on leadership preparation programs by forcing them to adopt a law-oriented curriculum. McHatton et al. (2010) conducted a study to investigate school leaders' perceptions of leadership preparation programs. They found that participants had taken only a few courses related with inclusive education, and those courses were mostly law oriented. They also state that "as new field specific topics emerge and the role of the principal evolves, many programs are only incorporating these topics into existing programs of study rather than revising

the program in view of current and new knowledge and skill requirements." (p. 2). Given the fact that only five states offer instruction of special education for principal certification (Valesky & Hirth, 1992, as cited by Wakeman et al., 2006), it is obvious that the preparation programs take that as an excuse to neglect special education. Monteith (1998, as cited by Wakeman et al., 2006) found that principals complain that the preparation programs do not include training in special education. In addition to these problems, leadership preparation programs face severe faculty shortages (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) define sets of skills that leaders must have in order to establish inclusive education. Those skills set standards for both leader preparation programs and in-service leaders. However, Voltz and Collins (2010) argue that recent changes to the education system outdated them, so they offer to add new skills in various areas. They suggest that leaders should construct models which help teachers to include students with disabilities, and collaborate with special education professionals.

Recommendations

Scholars make suggestions for leadership preparation programs to offer how leaders could be competent in special education. Also, in-service school leaders too could take them into consideration to overcome their incompetency. To begin with, a framework with five core principles could guide both the programs and principals (Crockett, 2002).

Ethical Practice prepares leaders who credit equality for every child regardless of their disabilities.

Individual Consideration means that leaders see every child as unique and having special needs. Therefore, leaders are responsible for providing children with specialized instruction.

Equity Under Law requires leaders to know and apply the law of special education so children can benefit from it equally.

Effective Programming implies that leaders should be competent in programming both individualized and general educational programs.

Establishing Productive Partnerships wants leaders to be collaborative in order to benefit both children and their families.

Smith, Robb, West and Tyler (2010) make recommendations to policy makers and leadership preparation programs: Increasing the supply of special education faculty, meeting the demand for expanded roles for special education faculty in the preparation of general educators, revising the curriculum of doctoral preparation programs to increase the knowledge and skills of the next generation of teacher educators, determining the gaps in the current knowledge base and developing a research agenda, and creating a national plan of action. McHatton et al. (2010) stated that "perhaps a more effective way to approach the preparation of school leaders may be to determine a career ladder for principals. Determining the body of knowledge and skills that all entry level principals (i.e., assistance principals) need would allow preparation programs to ensure those skills are delivered comprehensively, facilitating application of theory to practice." (p.16). Universities and professional organizations must have an agreement on preparing and supporting effective leaders who meet various learning needs, and the preparation must teach leaders how to administer their schools harnessing skills and experiences of stakeholders (DiPaola, Moran & Thomas, 2004).

School leaders should "a) promote an inclusive school culture, b) provide instructional leadership, c) model collaborative leadership, d) manage and administer organizational processes, and e) build and maintain positive relations with teachers, families, and the community.", and also they need to pay attention to these two key areas:

1. Principals must develop, enhance, and monitor the professional skills and knowledge of their faculty.

2. Principals must work with their communities to create a common cluster of expectations promoting implementation of those skills and knowledge (DiPaola, Moran & Thomas, 2004, p. 3).

Principals' personal and professional attributes and their actions with the education system, students and parents play a big role in the special education. To promote an inclusive school culture "...school leaders make explicit the embedded values of diversity, membership, and collaboration in every aspect of their school's operation..." (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002, p. 272). To establish an inclusive environment, leaders should adopt an inclusive culture which values equality, diversity and respect, and helps people internalize the notion of preciousness of every child regardless of their disabilities. They should emphasize the importance of trust in relationships between them and mothers of students with disabilities and become personally involved in the special education programs within their schools (Shelden, Angell, Stoner & Roseland, 2010). Leaders should exhibit commitment in every process related with inclusion, so children with disabilities and their parents feel that they are important and cared by the leader. They interact with students with disabilities and their parents to learn their needs, make solutions to problems, and get feedback on their leadership performance. Leadership in special education is a combination of "advocating for the best possible services, empowering staff, acknowledging the needs of parents, and collaborating with other administrators" (Goor, 1995, p. 3, as cited by Crockett, 2002). School leaders should have knowledge and skills in understanding student characteristics and needs, appreciating the need for specialized instruction, supporting educators with specialized expertise and balancing individually appropriate education and access to the general

curriculum (Bays, 2004). Leaders must be knowledgeable in areas concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities, and use their expert power to promote the commitment of staff (Hoy & Miskel, 2000). They should collaborate with parents and special educators to share their concerns and to harness their expertise, frequently update their knowledge and be aware of latest research in inclusive special education.

Conclusions

A leader is the most important person in a school who has the ability to shape the fates of people within a building and even a community. Leaders are responsible for setting an agenda, a culture, a vision, a mission, rules,

and habits to establish a working organization aimed to meet the needs of children. Such an important person plays a big role in education of students with disabilities who generally need special care. Thus leaders' professional development is vital, and both leadership preparation programs and leaders are responsible for its development. Unfortunately, leaders lack skills and knowledge required to treat students with disabilities. Leadership preparation programs should be restructured, and in-service leaders should be encouraged to take the courses tailored to special education. Leaders also should be accustomed to special education literature and update their knowledge according to the newest research in both leadership and special education.

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