"Equity as a Basis for Inclusive Educational Systems Change" Article in Brief

Based on "Equity as a Basis for Inclusive Educational Systems Change" by Wayne Sailor, published in 2016, *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 1-17. doi: 10.1017/jse.2016.12

Introduction

Rittel and Webber (1973) wrote, "The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail, because the nature of these problems. They are 'wicked' problems, whereas science has developed to deal with 'tame problems'" (p. 155). Thus, a wicked problem is one where the solution is bound up in its formulation and the context of the problem militates against its formation. Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education fits the definition of a wicked problem.

Current definitions describe disability through the medical or science-based model, implying that problems can or should be addressed through diagnosis and prescriptive cure. Defining disability this way led to the development of diagnostic categories in special education. Thus, the ever-expanding categorical specialization within special education poses a direct challenge to inclusive systems of support.

Reframing Education as an Alternative to Inclusion

Current frames of education rest within the logic of post-positivism (Sailor & Paul, 2004), believing students "afflicted" with disabilities benefit most from the acquisition of scientific knowledge through a specific branch of education called special education. This frame places the root cause of disability within the individual, neglecting to recognize larger, societal factors contributing to a person's "disability" (Skrtic, 1993). Under this model, inclusion is about placing students with disabilities in general education.

The sociological, constructivist frame of education shifts the focus away from the physical placement of students toward distributing resources and supports equitably to ensure all students have the support they need to learn, regardless of the nature of their learning needs (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007, 2016). This model moves away from using the medical model of disability toward whole-school applications (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; McMaster, 2013; Sailor, 2009; Sailor & Burrello, 2013).

Replacing placement-based definitions of inclusion with whole-school, equity-based models can mitigate educational subgrouping. While equity-based models of

inclusion are consistent with the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, policymakers are most likely to be swayed by scientific evidence supporting this shift. A growing body of evidence shows increased academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities who are associated with inclusive settings (Browder, Hudson & Wood, 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Courtade, Jimenez & Delano, 2014; Florian & Rouse, 2014; Jackson, Ryndak & Wehmeyer, 2008-2009; Kleinert et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2003; Nota, Soresi & Ferrari, 2014; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Peetsma, Vergeer, Roeleveld & Karsten, 2001).

Emerging Characteristics of Equity-Based Inclusive Education

Equity-based inclusion cannot fully occur under the present frame of education. This section presents what inclusive education looks like in practice based on a review of literature.

Structural Elements

Most approaches to structuring inclusive schools to meet the needs of students with the most extensive needs follow a placement-based model, making the general education classroom the unit of analysis (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; McLeskey et al., 2012; Sailor & Burrello, 2013). Whole school models are just beginning to emerge. For example, Giangreco and Suter (2015) illustrate how a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) can organize all school personnel (i.e., teachers, therapists, administrators, paraprofessionals) and the master schedule to meet the needs of all students, including those with the most extensive support needs.

Administrative Leadership

Research consistently shows that school leadership is a powerful predictor of student achievement (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Fullan, 2005; Klingner, Arguelles, Hughes & Vaughn, 2001; McLeskey et al., 2014). Principals of democratically organized, as opposed to hierarchically organized, schools who build a culture of trust can affect student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Implications for Teachers

Shifting to inclusive education requires schools to create comprehensive professional learning plans for all staff. It is recommended that administrators and academic coaches attend all professional learning sessions and teacher collaborative planning sessions (Leko & Roberts, 2014). Preservice teacher programs will need to be designed so all teachers are trained to work with all students (Sindelar et al., 2014). Specialized services for students with low-incidence issues, such as blindness or autism spectrum disorder, will always exist, but universal design for learning (UDL)

principles (CAST, 2016) can be taught to general educators to minimize the need for some specializations. Just as we do not need to segregate students with specific learning needs in separate classrooms or schools, we do not need to perpetuate separate educational systems through separate teacher preparation programs.

Implications for Paraprofessionals and Teaching Assistants

Placement-based models of inclusion rely heavily on the use paraprofessionals, with some arguing this perpetuates special education as a segregated service delivery model within the general education classroom (Tews & Lupart, 2008; Whitburn, 2013). Giangreco, Suter, and Hurley (2013) put forth a model for paraprofessionals that moves away from using them primarily as 'velcro-aids' toward assigning them to content areas or grade level classrooms, which fits with the whole-school model of inclusion.

Instructional Innovations

Using MTSS as the driver for whole-school inclusive education requires schools to think differently about how they utilize their space and expertise of staff to deliver evidence-based academic and behavior instruction. Emerging instructional practices that enhance whole-school MTSS applications include (a) *co-teaching*, typically between general and special educators, (b) *embedded instruction* or the practice of distributing instructional trials throughout the day in various settings and across people, places and materials in order to promote generalization of learned, discrete skills, and (c) *peer-assisted instruction*.

Whole-School Inclusive Educational Arrangements

In Sailor's opinion, we no longer need to ask the question, "should we include students with extraordinary needs for support and services in the general education program?" The preponderance of research supports inclusive education. The question is instead, "how do we best distribute and apply all available resources to ensure all student needs are met?" Schools implementing an effective MTSS focus on academic and behavioral outcomes, utilize data-based decision making, and configure school teams to allow for collaborative problem solving. Batsche (2014) delineates parameters of MTSS including, (1) instruction is evidence-based and delivered in varying levels of intensity (tiers); (2) instructional planning involves all personnel working collaboratively; (3) roles and responsibilities of all staff are aligned and add value to student outcomes; (4) common assessments are used to evaluate the impact of MTSS on student growth; (5) instruction across tiers is integrated; (6) instruction is designed and delivered by all providers; and (7) students and families are informed partners in the instructional process.

Conclusion

Inclusion poses a wicked problem. Sailor argues that the problem is unsolvable because of the way the problem is framed within the greater context of education. Prevalent models for addressing learning challenges have been quasi-medical, simply locating the problem as a characteristic within the individual rather than one of interplay between student issues and the learning ecology. Reframing education as an equity issue, wherein the distribution of resources generated through rigorous research becomes available to all students on the basis of measured need for assistance, allows us to move away from the medical model. Instead, we recast "special" education as a set of particular evidence-based resources directed to specialized applications for learning issues related to physical, social/behavioral, perceptual, or cognitive characteristics of individual students. The advent of MTSS, whole-school rather than classroom-focused applications of instruction, UDL, and fully integrated teacher preparation programs enable the reframing project to emerge with successful models of application in practice (Sailor, 2015).

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