A Comparison of Inclusive versus Resource Classroom Placement for Black Students with Mild Disabilities at the Secondary Level

Is There a Need for Separation?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in general education settings perform better academically than Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in resource classroom settings. Sixty-four Black high school students with mild disabilities receiving special education services were assessed using the Grade Level Short Form (Reading sub-test) of the Multilevel Academic Survey Test (MAST). Their reading scores were examined relative to each participant's placement in either included or non-included classrooms. Results revealed statistically significant evidence of difference in reading abilities to indicate that one group outperformed the other group in the inclusive or resource classroom settings. Limitations of the study, implications for both general and special educators, and considerations for future research are discussed.

Return to the Table of Contents

The overall academic achievement of Black students in the public school systems of the United States has long been a major source of concern for educators, government officials, legislators and parents (Marcus-Newhall & Heindl, 1998). The history of educational opportunities for Blacks has many negative and unequal components. It was believed that the 1954 landmark decision by the Supreme Court of the United States, which banned segregated schools, would improve Black students' academic achievement and soon equal that of their White peers (Marcus-Newhall & Heindl). The direct purpose of the decision was to provide equal educational opportunities regardless of race, and indirectly to improve race relations and Black students' academic achievements through inter-group contact at young ages (Marcus-Newhall & Heindl). However, fifty years since the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling, Black students continue to academically lag behind other ethnic groups. Reasons, such as the fluctuation of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey& Sandler, 1995) and the negative effects of school mobility (Rumbarger & Larson, 1998), for this societal dilemma have been studied and reforms, which

were originally intended to help solve the problem, have become a source of the problem (Grant, 1992).

The landmark decision previously mentioned was the catalyst for many dramatic changes in America's educational system. There was also a profound effect on where and how children are educated in America. The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision was not only a pivotal case against racial discrimination, but it also served as the vehicle for improving access to education for children with disabilities (Marcus-Newhall & Heindl, 1998). For example, laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were enacted to protect the right of children with disabilities to a free and appropriate education (Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Another vehicle was the development of the field of special education. The initial revolutionary idea of special education was to educate students in separate facilities who could not be educated in public schools. These were students with severe mental and/or physical handicaps. However, as the field progressed, other categories which targeted students with less severe disabilities were added. From separate facilities to inclusion in the schools, to inclusion in the classrooms with their non-disabled peers has been the progression of special education. One source of controversy has been the results of these added fields and it's effect on the academic achievements of Black students (Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Inclusion and Black Students with Disabilities

Several studies have been conducted on the effects of inclusion on various aspects of students with disabilities (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994; Elbaum & Vaughn 2001; McLeskey, Henry, & Axelrod, 1999;). For example, in the Elbaum and Vaughn (2001) study, which completed a meta-analytic review of the literature and examined self-concept outcomes of school-based interventions for students with learning disabilities (LD) placed in inclusive classroom settings. The results indicated that overall, middle school students benefited more from interventions than did elementary or high school students. Of the many issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classes, according to Baker et al. (1994), none is more important than the effects on students' learning and social relations with regular classmates. For example, McLeskey et al. (1999) examined national data on placement practices for school-age students from six to seventeen years old identified as LD over a six year time period (1989 – 1995) examined data from the 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine if differences existed in placement practices for students with LD across the United States. The method used was to examine data from Reports to Congress regarding placement practices for students with LD over the last six years. Participants included students with disabilities from the fifty states and the District of Columbia who had been placed in inclusive classroom settings over the period studied. Independent variables were placement settings and type of disability, while the dependent variable was the Cumulative Placement Rate (CPR). The results indicated that there had been a major increase in the CPR for students with disabilities in the past six years educated in general education classrooms. The CPR for students with LD educated in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the school day increased by 151% in years investigated, reflecting a gain of approximately 614,000 students. In contrast the CPR for students with LD educated in resource rooms for 21% to 60% of the school day decreased by 18%. Two trends in the national data were illustrated by the results. First, there was an increase of students with disabilities identified over the period studied. Second, there had been a considerable reduction in the proportion of students with LD who were educated in separate classrooms.

Wood (1998) investigated teachers' perceptions of their educational roles and collaborative teaching efforts in the inclusion of children with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. Participants included a sample of general and special education teachers comprising the collaborative teaching teams of children with severe disabilities. The method used was to conduct semi-structured interviews to seek information about teachers' perceptions regarding collaboration, communication and team-building. The teams consisted of a general education teacher and special education teacher of a student with a disability who was included in a regular education classroom. The independent variable was a general or special education teacher, while the dependent variable was the teacher's attitudes towards inclusion. Results indicated that in the initial stages of inclusion, teachers maintained discrete role boundaries through a clear, albeit informal division of labor. However, as the school year progressed, role perceptions became less rigid as the teaming became more positive.

Cook (2001) examined whether teachers' attitudes toward their students with disabilities who where included in regular education classrooms differed as a function of the disabilities' severity. The method used was to analyze data collected from part of a larger investigation regarding teachers' attitudes toward their students with disabilities who were included in regular education classrooms. Participants included seventy inclusive classroom teachers who nominated three students to prompts corresponding with the attitudes of attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. Chi-square analyses supported predictions, based on a theory on instructional tolerance and a model of differential expectations, that students with severe or obvious disabilities are significantly overrepresented among teachers' nominations in the rejection category. Results were interpreted to indicate that teachers tend to form different attitudes and expectations of their students with disabilities who where included in regular education classrooms depending on the severity or obviousness of students' disabilities. It was suggested that students with disabilities who where included in regular education classrooms with both obvious and hidden disabilities are at risk for receiving inappropriate educational interactions, but for different reasons. Distinct recommendations for improving teachers' attitudes toward included students with disabilities with hidden and obvious disabilities were offered.

Bender, Vail, and Scott (1995) examined the types of instructional strategies offered in mainstream classes. Participants included 127 general education teachers in grades one through eight from eleven school districts in three different school districts in the state of Georgia. There were 117 women which 115 were white. The method used was to ask each teacher to complete a self-evaluation concerning instructional strategies used in their general education classes. Each teacher was asked also to complete questionnaires concerning their own efficacy toward mainstreaming. An analysis of variance comparing teachers with positive attitudes indicated that the teachers with less positive attitudes used effective mainstream instructional strategies less frequently. The results indicated that teachers with more students with disabilities in their classes had more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) examined principals' attitudes toward and knowledge of inclusion. Participants included principals from 59 elementary, 27 middle and 29 high schools in the state of Illinois. The method used was to survey principals selected at random. A survey instrument was devised to elicit information from the principals regarding definitions, leadership styles, and effectiveness and implementation of educational practices associated with successful inclusive education. The results indicated that while no clear definition emerged of inclusion principals generally viewed inclusion as most appropriate for students with mild disabilities. Additionally, results indicated that teachers were not adequately prepared to implement inclusive practices. Significant differences between extent of use and perceived effectiveness of 13

educational practices were found. The researchers concluded that the findings raise issues related to administrators' awareness of practice that facilitate inclusion and how prepared they are to implement and support inclusive education.

Praisner (2003) completed another study of 408 elementary school principals' attitudes toward inclusion. The sample consisted of elementary school principals randomly selected from the state of Pennsylvania. The schools were of varying sizes ranging from 250 to over 1,000 students. The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was designed to determine the extent to which variables such as training, experience, and program factors were related to principals' attitudes toward inclusion. The results indicated that 1 in 5 principals' attitudes toward inclusion are positive while most are uncertain. Positive experience with students with disabilities and exposure to special education concepts are associated with a more positive attitude toward inclusion. Further, principals with more positive attitudes and/or experiences are more likely to place students in less restrictive settings. Differences in placement and experiences were found between disability categories. Results emphasized the importance of inclusive practices that give principals positive experiences with students of all types of disabilities as well as provide principals with more specific training.

Klinger and Vaughn (1999) conducted a study that investigated the perceptions of 4,659 students in kindergarten through 12th grade (760 with high-incidence). As important as it is for teachers and principals to have positive attitudes toward inclusion, perhaps it is even more important that students with disabilities have positive perceptions of inclusion. Twenty studies were synthesized that investigated and the following results were concluded. Findings revealed that students with high-incidence disabilities want the same activities, books, homework, grading criteria, and grouping activities as their classmates. Their peers without disabilities agreed, believing this most fair. Students with and without disabilities value teachers who slow down instruction when needed, explain concepts and assignments clearly, recognize and teach based on different learning strategies, and teach the same material in different ways so that everyone can learn.

If the goal of inclusion is to educate students with disabilities in general education settings, then it is important to study the effects this practice will have on students with disabilities placed in inclusive settings. The effects of placement versus non-placement in an inclusive classroom were determined in a study completed by Daniel and King (1997). Four sets of dependent variables were examined in this study: 1) students' academic performance, 2) students' problem behaviors as reported by teachers and parents, 3) student's self-esteem, and 4) parental attitudes of students with disabilities. A secondary purpose was to determine whether student placement in different types of inclusion programs would result in differences in the variables. Analysis of the results indicated: (1) parents of students in the inclusion classes expressed a higher degree of concern with their children's school programs; (2) teachers and parents of the students in the inclusion classes reported more instances of behavior problems; (3) students in inclusion classes were more likely to experience gains in reading scores with no noteworthy differences for mathematics, language, and spelling; and (4) students in inclusion classes reported higher levels of self-esteem. The conclusion reached by the researchers is that the effects of inclusion programs are mixed and difficult to interpret. There seems to be no consistent pattern in achievement differences. Behavior problems have a higher degree of occurrence in inclusive settings, implying that teachers must spend more time on correcting behavior than providing instruction. The behavior problems of the students with disabilities may potentially have negative effects on other students in the classroom.

Waldron and McLeskey (1997) investigated the effects of an inclusive school program (ISP) on students with mild and severe learning disabilities. The participants included students with LD in grades 2-6 from three elementary schools which had developed ISPs consisting of 71 students. The non-inclusion group of 73 students was from resource settings. Seventy-two percent of the students were male and only one student was Black. The method used was to administer both the experimental and comparison groups the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement Brief Form (K-TEA) in September, at the beginning of the ISP. Academic progress of both groups was evaluated using a curriculum-based measure. The results indicated that students with LD in the ISP made significantly more progress in reading and compatible more progress in mathematics when compared to the students who were provided services in resource classes. Furthermore, significantly more students with mild LD who were educated in the ISP made progress in reading that was comparable to their general education peers than did students with mild LD who were educated in non-inclusive settings. Students with severe LD made comparable progress in reading and mathematics, regardless of the instructional setting. The researchers concluded that effective ISPs, resulting in full-time placement in a general education classroom setting and student academic progress that is as good as or better than students placed in separate settings can be achieved for students with LD who are in elementary schools.

After examining teachers' perceptions and use of instructional adaptations in general education classes, Scott, Vitale, and Masten (1998) concluded, that general educators were found to be positive about the desirability/effectiveness and reasonability/feasibility of making instructional adaptations for students with disabilities. The primary purpose of the article was to provide a comprehensive literature review and synthesis to further an overall understanding of the key questions and issues regarding instructional adaptations for students with disabilities. The research reviewed for this study revealed that classroom teachers are very positive about the desirability and effectiveness of making adaptations for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Teachers were also found to be less positive regarding the reasonability and feasibility of implementing adaptations in their classrooms. Research revealed also that teachers cited lack of teacher training and limited school support as the major barriers to accommodating the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the academic achievement potential of Black students with mild disabilities in high school, in two instructional classroom placements, inclusive classroom setting compared to a self-contained/resource classroom model using pre and post test measures.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 64 Black students with mild disabilities (32 in an inclusive classroom setting and 32 in a self-contained/resource classroom) from a large high school located in a lower middle class suburban region of northeast Georgia. The population of the school was approximately 3,000 students with a demographical breakdown of Black (38.5%); Hispanic (31.4%); White (16.6%); Asian (10%); and Others (2.8%). Of the entire student population, 85% of the students participated in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (took this sentence from down at bottom to place it here where it seems to fit better). The students participating in the study ranged in grade level from nine though twelve and had been classified as either: Emotionally/Behaviorally Disordered, Learning Disabled, Other Health Impaired, Orthopedically Impaired or Speech Language Impaired based on federal and state definitions of the

exceptionalities. Of the 64 participants, 13 were females and 51 were males. The 32 students included in the regular classroom were all seeking technical level diplomas and the 32 students in self-contained/resource classrooms were seeking the special education certificate of attendance. The mean Full Scale IQ score of the students included in the regular education classroom was 89 with a range of 71-105, while the mean Full Scale IQ score of the students in self-contained/resource classrooms was 84 with a range of 48-98. The included students spend more than half the day in regular education classes, while the non-included students spend more than half the day in self-contained special education classes.

To top

Table 1

Table 1
Students Demographic Data

		Group	
	N	Non-Included	Included
Gender			
Male	51	28	23
Female	13	4	9
Grade Level			
9th	24	8	16
10th	23	13	10
11th	10	9	1
12th	7	2	5

Settings

The students received instruction in either inclusive or non-inclusive classrooms. The inclusive classrooms were offered to special education students seeking the technical diploma and have a general education teacher and special education teacher working together collaboratively. The average size of the inclusive classes at the participating school was approximately thirty-five students. The non-inclusive classes were offered to special education students seeking the certificate of attendance diploma and were taught by one special education teacher. The average size of the non-inclusive class at the participating school was eight students.

Instruments

The instrument used to test the participants was the Multilevel Academic Achievement Test (MAST), (Howell, Zucker, & Morehead, 1985). The MAST is intended for use by school personnel who make decisions about students' performance in reading and mathematics. These professionals include school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, special education teachers, and teachers in special programs such as Chapter 1. While teachers in regular classrooms may also administer the MAST to students without learning problems, the test is primarily intended for those educators who assess or instruct students exhibiting academic difficulties. Two basic instruments are included, the Grade level Test and the Curriculum Level Test. The Grade level

Test is a standardized measure of overall standing in mathematics and reading, which provides normed scores that estimate a student's present level of performance. The Short Form of the Grade Level Test measures reading, decoding and comprehension, and mathematics computation.

The criterion-related validity of the MAST was tested with 300 students in grades 3 through 8. The relationship between MAST Grade Level Test scores and related scores on the IOWA Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) showed high criterion validity. All students were administered the MAST Short and Extended forms one week and the multilevel form of the ITBS the following week. The ranking of students by the two measures (normal curve equivalents) were correlated. The coefficients in mathematics range from a low of .54 to a high of .85. The coefficients in reading ranged from a low of .59 to a high of .81. Inspections of the patterns of coefficients for the various measures indicate a high degree of agreement between the MAST and the ITBS in specific content sub-domains.

The predictive validity of the MAST was studied when 39 students in grades 4 through 12 of the standardization sample for the MAST Grade Level Test that had been previously labeled as learning disabled. The results showed that 74% of the students classified as LD by the Short Form, while 72% of the students classified as non-LD by the school systems were also classified as non-LD by the short Form.

The reliability of the MAST Grade Level Test scores was studied in a test-retest study involving 366 students in grades three through eight. The same teachers administered the test on both occasions within a two-week period. Raw test scores from the two administrations were correlated and the data suggest that the MAST has good reliability over a period of time. The correlation coefficients were moderately high to high in nearly all cases (only 2 of the coefficients were below.60 and only 6 of 24 coefficients were below .70). The median coefficients across grade level were .68 in short Form Reading and .71 in short Form Mathematics.

Procedures

The pre-test was administered to both groups of students at the beginning of the school year in September and the post-test was administered to both groups of students towards the end of the school year in March. The tests were administered to the non-included participants by the special education teachers of social studies and affective skills in their respective classrooms, while the tests were administered to the included students by the special education and general education teachers in the social studies (Geography, World History, U.S. History, and Economics/Political Systems) collaborative classes for a period of nine weeks. The students were administered two short form reading subtests of the MAST. All teachers received a training session on how to administer the MAST. In order to conceal the identity of the targeted students, all students in each class were administered the test and students were asked to write their name on the answer sheets to identify targeted and non-targeted students. The data from the results of both groups, included and non-included Black students with mild disabilities, were analyzed to determine if significant differences existed between the two groups.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for MAST Reading

Group (before Setting)	*N*	*M*	*SD*
First Administration			
Non-Included	32	28.0	5.98
Included	32	34.2	5.39
Second Administration			
Non-Included	32	29.0	6.61
Included	32	35.2	4.97

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine whether Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in general education settings perform better than Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in resource settings. Comparisons were made between the two groups on the MAST Reading Sub-test using pre and post tests to answer the following research question:

1. Is there a difference by placement (non-included vs. included) based on the academic abilities of Black students with mild disabilities?

Two separate measures (Fall and Spring) were administered to the participants. The mean score of the non-included participants on the first administration was 28.0 (SD = 5.98), while the mean score of the included participants on the first administration was 34.2 (SD = 5.39). A one-way ANOVA was performed on the data and the results indicated no significant differences between the non-included and included students with mild disabilities. F (1, 62) = 18.75, p = .990.

Table 3

Table 3
ANOVA for the first administration of Mast Reading

Source	*SS*	*Df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Mast	606.391	1	606.391	18.75	.990
Error	2007.844	62	32.385		
Total	2614.234	63			

Note. *$p < .05$.

The mean score of the non-included students on the second administration was 29.0 (SD = 6.98), while the mean score of the included students on the second administration was 35.2 (SD = 4.97). Each group's mean score increased one point on the second administration. A one-way ANOVA was also performed on the data from the second testing administration. The results indicated significant differences in potential academic achievement between the two groups F (1,62) =

17.91, p = .05

Table 4

Table 4
ANOVA for the second administration of Mast Reading

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Mast	612.593	1	612.593	17.91*	.000
Error	2120.438	62	34.201		
Total	2733.000	63			

Note. $*p < .05$.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Considering the maximum academic achievement potential of Black students with mild disabilities, the results of this study do provide statistical support that included Black students with mild disabilities may potentially perform better academically than non-included Black students with mild disabilities. Prior to greater depth of that discussion, several limitations of this study must be addressed. First, this study yielded the scores of only 64 participants. This small sample size increased the standard error of measure which increases the difficulty of making generalizations to a larger population. The study was also limited in that only one geographical region, state, school system and school was utilized. An argument could be made that a greater number of students from various geographical locations, states, systems and schools would have provided different results. Results revealed significant differences of reading ability between the two groups. Future research should examine this question more thoroughly by including a larger population from different geographical regions, states, and school systems.

The post-test administration of the MAST demonstrated significant differences between the two groups of students. This study's findings suggests that Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in general education settings perform better than Black students with mild disabilities receiving their education in resource settings. These results lend support to the findings of Waldron and McLeskey (1997). The results also indicate that inclusive practices should continue for Black students with mild disabilities and suggest that future study needs to be performed for students having more serious disabilities to investigate if their performances increase due to inclusive practices.

Implications for Practice

The overrepresentation of Black students in special education has negative psychological, social and economical impacts which may last a lifetime (Patton, 1998). The fact that disproportionately large numbers of Black students are persistently diagnosed, labeled, and placed in special education programs constitutes a problem, as many of these students are inappropriately misplaced (Hilliard, 1991). Additionally, limited exposure to the core academic curriculum results in the spiral of "lower levels of achievement, decreased likelihood of post secondary education, and more limited employment" (Markowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997). The implications from this study for educators, school administrators, parents and Black students with mild disabilities are varied.

First, consideration should be given to the placement process which determines which student is included and which is non-included. There does not appear to be a distinct line between those selected for inclusion and those placed in non-inclusive classrooms. While standardized tests and achievement scores are regarded as important tools in the placement process, perhaps more consideration should be given to the consequences of the placement of Black students with mild disabilities in non-inclusive classrooms.

Second, there are implications for the manner in which Black students with disabilities are educated in non-inclusive classrooms. Educational practices should be implemented to insure that all students with mild disabilities, particularly Black students, are academically successful when placed in inclusive classrooms.

Third, the implications suggest that Black students with disabilities do benefit from being included in the general education setting and that more effort should be put forth to make this end a realization for this population.

Conclusion

The results of this study did suggest included Black students with mild disabilities as a group; perform better academically than non-included Black students with mild disabilities, as a group. It also suggests that these two groups should not receive their education in separate settings but should continue or begin being provided with equal access to inclusive settings. These findings suggest that this practice would benefit Black students with mild disabilities and should lead to future research to include students with more serious disabilities in the general education classroom.

There are possibly many factors which play a role in the placement process of Black students with mild disabilities. The ability to achieve can be either beneficial or hampered by placement in either an included or non-included classroom. Given the lack of research on this subject and the seriousness of the implications, it is imperative that this question be examined more thoroughly. This study answered the question if there was a difference by placement (inclusive v. non-inclusive) based on the academic abilities of Black students with mild disabilities and the results suggest that there is a positive difference for Black students with mild disabilities in inclusive settings.

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Return to Table of Contents