

Proceedings Submission

1. Inclusion: An Overview and Strategies to Ensure Success
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6. Abstract

This paper reviews issues surrounding the concept of inclusion in the elementary education classroom. It discusses some of the misperceptions regarding inclusion and the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are necessary for it to work successfully. Psychological, as well as educational benefits are noted. Basic strategies for creating inclusion in the classroom are also offered.

Please Note:

I have been accepted as the second presenter in a workshop entitled "Inclusion: Cooperation or Competition" (first presenter is Mary Lee Batesko, Ed.D.). The following paper represents my additional contribution, if accepted, to be included in the proceedings of the conference when they are published.

Inclusion: An Overview and Strategies to Ensure Success

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Abstract

This paper reviews issues surrounding the concept of inclusion in the elementary education classroom. It defines the concept and describes the philosophy underlying its meaning. It discusses some of the misperceptions regarding inclusion and the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are necessary for it to work successfully. Psychological, as well as educational benefits are noted. Basic strategies for creating inclusion in the classroom are also offered.

Inclusion: An overview and strategies to ensure success

Approximately one million children with disabilities were excluded from school in the late 1970's. (NEA Today, 1999). These children were not included in regular classrooms. In fact, they were not included in public education at all. Changes in federal regulations have addressed this issue and major changes can be noted in our regular public school classrooms. "Since the late 1980's U.S. schools have made substantial progress toward including school-aged students with disabilities in general education classrooms, as well as toward serving fewer students with more substantial needs in separate school settings" (McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1998, cited in McLesky, Henry, & Hodges, 1999, p.60). Today, at the U.S. Department of Education, school psychologist Robert Pasternack, Ph.D., is overseeing special education programs for six million children..."(Chamberlin, 2002, p.36).

Interest in the educational needs of all our world's children is becoming globally apparent. In 2001, the agenda of a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly delineated three outcomes for children. They proposed that they have the best possible start in life, good-quality basic education, and opportunities for them to have meaningful participation in their communities (Foxhall). In a paper presented by G. D. Wills from New Zealand at the International Special Education Conference in Manchester, England, he stated that we have an international human rights responsibility for educating all our children which also impacts their health and sense of well being (2000).He

strongly asserted, “It is accepted as non-negotiable that every child is entitled to education as a fundamental part of childhood”(p.3).

Inclusion is becoming more and more commonplace. And yet, confusion and controversy remain about the concept and questions about how to implement it effectively continue to be raised. Pasternack explained that it is performance rather than compliance that is important now. He stated “The president has asked us to move from a culture that has been too compliance-oriented to one that is more performance-oriented, so we are looking for ways to improve results and improve outcomes for the recipients of all our services” (Pasternack, 2002, cited in Chamberlin, 2002). This paper will attempt to clarify salient issues, and add to the current implementation strategies for successful inclusion outcomes. Creating successful outcomes with inclusion is in keeping with the president’s urgings and Pasternack’s plan; it is also in the best interests of all our students.

The term *inclusion* was largely added to our educational vocabularies when the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed in 1975, was amended in 1997. Woodrum and Lombardi (2000) report that the lack of a clear definition of inclusion is a problem. The law does not require *inclusion* per say, and in fact, does not use the term in its wording. The intent of the IDEA is to educate as many children as possible in the regular classroom environment to the maximum extent possible in all cases (Stout, 2001). The reasoning behind the amended law is that we allow children with special needs to live ordinary lives as much as possible (Arnold & Dodge, 1994, cited in Stout, 1996). It requires that

special education IEP team members consider the regular classroom as their beginning point for placements for children with disabilities. Any support, personnel and technology may be added to the regular classroom as necessary. This is mandated to address the requirement that the children be educated “to the maximum extent appropriate” in the “least restrictive environment” (Stout, 1996, p 2). Pasternack asserts that with IDEA we have the opportunity to make sure that no child with a disability is left behind (2002).

Students with high incidence disabilities make up approximately ninety-four percent of students with disabilities. These high-incidence, or mild disabilities include such categories of disability as learning disabilities, educable mental retardation, mild emotional/behavioral disorders, and speech/language impairments. A little over fifty percent of all the students receiving special education services in our public schools have learning disabilities (Salend, 2001). These children have difficulties in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. They may experience problems with listening, thinking, reading, writing, spelling or mathematical calculations. These students have average or above average intelligence, but often times do not perform at the same level as their peers without learning disabilities. Some of these students have difficulty in only one area and some have difficulties in several areas. The children with these disabilities tend to demonstrate learning strategies that are inefficient and ineffective.

So then, what exactly is “inclusion” and how does it work? Bloom, Perlmutter, and Burrell define the term *inclusion* as “...a philosophy that brings

students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging, and community” (1999, cited in Salend, 2001, p.8). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) describes inclusive programs as “...those in which students, regardless of the severity of their disability, receive appropriate specialized instruction and related services within an age appropriate general education classroom in the school that they would attend if they did not have a disability” (NASP Communique, Volume 28, No.8, 2000, p. 1). NASP takes the position that these programs must adequately provide all the services needed by the individual student to ensure that he or she makes consistent “...social, emotional and academic gains” (p.1). It is only when that is not possible, that a child is to be placed outside the regular education classroom.

Prior to IDEA, many special education students were placed in self-contained special education classrooms or in schools for special needs students outside their home districts in order to be educated. Some of these children eventually “earned” the right to be mainstreamed into one or more regular education classes if he or she could keep up the pace with the other regular education students. Another option was for the student to be “pulled out” to attend a resource room with a special education teacher for subjects or areas where the need was apparent. However, while these various approaches to educating children with disabilities brought them into our schools and greatly reduced the numbers of children that were excluded from our educational system, rather than promoting a collaborative and socially integrated learning

environment, it often highlighted individual differences and encouraged social isolation (Starr, 2001).

There is much controversy about the issue and many misperceptions about inclusion have been noted. For example, parents and special educators have raised concerns that students with disabilities will not get the supports and services that they really need; that regular classroom teachers will not know how to meet their educational needs; parents of students without disabilities voice concerns that all the lessons in the regular classroom will be given at a lower level to accommodate the students with disabilities and overall progress will be diminished; that the students without disabilities will not get the attention and support they need because the attention will be so focused on the needs of the students with disabilities; and lastly, opponents voice the idea that inclusion may sound good in theory, but in reality it may be too complex a task for teachers and administrators to deal with educating such diverse groups of students in one environment.

Proponents of inclusion say that the learning for both students with disabilities and those without disabilities improves when children with learning problems are added to the regular classroom. The teacher is more likely to break instruction down into finer points, repeat directions, or explain them in different ways when there are students with deafness, blindness or developmental disabilities in the class. In addition, misconceptions about children with disabilities fade when they are in integrated settings and work side-by-side other students in regular education classrooms. When students stay in their

neighborhood schools rather than being placed in special schools in different communities, it allows friendships to develop and reduces isolation. Parent participation increases when students with disabilities attend local schools. Other benefits include the role modeling by the general education students for the students with disabilities with the advantage of increased self-esteem for the students modeling the behaviors and the appropriate social and educational behaviors learned by the students engaged in the modeling. In addition, there are increased opportunities for one person to help another in the inclusive classroom. Extrapolating from Haidt's (2001) research, he speaks of the side benefit of observing one stranger helping another, which he calls "elevation". He says that it involves a physical sensation and results in motivation to help others. In addition, when children are given the assistance they need they often experience gratitude. It is not difficult to see how a parent or a teacher can experience gratitude as their children and students cooperate and make progress. Gratitude brings psychological benefits. Recent research by McCullough has indicated that people who frequently experience gratitude are happier. They are also less depressed and anxious (cited in Carpenter, 2001). This seems like an "everyone wins" scenario.

While inclusion was initially conceived to address the needs of students with disabilities, it can provide benefits for both the children with disabilities and those without disabilities when it is done well (Sharpe, 2001). The overall effect is that all students' needs are met, effective learning takes place, and the line between students with disabilities and students without disabilities is blurred,

rather than accentuated. According to the National Association for School Psychologists (NASP), inclusion can create "...general education classrooms that are better able to meet the needs of *all* students as a result of additional instructional resources, staff development for general and special educators, a more flexible curriculum and adapted instructional delivery systems" (NASP, 2000, p.1). Many issues need to be addressed, however, to ensure that inclusion is done well. Teachers must be provided with additional training and support from special education personnel. They need specialized skill development training to adapt curriculum and develop activities that encourage appropriate social interaction. Pre-service and in-service workshops can facilitate this development. The Utah Education Association offers a list of provisions that they propose be met for inclusion to work. The list includes time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students together; well-designed individualized education programs; reduction of class size; professional skill development, especially in areas of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and varied learning styles, as well as increased monies to facilitate program development based on student needs rather than available funding. The association also recommends that collaborative relationships be created amongst educators, parents, and administrators (2001). These collaborative relationships are in keeping with the spirit of IDEA.

So it seems, inclusion can work. However, the issue of how to make it happen and make it happen *well*, remains a concern. Generally, three models of inclusion have been put forth. These include the Consultant model recommended

for small schools with few students with disabilities where a special education teacher is available to teach the challenge student certain difficult skills; the Teaming model which promotes cooperative planning and teaching where a special education teacher and a general education teacher work together to present materials to all the students in the classroom; and the Collaborative co-teaching model with shared responsibility between the regular and special education teachers where students are grouped and taught simultaneously. One teacher may present an enrichment lesson while the other teacher works on a challenging content area with the other group. All the students receive appropriate academic and support services (Sharpe, 2001).

Whichever model of inclusion is followed, there are a number of teaching strategies that may be helpful. Nine types of adaptations are recommended by Deschenes, Ebeling, & Sprague (1994). These include:

- Size - adapt the number of items that the learner is expected to complete
- Time - adapt the time allotted and allowed for learning, task completion, or testing
- Level of Support – Increase the amount of personal assistance with a specific learner; for example, assign peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors or cross-age tutors
- Input – Adapt the way instruction is delivered to the learner; for example, use different visual aids, plan more concrete examples, provide hands-on activities or place students in cooperative groups

- Difficulty – Adapt the skill level, problem type, or the rules on how the learner may approach the work
- Output – Adapt how the student can respond to instruction; such as instead of answering questions in writing, allow a verbal response, use a communication book for some students, or allow students to show knowledge with hands-on materials
- Participation – Adapt the extent to which a learner is actively involved in the task; for example, in geography, have a student hold the globe, while others point out locations
- Alternate – Adapt the goals or outcome expectation while using the same materials; for example, in social studies, expect a student to be able to locate just the states while others learn to locate capitals as well.
- Substitute Curriculum – Provide different instruction and materials to meet a student's individual goals, such as during a language test one student is learning computer skills in the computer lab (Deschenes, Ebling, & Sprague, 1994).

Silver, Bourke and Strehorn (1999) utilized a concept usually held in architecture and applied it to the educational setting. It is termed *universal instructional design* (UID). They point out that in architecture, ramps are used to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities, yet, they can be and are, used by those people with able bodies who might have a temporary physical problem such as a broken leg or an arthritic inflammation. In that same way,

instructional strategies that benefit individuals with disabilities can, and do benefit children without disabilities. Silver et al, (1998) equate the concept of UID with good instructional practice. While these researchers are addressing the needs of students in higher education, the principle aptly applies to our classrooms for younger learners.

In addition to learning strategies, there are certain attitudes and beliefs that underlie successful inclusion. These are shared by all of the individuals that are involved in the academic lives of our students with disabilities as well as those without disabilities. The regular education teacher believes that all students can succeed and the special education staff is committed to collaborative practices in the general education classrooms. Parents are informed about program goals and work supportively with teachers to achieve these goals. School personnel and students are prepared for the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teachers believe in and foster a cooperative learning environment and promote socialization.

There is one final suggestion that can benefit all those involved in inclusion, from the children with disabilities to the parents, teachers, administrators and support staff – volunteerism. In a radio address from the US president in August, 2002 he urged teachers and schools to create service projects this year. He declared that our children can make important contributions and that volunteer service can teach them a sense of selflessness, responsibility and community. The president encouraged the use of a web site entitled “Students in Service to America”. From a psychological perspective we

know that not only are there benefits to the recipients of the volunteer service projects, but the volunteers as well. These projects can go a long way to empowering our children with disabilities as they begin to see themselves as capable, caring, contributing members of our schools and communities.

Successful inclusion classrooms are those that welcome diversity and are prepared to address the individual educational needs of all their students, whether or not they have a disability. If this overall attitude is conveyed and supported, all our students will benefit. It is also quite possible that educators and administrators will benefit as well.

This paper has offered clarifications about inclusion. It has described some of the issues and concerns that continue to exist in the process of creating inclusive schools. It has also highlighted strategies and attitudes that will aid in its implementation in our classrooms, as well as some of the psychological benefits accrued to those involved in the process.

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