

Inclusion: Research, Participation and Discussion

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Stephaney Pedler

Thesis Advisor

Mrs. Bonnie McKenzie

Bonnie McKenzie

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 1995

Expected Date of Graduation

December 1995

SpCo
1995
1995
1995
1995
1995
1995

Purpose of Thesis

Before beginning to write this paper I researched the topic, inclusion. I found the definition of inclusion, the levels of implementation, and some of the advantages and disadvantages of having this kind of a program in a school system. Next, wanting some practical experience, I spent ten hours in an included kindergarten in the Muncie Community Schools. While in the classroom, I acted much like any other volunteer. I helped the teacher, read to the children and offered assistance whenever necessary. While in the classroom I observed, asked a lot of questions and took many notes in order to gain a better understanding of how inclusion worked in this particular classroom.

The paper that follows will provide the reader with the results of my research and observations. The last section contains a discussion including my conclusions and recommendations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Mrs. Bonnie McKenzie for helping me through this project. Her professionalism and wonderful sense of humor were invaluable. I would like to thank Mrs. G. and the entire kindergarten class for allowing me to have an experience I will not soon forget. I would like to thank the Honor's College for encouraging students to be the best they can be. Most of all, I would like to thank my family. Without their support, I would not be where I am today.

Research

“Inclusion is a new term that has been applied to the philosophy and practice of including students with disabilities in the schools and classrooms they would attend if they had no disabilities” (Adams, 1990, p. 593). The move toward inclusion seemed to begin with mainstreaming, which refers to the relocating of “qualified” special education students into the regular education classroom, usually for only part of the day. Inclusion came about to help further meet the specifications of special education law, Public Law 94-142, which requires that appropriate educational services be provided for every child in his/her least restrictive environment (Evans, 1990).

When educators hear the term “inclusion”, many think of full inclusion. “Full inclusion is a phrase used to describe a policy in which all students with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability and the need for related services receive their total education within the regular education classroom in their home school” (NASSP, 1993, p.1). In actuality, all inclusive programs are not based on full inclusion. Inclusive schools operate along a broad continuum of services. The three main types are general curriculum alignment, adapted curriculum alignment, and functional curriculum alignment (NASSP, 1993).

General curriculum alignment is the highest level of participation. The children stay in the general education classroom full time. Special education services focus on reducing or maintaining any existing educational differences between the included students and the other children in the classroom (NASSP, 1993). The general education teacher uses remedial techniques or individual learning strategies to focus on the child's strong points. Academic achievement for the included student is measured with the same means of assessment used for the other students in the classroom. This type of placement would be recommended for a child that needs only

slight alterations in the existing curriculum to be successful. For instance, a child with a visual processing problem who would benefit from teaching strategies that concentrate on the sense of hearing would most likely receive this type of placement. This child has the ability to read, but learns more successfully if the lessons are verbal. The teacher would simply have to modify his/her teaching style, perhaps by reading out loud instructions which would normally only be written. Remediation techniques or learning and study strategies enhance the student's strengths in the content of the general education curriculum (NASSP, 1993).

The second level, adapted curriculum alignment, is used when the child's functional level is such that instructional changes are necessary. The classroom content is appropriate, but requires additional adaptations or modifications to meet the student's instructional needs (NASSP, 1993). Adaptations might include requiring a student to listen instead of read or to speak rather than write. Unlike the child in the general curriculum alignment model who simply learned more easily through auditory channels, a child at this level must listen instead of read because he or she does not possess the ability to learn through sight; such as a visually challenged child. Additional, supporting staff members, such as special educators, assist the classroom teacher in modifying and offering similar general content at a lower developmental level that is more appropriate for the individual student (NASSP, 1993).

At the third level, an IEP developing team has decided that a student cannot benefit from remediation or adaptation of the curriculum normally taught in the general education classroom. The IEP team develops a functionally aligned curriculum to focus on living skills and possibly pre-job vocational training. The IEP team supports the classroom teacher with additional staff members, specialized materials, student independent living skills and other skills that most students would learn through

— general life experience (NASSP, 1993). A child at this level would still participate in whole class activities, but his/her goals and objectives would be functional in nature. “For instance, a class working in cooperative learning groups might include a lower functioning student to do timekeeping for a biology experiment. The special education student’s functional aligned curriculum objective is telling time, while the other students work to discover the functions of the human lymphatic system” (Eichinger, J., 1990, p. 411).

— Regardless of the level of the inclusive programs in a school, all inclusive programs have several things in common. The first is zero rejection. No student will be refused placement in his or her home school because of the presence of a handicap. The second is natural proportions. Schools are shifting students to ensure that no one school has a higher percentage of a certain handicap than would normally appear in the general population. The third is age-appropriate programming. Although some children with special needs are developmentally delayed, the schools make every effort to place children with other children in their age group. The fourth is a noticeable change in the delivery of service. Special classrooms for specific students are eliminated. Special education becomes a service instead of a place, and special educators operate as support staff for general educators. The fifth item is the use of individualized education plans, commonly referred to as IEPs. IEPs are written by a committee chosen specifically for that purpose. IEPs concentrate on what each individual child needs to be successful in his/her academic career. IEPs also serve as a guide for the general education teacher as he or she plans the curriculum. The sixth and final component is parent participation. It is necessary for all parents to be involved in changes in their child’s placement, both as a matter of respect and as a matter of policy (Adams, 1990).

Some of the possible benefits of inclusion are as follows. It is possible that the educationally strong children will positively influence the achievement of the disabled children (Brown, 1989). Inclusion promotes a more positive attitude on the part of non disabled learners toward their peers with severe disabilities (Voeltz, 1982). It also provides less able children with a “circle of friends” to love and support them (Viadero, 1992). Inclusion provides opportunities for all children to develop social and communication skills. Inclusion requires team work between special educators and general educators thus improving all of the children’s learning experiences (Voeltz, 1982).

Some of the possible disadvantages of inclusion are as follows. Some people believe that placing children with severe intellectual disabilities in regular education classrooms will negatively affect the educational growth of the other “normal” children in the classroom (Brown, 1989). Through the years, millions of dollars have been devoted to developing special education materials for use in special education classrooms. Many educators are afraid that if these special students are placed in regular education classrooms, they will lose out on the possible benefits of this equipment. When disabled children are placed with other disabled children, they feel a sense of community because they have something in common. If placed in a regular education classroom, the special education student will never be accepted as an equal member of the class (Voeltz, 1982). If they do not receive adequate support, teachers may be overwhelmed by this added work load and the education of all the children could suffer.

In order to increase the benefits and decrease the disadvantages of inclusion, there are several things that should be considered before beginning to implement any kind of inclusion model. Inclusion should not happen overnight;

school systems should have a step-by-step implementation plan before beginning to include their schools (York, & Vandercook, 1991). The need for in-service training for the teaching staff is of great importance and cannot be overemphasized. Staff may need in service training to learn how to use specialized adaptive equipment, individualize instruction, adapt the curriculum, or evaluate student performance on an ongoing basis (Eichinger, 1990). To achieve successful inclusion, the curricular program must be designed to meet the needs of all learners and be flexible enough so that modifications can be made to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate program in a regular education classroom. Thus, an active, student-centered learning approach is recommended (Putman, Rynders, Johnson, & Johnson, 1989). Ongoing communication with parents is a critical component of successful inclusion. It is important to include parents in the preparation and planning of an inclusive education model. Helping parents to understand the benefits of integration will help alleviate any fear they may have and in doing this, save the school system from parent complaints at a later date (Putman, Rynders, Johnson, & Johnson, 1989). “When a concerted effort is made to include ongoing planning, in service training for staff, needed support services, and curricular modifications, successful inclusion of students with disabilities can occur” (York, & Vandercook, 1991, p.26).

Description of Environment

The first time I walked in the door, the sound of laughing children greeted my ears. The room is bright and cheerful. One whole wall is lined with windows, and even though clouds cover the sky, the natural light floods in. Green plants sprout out of brown clay pots and dangle off macrame suspended from the ceiling. A red watering can sits on the window ledge. Toys, books, games and art supplies line the shelves below the windows, strategically placed so tiny people can access them without help from an adult. In one corner, a reading area is set up. Children can lie on pillows or sit inside a rocket ship to spend some quality quiet time with a good book. A table set up near the center of the room is filled with plastic dishes full of clay. A basket of tools (rolling pins, plastic silverware, etc.) stands ready for use by the young sculptors. Cubby shelves with the children's tubs in them stand around the perimeter of the room and across the center to form a natural dividing line between work and play areas. All children have name tags which are kept in their tubs when they are not being worn. The children's coats hang by the door on pegs on the wall and their boots and hats fill the overhead racks. Off to the side is a conveniently located bathroom. A drinking fountain and sink outside the restroom provide water for drinking and cleaning purposes. In the far right corner of the room is a "learning well". It is about three steps deep at its deepest part. The stairs are carpeted for maximum comfort and a rocking chair for Mrs. G sits in the middle of it. In this well, the children sing, talk and listen to stories.

Mrs. G's class has twenty-four smiling faces. There are Caucasians, African Americans and one Mexican American child in the group.

Glancing at this happy group would not give one any indication that this class rests on the cutting edge of a controversial trend in education; inclusion. This is the

first year for inclusion in this school, and at this time, Mrs. G's classroom appears to be functioning at the level of General Curriculum Alignment.

Special Students

Looking more closely at this classroom one will see some signs that this is not an average class. Mrs. G wears an electronic box hanging around her neck. A small microphone amplifies her words into the box. One of the children, R, wears an almost identical box with wires connecting to hearing aids in his ears. R is hearing impaired; he can hear some sounds, but not without the use of his auditory trainer. R has learned some sign language, but because the other children in the class do not understand it, he uses it very infrequently.

Looking even more closely at the group, one may notice A. This small girl has thick glasses on. Her mouth hangs open slightly and her gaze does not seem to focus on anything. A has been diagnosed as mildly, mentally retarded. She has an I.Q. of fifty. A has also been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, a disorder that makes it difficult for children to concentrate on one thing for very long. She is currently taking Ritalen, a drug which helps depress the nervous system, controlling hyperactivity and making it easier for a child to concentrate.

One other child that might be noticed upon closer inspection is a small blond boy. K crouches by himself near the wall. Instead of facing Mrs. G like the other children, he faces the rest of the class. His eyes dart back and forth as if he is monitoring everyone's movements and he seems slightly agitated. K is an extremely quiet and unresponsive young boy. He rarely talks, laughs or smiles. He is adverse to touch and shrinks back into himself whenever another person approaches him. K has been labeled as a child who is "emotionally handicapped".

In non-inclusive times, these three very special children would be in the special

education room. They would be taught by different teachers, eat lunch separately, play separately and maybe even ride different buses. Now they are here in Mrs. G's room and they are a part of this very special kindergarten.

Description of Activities

Start the Day Mrs. G's class starts its day with calendar time. The children gather in the learning well and talk about what day of the week it is, what the date is, and what month it is. Some of the children are fond of shouting out the answers. A always tries to volunteer information, although she rarely gets it correct. R often looks lost during this time. With everyone talking at once, he is unsure of whose lips to read.

After the calendar is complete, the children look around the room and decide if any of their classmates are missing that day. Mrs. G identifies who will be the helpers for the day. There is a boy helper and a girl helper. She identifies who will stand at the beginning of the girls' line and the boys' line. Then she picks the weather person. The weather person's job is to stand at the window and tell the class about the weather. Mrs. G stands at the chart and asks, "Is it sunny? Is it windy?" etc. The weather person's answers are noted on the chart (whether or not they are correct). Then the weather person must read the chart to the class by saying, "Yes, it's sunny or no, it's not windy." etc. One day, A was the weather girl. She went to the window and proceeded to tell Mrs. G that it was sunny and snowing when it was really cloudy with no precipitation. The rest of the class found this extremely funny and laughed and giggled for quiet awhile before Mrs. G told them to stop.

Counting. Songs

After the weather, the whole class counts together to a number determined by Mrs. G. Many of the children can count to one hundred and are more than willing to demonstrate this skill to anyone who cares to listen. K knows how to count and will

mumble quietly to himself. R also knows how to count and will try to form the words with his lips as he watches the faces of the other children. A can only count to twenty. If the predetermined number is higher than this, she simply counts to twenty and then stops and watches the others.

After counting, the class sings songs. These songs vary but are usually related to whatever holiday is approaching. While I was there, I heard Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas songs. The children enjoy singing and will often make up their own songs and perform them for the class. R. will try to sing, following along and making some of the sounds that he sees the others making.

Letter People

The letter people in this classroom have been changed to letter animals. Mrs. G introduces one new letter and letter animal each week. The children sit in the learning well and Mrs. G tells them about the new letter, what sound it represents, and where it is located in the alphabet. The children take turns volunteering words that begin with this letter. Mrs. G then demonstrates step-by-step how to make the letter animal. The children are advised to watch closely because they will have to do this on their own. Some of the parts are precut for them and already laid out on the table with number signs posted to tell the children how many of each part they need. The parts will have to be colored and put together to form the letter animal. Neatness is important. Conformity to the teacher's pattern is also encouraged. Scribbling and racing through one's work are not allowed in this classroom. The children know that the penalty for scribbling is doing the whole project over again. A. has a hard time with neatness and of course, Mrs. G does not hold her to the standards of the rest of the class. The class, however, is not so easy on her. "Mrs. G, A. is scribbling", is a common phrase heard during this coloring period. During the time that I was there, several children had to

redo work because of scribbling.

Worksheets

There are worksheets that go along with the letter for the week. Mrs. G goes over the sheets in the learning well. These sheets follow the same format consistently. For example, if the letter for the week is T. The worksheet would have a picture of a T and about five different pictures of things that start with T. It would also have three pictures of things that do not start with T. The child must first decide what does not start with T and cross it out. Then the child colors the pictures that do start with T. Once again, neatness is required. Realistic coloring is also valued. Mrs. G will say to a child who is starting to color his/her turkey blue, "Do you think that there are blue turkeys? Have you ever seen a blue turkey?" Once again, A is allowed a little leeway, and received a little more teacher help than the other children. K is very attentive to detail during both worksheet and letter people time. He does his best in an effort to receive as little attention from anyone as possible. One day when he had done a particularly good coloring job, I complimented him. He smiled slightly, kept his head down and never made a sound.

Tub Time

This is a daily occurrence. When the children are finished with their seat work, they are expected to "Tub". There are 8 different plastic tubs filled with various materials such as pool tiles, blocks, beads and other manipulatives. The children use these things to make patterns, count, learn one to one correspondence and learn to fill a plane with a repeated shape. During tub time, the children are only allowed to play with the materials from the tubs. K. never plays during this time unless Mrs. G sits next to him and shows him what to do. He usually just sits in his favorite spot by the blocks and keeps his eyes on everything. A. sometimes has trouble during tub time because

she is not fond of sharing and sharing is required due to the limited amount of tubs for the class. Every child does not make it to tub time every day. If a one does not complete one's seat work, one has to sit at the table until it is complete. Sometimes this means no tub time. Also, excessive arguing or disrupting during tub time could get a child sent back to his/her table.

Stories

A bell sounds to announce the end of tub time. The children recognize this signal and immediately begin to clean up their materials. Everyone must help clean up regardless of whether they were using the materials. When everything is clean, the class reconvenes in the learning well for story time. It seemed to be important to the children at this time to be sitting near their friends. This seems to be one of the children's favorite times of the day. Mrs. G keeps a large collection of books on hand for the children. She picks two or three short books to be read during story time. The children relax on the steps and Mrs. G sits in the rocker and reads to them. There were only two problems I witnessed during story time. If the children became restless, they would sometimes pick on one another. Also, the children really want to be close to their teacher and often try to sit on the floor next to her. This isn't allowed because everyone would want to get off the steps and sit on the floor. The stories are usually followed by a few short comprehension questions. The children generally do well on these questions and they pay attention because they like being read to. A. enjoys the stories, but often has a hard time sitting still, often getting reprimanded for squirming and bothering the other children. R. has to sit in the front to ensure that he can see the pictures and Mrs. G's lip movements. As usual, K sits by himself on the edge of the well to keep an eye on the class.

Free Play

After story time, the children have free play time. At this time they are allowed to use any of the materials available in the room. The two favorites seem to be the craft table and the housekeeping area. There is a limit on the number of children allowed to be in these areas at a time, so it is not unusual to see several children standing and waiting for their turn to use these centers. During the times that I was there, I noticed that the same children do the same activities all the time with very little variation. A. usually plays by herself because the other children get frustrated with her inability to play at their level. K. never plays, but stays in his corner of the room to keep an eye on the others. R. sometimes plays by himself and sometimes plays with the other children. His favorite toy is the train track and he does not like to share this with anyone else. During this time, Mrs. G works quietly nearby and keeps an eye on everyone to make sure rules are being obeyed.

Ending Activities

Free time usually lasts until 10 minutes before class ends. At this time, the children clean up and get their coats and book bags out. They replace their name tags in their cubbies and get any materials together that they need to take home. A's brother, who is also in Mrs. G's class helps her put away her things and get her coat on. When everyone is snug in their outdoor gear they line up in two lines, one girls', one boys', at the door and go outside. Most of the children's parents pick them up after school. Mrs. G. stands outside with the children and helps load them into the correct car. After all of the cars are cleared out, then walkers are dismissed. K is a walker. When dismissed, he walks slowly behind the group of children from his neighborhood keeping his eyes alert and his mouth closed.

Birthday Party

The class had a birthday party for Michael while I was there. Mrs. G told me that she sends notes home to the parents telling them that it is okay to send food for birthdays. Both kindergarten teachers in the building tell parents to please not send cupcakes because they are crumbly and they make a huge mess. Most parents disregard this message and send cupcakes anyway. Michael had white cupcakes with Power Rangers on them. The children ate and drank punch and sang the birthday song. This was the time when the children all seemed to be on the same level. A and R laughed and enjoyed this time with the rest of the children and even K smiled a little bit.

Alphabet Bingo

Alphabet Bingo is a game that is used as a special reward in this classroom. It is played much like the traditional game of Bingo except that the boxes on the cards have capital and lowercase letters of the alphabet on them with one space being the "freebie". The cards are enlarged for easier reading and each child gets one card. To play this game, the class, including Mrs. G, sit on the floor in a circle. Mrs. G calls out the letters and holds up the card with the letter written on it so the children can both see and hear what is being called. This helps R who usually sits across the circle from Mrs. G so he can watch what she is doing. A. sits right next to Mrs. G so that the teacher can keep an eye on her and help her locate the letters. The other children also try to "help" A but Mrs. G reminds them that if they are looking at someone else's card they are not watching their own and might miss a Bingo. When someone has filled his/her entire card, she/he is the winner and must read back the letters correctly in order to claim the prize. Play usually proceeds until at least two or three children have won. Mrs. G always reminds the children that not everyone is going to win and

that's just the nature of games.

Pilgrims

Mrs. Gobble did a lesson on Pilgrims and the Mayflower. She talked about how the people had come over from England to find a better way of life. The children were given a worksheet with the Mayflower on it to color. Once again, scribbling was discouraged. On that particular day, A. had to do two worksheets because her first one was too messy. She did not understand why she had to do her worksheet over again. She sat in her seat and cried for ten minutes before Mrs. G was able to get her to stop.

Muncie School System Policy on Inclusion

Although, some classrooms in the Muncie Community School System are presently included, currently, the Muncie Community School System does not have a plan of implementation for inclusion in its schools. When I inquired about a plan, I was told that Muncie Community Schools follow the mandates of P.L. 94-142 mentioned at the beginning of this paper, and strive to meet the individual needs of each student.

Discussion

The repercussions of inclusion impact three groups in the classroom in various ways. Inclusion affects the special children, the other children and the teacher.

Looking at the special children first, I see advantages and disadvantages. Socially, they have grown. All three of them work and play in a room with children who are very different from them and yet they manage to get along. A and R have increased their communication skills. K has increased his tolerance of people. I feel that academically, this setting is not the best for these children. A. would be more successful if some special methods were used to educate her instead of just the same curriculum with lower expectations. R. would prosper more if he had an interpreter or someone who could sign with him as well as talking with him. K. needs some emotional help before he can begin to focus on academics. This classroom sometimes becomes emotionally challenging for these children. A. becomes upset because she can not or will not achieve at the same level as her peers. R. becomes frustrated when he can not understand what is being said or he cannot communicate his needs or wishes. K. is frightened of this classroom and its abundance of people and never ending activity.

I feel that the other children in the classroom benefited more from the inclusion situation than K, A, or R. The other children developed sensitivity to the needs and

concerns of their special classmates. They took it upon themselves to help the special children. This experience has made them more in tune with the needs of people around them. They have become better classroom "citizens".

The ramifications of inclusion on the classroom teacher vary depending on how prepared that teacher is and how much support he/she receives. In this case, Mrs. G was totally unprepared. She was told about one month before school began that her classroom would be included. She received no training and very little support. Despite the fact that she had twenty-four students, she has no teacher aids. The only help she receives is an occasional office employee with some extra free time.

I have come to the conclusions that inclusion is a process that should be given extensive thought and planning. Children should not be indiscriminately placed into regular education classrooms that may or may not be prepared to meet their special needs. It is my belief that inclusive settings are not beneficial for every student. Each case should be dealt with on an individual basis and care should be taken to ensure that the final placement of a student provides the best academic atmosphere possible. If it is decided that inclusion is the best option, schools should not automatically assume that full inclusion is justified. They should instead utilize the continuum of services offered by the three levels of inclusion and choose the one that is right for the student in question. School systems need to be aware that implementing inclusion at any level requires both time and money not only to implement but to maintain at a level that is beneficial for both students and teachers.

I have always felt that good teaching techniques are good teaching techniques no matter who the students are. I feel that general educators can make inclusion a positive experience if they have what is necessary for success. After this experience, I feel that inclusion is only beneficial if it is both well planned and carefully

implemented.

I recommend that inclusion never be attempted without a large amount of preplanning and a sincere look at whether or not each individual child will benefit from the new system. Lack of structure in planning leads to teachers who do not know how to handle the children that are being placed in their classrooms. These teachers feel overwhelmed, like these children were thrust upon them without warning or adequate preparation. When teachers feel like this, children sense it and begin to feel unwanted. Lack of planning leads to children who may fall behind because they are not receiving the services that they require for academic success. Lack of support services forces teachers to resort to using office help as classroom aids. Lack of support leads to low morale among teachers and a negative attitude toward inclusion.

References

Adams, J. (1993). Regular education initiative. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 26 (9), 593-596.

Brown, L. (1989). Should students with sever intellectual disabilities be based in regular or in special education classrooms in home schools. JASH, 14(1) 8-12.

Eichinger, J. (1990). Goal structure effects on social interactions: Non disabled and disabled elementary students. Exceptional Children, 56, 408-416.

Evans, R. (1990). Making mainstreaming work through pyre consultation. Educational Leadership , 9, 73-77.

NASSP. (1993). Including special education services in the general school curriculum. Curriculum Report, 22 (5). 1-6.

Putnam, J, Rynders, J, Johnson, R & Johnson, D. (1989). Collaborative skill instruction for promoting positive interactions between mentally handicapped and non handicapped children. Exceptional Children, 55, 550-557.

Syracuse City School District and Syracuse University Inclusive Education Project. (1990). Information Briefing on Inclusive Schools.

Viadero, D. (1992). Full inclusion, not exclusion. Education Week ,18, 70-73.

Voeltz, L. (1982). Effects of structured interactions with severely handicapped peers on children's attitudes. American Journal on Mental Deficiency , 86, 180-190.

York, J. & Vandercook, T. (1991). Designing and integrated program for learners with severe disabilities. Teaching Exceptional Children, 23, (2), 22-28.