

Running head: THE EFFECTS OF INCLUSION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The Effects of Inclusion on Elementary School Students and Teachers

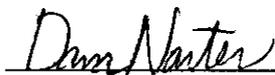
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

Getting an education can prove to be difficult for all students, but for those children who possess a learning disability, it can be an even greater challenge. The passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 led directly to the development of inclusion, a process implemented to close the gap between LD students and their peers. Today, the benefits and necessity of inclusion is a topic of great controversy. To answer this question, it is essential to look at the effects of inclusion on those, LD students, non-LD students, and teachers, who are directly involved in the process. In addition, there are a number of key areas where improvements can be made.

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Introduction

A student sits at her desk ready to start the day. She wants to learn but sometimes it is difficult. The world around her does not always make sense. She finds it difficult to sit still, and this often leads to punishment from her teacher. The other students know that there is something different about her, and some even treat her as such. Sometimes she has to leave the classroom so she can get help. Certain days are better than others, but every day provides a wide array of challenges, many of which she is simply not prepared for.

Another student sits at his desk eager to learn. Learning comes easily to him. In most subjects he is much more advanced than his peers. He also exhibits exceptional behavior both inside and outside of the classroom. By listening attentively, following the rules, and treating others with respect, he provides a model for the other students in the classroom and they are all fond of him. He is truly a teacher's dream.

A teacher stands at the front of the classroom. As she looks at her students, she sees many faces, colors, shapes, and sizes. But that is not all that differentiates this group of students. They are diverse academically and behaviorally as well. Some soak up knowledge, while others seem to repel it. Some take easily to the rules of the classroom, while others find it difficult to do something as simple as sitting still. It is difficult but she tries to provide each student with a quality education. Every child presents a unique challenge, some of which are easily handled and others that require resources she simply does not possess. She cares deeply for her students but is often at a loss about how to fulfill all of their needs effectively.

So what do these three individuals have in common? They all exist within the walls of an inclusive classroom. In 1975, Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act which set the stage for the development of inclusion (Goldstein & Kuveke, 1996). Inclusion is a system where all students participate in a general or regular classroom setting regardless of the severity of the disability possessed or the amount of needs (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE], 1997). Generally speaking, it involves “educating students with mild to severe disabilities in the general education classroom.” (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999, p.5) The placement of students into this situation is done on an individual basis and involves the consideration of a number of different factors. However, the regular classroom is always the first and most desirable choice.

In recent years, this topic has become very prominent in the educational realm. Between 1986 and 1996, the number of students identified as having learning disabilities and receiving an education within the confines of a regular classroom increased by nearly 20 percent and the numbers are continuing to increase (Holloway, 2001). During the 2001-2002 school year, disabled students made up 13.5% of all public school enrollment in the United States many of which spent their days in an inclusive setting (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Inclusion has been around for many years, but with the numbers growing every year, it has become essential to look critically at the inclusion process.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the effect that inclusion has on certain groups of people as well as its overall effectiveness. We will first look at the origins and history of inclusion. The next section will provide some of the general arguments for and

against inclusion that exist today. The main portion of this paper will look specifically at three different groups, students with learning disabilities, students without learning disabilities, and teachers, and how inclusion affects them. In regard to teachers, we will discuss how inclusion changes the roles and responsibilities of those who are in charge of the classrooms. For both groups of students, the academic, social, and emotional consequences will all be addressed as well as the overall effectiveness of the inclusion process. The paper will then conclude with a number of suggestions as to how inclusion can be improved. All of these elements together will help to provide a general understanding of inclusion and those who are directly affected by the process.

History

In order to fully understand how this new law changed the face of education, it is important to look at what was occurring up until the law was implemented in 1975. Before the enactment of this law, children who had learning disabilities were often treated as incapable individuals who did not require or even deserve an education of equal quality to their non-disabled peers. Benjamin Rush, a physician in the late 1700s, was one of the first people to consider the possibility of educating individuals with learning disabilities (Kargiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, 1996). Rush, considered by most to be the father of American psychiatry, played a major role in developing the humane treatment of members of the disabled community. Thomas Gallaudet established the first special education program in 1817 (Kargiannis et al., 1996). In colonial America, most students were being taught within the home (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). A compulsory educational system, or 'common schools,' had not yet been implemented in the governmental framework (Kargiannis et al., 1996). At that time, education was

primarily reserved for those who could afford it. In the year 1852, compulsory education was developed which required that public education be provided to all children. For the first time people were faced with the challenge of educating a diverse population of students (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). According to Pfeiffer and Reddy (1999), during the 1920s, special separate schools were created to educate those children who were blind, deaf, or had severe mental retardation. Some children with milder disabilities were educated in the same mainstream schools as their same-aged counterparts, yet were confined to separate rooms as the number of these students increased (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). At this time, similar to today, many felt that these students would better benefit from individual attention provided by specially trained instructors. It was also widely accepted that children with disabilities would have a negative effect on the learning process of their non-disabled peers (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). Another commonly held belief was that people with disabilities had “criminal tendencies” and were a menace to society, further continuing the idea that these individuals were not worthy of the same education as those without learning disabilities (Kargiannis et al., 1996). As time went on, the attitudes held by many individuals about these children began to change, and tolerance for them began to grow (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). Over the next twenty years, the desire and concern regarding identifying these children and getting them the proper supports began to be pushed aside. This breakdown was also becoming visible in the classrooms. The conditions of these rooms were deplorable, and the resources available were inadequate at best (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). As the 1950s came into view, parents became more aware of and concerned with these conditions and began to voice their disgust. In 1952, the court ruled on the case of Brown vs. The Board of Education which

clarified what schools were responsible for in regards to children who were either disabled or belonged to a minority group (Gartner & Lipinsky, 1997). This ruling paved the way for more legislation concerning the rights of children with disabilities (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). Not long after that court ruling, the Civil Rights movement began which in turn saw the emergence of what is now known as mainstreaming. In general, this refers to allowing children with disabilities to be educated in the same classroom as their non-disabled peers (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). Then in 1975, Congress passed a law that would change the face of education forever. This law, as stated previously, was known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and set a new standard for the education of children with disabilities (Goldstein & Kuvke, 1996). This act, also known as P.L. 94-142, specifically “guaranteed all students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education in the LRE” or least restrictive environment (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999, p. 4). Education in the United States has not been the same since. In 1997, this law was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (Gartner & Lipsky, 1997). The end result is what we now know today as inclusion.

Today, approximately 5 % of all children in public schools are affected by some form of learning disability (National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2004). The legal preference is to educate students with disabilities in a desegregated, regular classroom setting (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). By law, schools are required to offer and provide a continuum of placement options and services, but to this point, the courts have refused to make full inclusion mandatory in all cases. At this time the courts prefer to review each case individually and base placement on the needs of the individual student.

The progress that has been made in the area of disability education services over the past quarter of a century has been astonishing. In the last 30 years, we have seen children who were once isolated and treated as incapable become fully immersed in mainstream interaction and education. The issue at hand today is not whether or not to implement such a policy, but simply if a policy of this nature is truly beneficial. This controversy has moved to the forefront of the educational arena.

Definitions

Inclusion involves a number of different components that are essential to the process as well as understanding. To aid in the understanding of this concept and its resulting effects, the definitions of these factors must be considered. Knowing and comprehending such terms as learning disability, mainstreaming, and least restrictive environment will help to develop a well-rounded and complete picture of inclusion.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a *learning disability* is:

A disorder in basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or use mathematical calculations. The term includes conditions such as perceptual disability, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia (National Institute of Health [NIH], 2003).

Learning disabilities are often considered to be 'hidden handicaps' because one cannot tell by simply looking at a person whether they possess one (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2003). These disabilities range from difficulties with spoken and

written word and coordination to problems with self-control and attention. Regardless of the particular issues, all impede the learning process of the individual student. The DSM-IV (1994) fourth edition has identified three broad categories of learning disabilities. The categories include developmental speech and language disorders, academic skills disorders, and the final group other, which includes all other learning disorders that do not fit into the other two categories.

Referred to by law as a 'specific learning disability' or SLD, at this time there is no identifiable cause of learning disabilities (NCLD, 2004). They are likely a result of a disturbance in brain structure and functioning some of which may develop even before birth (NIMH, 2004). Some learning disabilities are identified early in development. Parents and perhaps pediatricians may notice developmental delays. When and how the disability is discovered is often dependent on the type. A formal diagnosis is usually obtained through standardized testing (NIMH, 2004). This process allows a trained professional to compare the child's current ability level to what is considered normal or average for an individual at that age. The results are then used when determining the appropriate placement of children in the educational system. Once identified and diagnosed, these children can then become eligible for the help and services they need.

The educational system is constantly changing in order to meet the needs of its students. One transformation in particular played a vital role in the development of what we know of today as inclusion. Identifying and discussing this movement, also known as *mainstreaming*, is particularly important because this term is often incorrectly confused with that of inclusion. While on the surface they appear to be one in the same, they are two separate issues.

Mainstreaming was a direct result of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). After this mandate was passed, the placement of learning disabled students within the schools became the topic of much debate. Different ideas began to develop on how this placement process should be properly implemented. Mainstreaming was one of the three major approaches that came as a result of this debate. By definition, mainstreaming is a term used to describe the process of placing some students with disabilities into the regular class setting while keeping others in a “separate system of classes, services, and programs.” (IDOE, 1997, p. 4) Students who benefit from this service are often the children who spend the majority of their time in self-contained classrooms outside of the regular classroom (Goldstein & Kuvke, 1996). In theory, mainstreaming gives them an opportunity to interact with their regular education peers. This process is often seen as being more concerned with the physical presence of the student in the classroom while having little regard for the instructional and educational needs of the individual students which is not the case with inclusion. While this may or may not be true, mainstreaming is ultimately based on the idea that every student is different; therefore, each individual student requires a different and appropriate setting in which to receive an education (Goldstein & Kuvke, 1996). This is one area where inclusion and mainstreaming are similar.

One of the key terms present in both mainstreaming and inclusion is *least restrictive environment* or LRE. There is much controversy surrounding the many interpretations of what the least restrictive environment is, making it difficult to define. While the terms mainstreaming and inclusion are not found in any state or federal documentation, LRE is directly addressed. The definition of LRE that will be utilized in

this paper comes from the inclusive perspective and in general, refers to the process of placing students in an educational setting where special education will be provided to students with disabilities (IDOE, 1997). The term itself is arguably the most significant part of inclusion. According to Goldstein and Kuvke (1996), the environment in which the child is placed must aptly meet the needs of the child. For a setting or procedure to be considered appropriate, it must maximize to the fullest extent possible, the interaction of the student with regular education peers. This emphasis on contact with peers is a key component of the LRE and is essentially what it is based upon. The general classroom is always the first option or consideration when it comes to child placement (IDOE, 1997). Students are only to be removed from the classroom if they cannot receive an adequate education in a regular setting. Another important aspect of the LRE is the idea of individualization. Every placement decision is to be made on an individual basis, and the guidelines provided by the LRE help to direct the implementation and process of inclusion.

Once the least restrictive environment has been determined, children must be integrated into the appropriate classroom setting. Every child who is identified as learning disabled and placed into a regular classroom setting has prepared for them an individualized education program (IEP) to help monitor and guide the process of inclusion (Goldstein & Kuvke, 1996). This document is created through the collaboration of the child and his or her parents, teacher, and administrators and has a main purpose of identifying the individual student's educational, social, and emotional needs. At minimum, the document is revised once a year and every three years undergoes a complete reevaluation (Goldstein & Kuvke, 1996). This plan ultimately

serves as a blueprint showing how inclusion should be implemented for each individual student.

General Arguments For and Against Inclusion

As with any controversial topic within the educational arena, there are some people who believe that inclusion is beneficial and effective, and others who question both its effectiveness and necessity. Both sides have arguments that they think effectively support their positions. There are a number of categories on which these arguments are based all of which offer a good deal of insight into the inclusion debate. In general, those who are in support of inclusion believe that the presence of students with learning disabilities in the general classroom is beneficial. Those who oppose inclusion feel that it is an ineffective solution to the dilemma that is often faced when educating children with learning disabilities.

The development of social skills is one of the benefits that supporters feel can be gained through the involvement of children with learning disabilities in the regular classroom. By being able to interact with non-LD children, they feel that students will have the opportunity to develop friendships, learn social rules, and model appropriate behavior. Those in opposition see the placement of these students in the regular classroom as creating behavior problems and leading to a disruptive environment for all students.

There is also the development of academic skills. Supporters believe that by placing children with learning disabilities in a setting of isolation, they will be able to receive the help they need in order to learn effectively. Removing them from this environment puts them at a disadvantage and as a result these students are held to a lower

academic standard. The other side sees the educational process as a result of both the academic and the social components. Both play a role in the development of the child and therefore must both be present during the educational process. They feel that a good balance in both areas is more important than looking at the effects of just one part. Providing benefits in just one of these two areas is simply not enough. They also fear that LD children will not be able to receive the same educational opportunities that they would in an isolated classroom.

The overall perception that others hold of children with disabilities and how they view themselves are both major issues involved in inclusion. Including these children in the regular classroom affords them the opportunity to interact with their non-disabled peers. Those who support this process see this interaction as a force that can break down the barriers that misunderstanding and fear create and allow for acceptance. Through opportunities for these children to be successful as students, their self-perception may be improved. The other side sees such interaction as putting these children in a situation in which they are doomed to fail. Including such students in the regular classroom will magnify their disabilities and differences, affecting not only how they see themselves but can also result in stigmatization and labeling.

The effect of inclusion on students without disabilities is another issue of great debate. Often the focus is on the children with disabilities, but they are not the only ones who are affected by the inclusion process. Some believe that the issues surrounding inclusion compromise the education that all students receive. Others argue that the interaction with learning disabled students provides a wide range of opportunities that

offer experiences and teach many lessons about life. And the benefits gained by the students from inclusion far outweigh any negatives that may develop along the way.

All of these issues are of great importance in the debate regarding inclusion. In the end, the main argument is whether or not having a mandatory inclusion policy in elementary schools is beneficial. To answer this question a good deal of research has been conducted. The following sections will examine what studies say about the effect of inclusion on students with learning disabilities, students without learning disabilities, and those who educate both groups.

Overall Effects of Inclusion

The Effects of Inclusion on Children with Learning Disabilities

When most people think of inclusion, their thoughts are automatically directed toward the children who have the learning disabilities and for good reason. They are in fact the individuals who are most directly affected by the inclusion process. There are millions of children across the country who participate in such programs every day. However, there is some question as to whether placing students with learning disabilities in general classrooms is the most effective way to educate these children. This is an issue raised by many yet surprisingly studied by few. However, the research that has been conducted up to this point does provide insight into how inclusion affects children with learning disabilities.

Through participation in a general classroom setting it has been found that children with learning disabilities are affected in many different ways. One area where the effects can be seen is in that of social abilities. In a study by Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1996) looking at the social functioning of students in an inclusive setting, it was

found that students with learning disabilities do face greater alienation by their peers than do non-LD students. Boys also appear to face this situation more than girls do. It was also found that in general, the liking of LD students decreased over time (Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn, 1996). The increase in interaction that resulted from inclusion also led directly to an increase in dislike for those children who possessed a learning disability. There was however found to be an increase in reciprocal friendships for LD students. In the fall, at the beginning of the study, only 26% of learning disabled children participated in a mutual relationship (Elbaum et al., 1996). When the same measures were looked at again in the spring the number increased to 53% (Elbaum et al., 1996). Being in a general classroom gave LD children the opportunity to form friendships with their non-LD peers and many of them were able to take advantage of this opportunity. Also of interest was the fact that the friends these students gained represented all achievement groups (Elbaum et al., 1996). Students with learning disabilities were not only able to develop friendships but they were able to do so with a wide variety of individuals. The relationships were not based on abilities but instead on interaction. MacMillan, Gresham, and Forness (1996) also saw the potentially harmful effects of inclusion on learning disabled children. Recognizing that interaction could have negative effects, they feared is that the contact hypothesis could potentially work in reverse meaning these students may actually be viewed more negatively after interaction with non-LD peers, helping to perpetuate the negative effects.

A more recent study done by Elbaum (2002) also found a number of effects that come as a result of inclusion. As was found in the first study discussed above, in general, children with learning disabilities are less accepted by their peers than are non-LD

students (Elbaum, 2002). This study also found that these children did develop friendships, however, a difference in the number of friends was reported. So while they did have some friends, they did not have as many as did their non-LD classmates. Teachers also reported that LD students were more likely to be friends with children who were similar, in particular, other children who possessed learning disabilities which is different than the findings in the first study (Elbaum, 2002). These relationships were also found to be of lesser quality. While a part of these friendships the students tended to experience more conflict and less validation and found it more difficult to repair issues or resolve problems (Elbaum, 2002). Results of this experiment also showed that time with non-LD children provided those with learning disabilities with a model for behavior (Elbaum, 2002). In fact teachers rate LD children as having poorer social skills and more problematic behavior. Many of these children do not know what appropriate behavior is and by being able to see their peers act properly in the classroom, they may then be able to reproduce the same behavior. This can be a great benefit to the teacher as well as to the student.

This same study also looked concurrently at different levels of inclusion. There were four groups studied each of which varied in the degree to which children with learning disabilities were integrated into the general classroom. Placement ranged from full participation in a special education classroom to full inclusion. When comparing these groups, few differences were found for LD students placed in special education classrooms when compared to other forms of placement (Elbaum, 2002). However, when difference did occur, it was always the children in the more inclusive classrooms that fared better. The classrooms that were more inclusive provided academic,

emotional, and social resources that were of greater benefit to LD students when differences did arise. The less inclusive settings did not provide these resources.

To this point, there has been little research done on the academic effects of inclusion. There is no doubt, though, that they do in fact exist. Many who oppose inclusion feel that the greatest importance is placed on integrating LD children into the general classroom, even if it is at the expense of their academic advancement. And while many see this as a valid concern, it had yet to be substantiated. In fact, the Indiana Department of Education (1997) has found that students with learning disabilities have shown an overall improvement in academic performance. The effects they have observed have been of a positive nature. Learning disabled children have been found to achieve at a level that is similar to or better than the level they would reach in a isolated setting (IDEO, 1997).

Inclusion also plays a role in the emotional aspects of these children's lives. When LD students are placed in the general classrooms, they are often surrounded by other children who are more advanced both socially and academically. Being different is hard for any child but especially for those who are learning disabled. It had been found that LD students have lower concepts of themselves academically (Elbaum, 2002). Most of these children are highly intelligent yet they have a difficult time achieving in the classroom. In a regular classroom, these deficiencies can become clearly evident and cause LD students to look at themselves negatively in regards to academic achievement. Students with learning disabilities also have been found to show more signs of depression as well as loneliness (Elbaum, 2002). This is not surprising considering the findings given above. In general, these children are viewed more negatively by their non-LD

peers. And although many of them do have friends, they simply do not have the social means that their peers have. As a result, they experience more depression and loneliness (Elbaum, 2002). These findings may seem a bit bleak; however, not all observations have conjured such negative results. Elbaum (2002) found that when comparing children with learning disabilities to their non-LD peers, there is little if any difference in overall self-esteem and non-academic self-concepts. When looking at non-academic concepts, there do not appear to be any ill effects from placement in a general classroom setting. LD children are able to function at an emotional level that is similar to their peers.

Effects of Inclusion on Children without Learning Disabilities

The overall ability of the public school system to provide support for its students has increased dramatically (IDOE, 1997). The goal of the general education system is, “to improve educational outcomes for all students in the nation’s schools.” (IDOE, 1997, p. 2) In order to obtain this goal the system exists in a state of constant reform. Since the implementation of inclusion into the regular classroom setting, there has always been great concern that this goal would no longer be attainable. The process of inclusion was developed to help integrate learning disabled children into the general classroom, but was never intended to occur at the expense of all other students. Many fear that inclusion will damage or disrupt the education provided to students who do not have a learning disability. As a result of these concerns, much research has been conducted to find what if any effects inclusion has on children who do not possess a learning disability.

Having children with learning disabilities in the general classroom requires that resources be distributed in different ways. One resource in particular is the time and attention of the classroom teacher. Not only does the presence of these children mean

that the overall class size is larger, but LD students often require more attention and help. Some fear that because of this, the quality of education received by the non-LD students will be jeopardized. The Indiana State Department of Education (1997) has found no evidence that the presence of LD or inclusion students in any way hinders the education of their non-LD peers. Preliminary findings have shown that non-LD students maintain their current level of academic achievement in the company of students with disabilities (IDOE, 1997).

Not only are there possible academic effects for non-LD students in an inclusive setting, but there may also be social implications. As was discussed in the previous section, LD children have the opportunity to gain a great deal socially from their non-LD counterparts in the form of friendships and modeling. In the same respect, non-LD students may also be able to benefit socially from inclusion. Some feel that this may actually be the greatest benefit that inclusion has to offer. Pfeiffer and Reddy (1999) have found and it is generally accepted that once children, those without learning disabilities, develop negative perceptions of LD children, it becomes nearly impossible to change them. This makes establishing positive attitudes early on essential in the development of a child. Studies have shown that interacting with LD students may lead non-LD students toward becoming more accepting of differences as well as the people from whom they differ (Daley & Hanline, 2002). While studying a group of preschool-aged children, Daley and Hanline (2002) found that the presence of LD-children in the classroom resulted in fewer rejecting attitudes and behaviors. The students seemed to be more accepting of the learning disabled children after having the chance to interact with them. It appeared to increase understanding of both the students themselves and what

made both groups similar as well as different. The educational system in the State of Indiana (1997) has also found there to be an overall increase in acceptance for children with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Improved tolerance for differences between individuals has been observed and reported (IDOE, 1997).

A longitudinal study by Maras and Brown (1996) regarding the effect of contact on children's attitudes towards disabilities showed that after only a short period of interaction students' contact became more frequent and their general attitudes became more positive. The experience that the regular students in this study gained with children possessing learning disabilities enabled them to see inclusive students in a different way. Attitudes that were previously negative were reduced and differences that had seemed insurmountable were found to be less prominent than once believed (Brown & Maras, 1996). This decrease in negative attitudes was directly visible in the evident desire that the non-LD children had to play with the LD-children. Over time, their desire to interact with LD children increased dramatically from its initial levels (Brown & Maras, 1996). Positive results such as these were even more evident when interaction between students was planned and supported.

It has also been found that non-LD students show a genuine sensitivity not only to the differences they have with their LD peers but to the LD students themselves. Interestingly, non-LD students were observed adapting their speech to the developmental level of their disabled peers when necessary (Daley & Hanline, 2002). Not only has increased liking been observed, but there is also evidence that a sense of helpfulness and responsibility develops for the learning disabled children who are participants in inclusion when both groups are able to interact. Integrating LD children into the general

classroom presents many challenges but can also allow for growth in all children involved.

Effects of Inclusion on Teachers

In 1981, a survey found that when considering all of their students, teachers identified approximately 18.8% as having special needs (Croll & Moses, 2003). In 1998, a similar study was conducted and seventeen years later, teachers described 26.1% of students as having special needs. Compared to the original baseline, this was an overall increase of 38.8% (Croll & Moses, 2003). Now these assessments may seem to be drastic overestimations, but for the most part, it appears that these teachers were accurate when they reported an increase in the number of children with special needs in their classrooms. As of the year 2000, there were approximately 6 million students who had been identified as having some form of learning disability. This statistic was the highest it had ever been up to this point and it continues to grow every year. This number does not even include those who have not been formally diagnosed (Education USA, 2000). Even more staggering is the fact that 46.2% of those children were mainstreamed into general classrooms (Education USA, 2000). Much of this transformation is due to the frequently changing ideas and definitions surrounding learning disabilities and special needs students. When looking at these numbers, it is no surprise that inclusion has not only led to many changes for students but also created additional issues for teachers as well. With learning disabled children come a whole new set of issues and challenges. And while teachers have little if any choice as to who is in their classroom, they are undoubtedly affected by each student with whom they come in contact.

Teachers are the backbone of the educational system. When examining the issue of inclusion, the discussion usually focuses on the students who are involved. While they are a major part of the equation, most believe that teachers are the key when it comes to determining the success of any type of integration program. Within the framework of inclusion, teachers are the main service providers. For that reason, it is crucial to understand the feelings that teachers have toward inclusion as well as how the entire process affects them. Research in this area has been sparse, but the information that has been found provides some insight into the feelings and attitudes of those who teach children with learning disabilities.

When teachers are asked about their feelings towards inclusion, a diverse set of responses usually results. Answers range from unqualified enthusiasm to support with definite distress. Others vary from concern with lack of resources and support to worry teacher's responsibility and the effects on students in general (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). And though they are different, many of them usually revolve around the same theme, fear. Teachers' fears are not based on the fact that these children have learning disabilities, but they stem from the fact that many teachers lack the necessary understanding of what inclusion truly is, and this kind of unknown typically results in fear.

Much of the fear is a result of the lack of education and preparation that many teachers have received to deal the new challenges that inclusion brings. Daley and Hanline (2002) report that, "the attitudes, preparation, and ongoing support" of teachers are all major factors in determining the success of inclusion. (p.1) Most teachers have had only minimal experience or learning opportunities in the area of special education

(Vaughn et al., 1996). Teachers are often put into a situation for which they are not prepared and expected to fend for themselves. Without any type of extra training, teachers often feel that they are fighting a losing battle. This situation can also create a sense of fear. Teachers enter the realm of general education and often do so with the intention of working with a certain type of student. Now, with learning disabled students becoming a mainstay within the classroom, these teachers are being asked to do things that they never wanted or intended to do when they chose their profession. This may not only be frightening but can also lead to feelings of confusion and resentment.

There are also a number of personal sources of fear. Some teachers have fears for themselves. The changes that coincide with inclusion can be very challenging especially for those who do not want to change. There is also the worry that additional students with special needs will increase an already demanding workload (Vaughn et al., 1996). Lack of control and input is also often at the root of many fears. Inclusion and the programs that are involved are for the most part determined by the government or educational system with little to no input from teachers themselves. It is something that is done by them but it is also something that happens to them. As one teacher put it, "Inclusion is promoted by people who do not work in the classrooms and who are unaware of the procedures and consequences of implementing practices they establish." (Vaughn et al., 1996, p. 101) Teachers are expected to carry out inclusion. They are to be fully involved and in support of it, yet they are often left out of the development and decision making process. This can lead many to feel out of control and helpless which in the end can lead to negative or even fearful feelings.

Personal fears are important, but a majority of the fears that teachers have regarding inclusion stem from the students. Teachers want students to succeed. For many teachers, placing these students into the regular classroom is setting them up to fail (Vaughn et al., 1996). Inclusion appears to be a barrier for some students. LD students will certainly be present in the classroom, but many wonder if they will be able to learn effectively. There are also fears of inadequacy. Children with learning disabilities present challenges and responsibilities that are vastly different from those of their peers. For example, often times these children have a difficult time focusing on the task at hand which allows more time for inappropriate behavior resulting in a greater need for discipline. Children with learning disabilities may also require more academic guidance as well. Many teachers do not feel prepared to handle these types of students or situations, which may lead to feelings of failure as a teacher. They also may feel like they are in it alone. Collaboration with administrators and other teachers is a necessary part of effectively running an inclusive classroom, yet it is the one key factor that most teachers feel is lacking (Hammond & Lawrence, 2003). Without a support network, many teachers feel that they are on their own with nowhere to turn. When problems arise, teachers must handle them themselves, whether they know how to or not. This can lead to feelings of isolation and keep teachers from effectively providing services.

When looking at reports from focus groups, the most frequently mentioned issue was the lack of a universal definition of inclusion (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Many teachers feel that without knowing exactly what inclusion is, that there is no way they can effectively carry out what it requires. This can in turn lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and inadequacy (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). The lack of

one, true definition is also coupled with feelings of doubt concerning the role of the teachers themselves. With the addition of these special needs children into the general classroom, the roles of the classroom teacher have been transformed. This is very difficult for most teachers, not because they lack desire, but for the simple fact that many of them have been doing the same routine for many years. Having to change the status quo is difficult in any situation, but especially if there is a lack of support for the transition.

As for overall opinions of inclusion, research studies have found mixed results. In a study by Hammond and Lawrence (2003), a survey of teachers found that approximately 50% of those questioned felt that teachers as a whole are committed to the inclusion process and are willing to make the changes necessary to achieve success. However, it was also found that a high percentage of teachers hold negative or neutral attitudes concerning inclusion.

The main focus for teachers is that their students, regardless of ability, receive the highest quality of education possible. Some studies show that few teachers saw or understood the benefits that come with inclusion. Others have also found that teachers hold overall negative feelings towards inclusion (Vaughn et al., 1996). The results of a focus group find that teachers are in fact very passionate about the topic of inclusion. However, these teachers also expressed worry about the likelihood of success for inclusion and general feelings of concern and negativity for the entire process.

The attitudes of teachers are critical because as was stated previously, teachers' feelings directly influence the effectiveness and ultimately the success of inclusion. If the classroom teacher has negative feelings about inclusion, it is highly unlikely that it will

be successful. Many of these feelings can even create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Teachers do not believe that inclusion will work which in turn causes them to act in ways that make that belief a reality, reinforcing what they already see as the truth. This not only makes it difficult for teachers to accept inclusion, but in the process it also hurts the children.

The issues that arise while working with learning disabled children are faced by all teachers, but when looking specifically at special education teachers, there are additional and often times different concerns that these teachers must face as a result of inclusion. In the past, these teachers were the main providers of educational services to children with learning disabilities. Since the implementation of inclusion, their roles, for the most part, have changed drastically. While some special education teachers continue to work primarily with special needs students in isolated classroom settings, many of these teachers have become a support system to the general classroom teachers (IDOE, 1997). Historically, special education programs have been more teacher-directed in nature as compared to other standard programs (Daley & Hanline, 2002). Inclusion has led to a more secondary, hands-off role for special education teachers, and for many staying in the background can prove to be challenging. The responsibilities of special education teachers have changed along with their roles. In the old system, they were responsible for a specific classroom of students. However, as a result of inclusion, they are now mainly responsible for a 'case load' of students, for whom the help to develop and manage IEPs, monitor and supervise instruction, and act as a supplemental resource (IDOE, 1997). They are also responsible for the support of general education students as well as special education students which was rarely the case in the past. Some may be

quick to make the assumption that inclusion lessens the workload or responsibilities of special education teachers but this is simply not true. In reality, there are many changes occurring in special education along with those that are taking place in general education that not only increase the work that special education teachers are required to do, but that have changed their roles and responsibilities as well.

In both studies discussed in this section, a majority of teachers, both general and special education, reported that their schools were capable of implementing inclusion programs effectively despite limited levels of commitment, uncertainty, and overall negative attitudes (Hammond & Lawrence, 2003). And while this appears negative, if many of the issues and problems were addressed, these same teachers would be more willing to accept inclusion as a viable educational tool. It is also important to remember that although some teachers do have negative feelings toward the inclusion process, many other teachers do not. Nor do teachers in any way intentionally allow their feelings to affect their performance in the classroom. For now, teachers must continue to work through their concerns and uncertainties for the sake of their students. Until changes are made, teachers must continue to focus on the most important part of this issue, the children.

Discussion

The information above provides a general overview of how inclusion affects both students and teachers. At this time there is no resolution of the issue of the effectiveness or necessity of inclusion policies. It is really up to each individual to decide whether he or she is in favor of or in opposition to the process. And although there is no agreed upon method for integrating students with learning disabilities into the general classroom

setting, there are a number of areas that should be addressed or improvements that could be made to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of current inclusive practices. The following is list of possible advancements that could aid in the implementation of inclusion.

1. Support for Teachers

It is essential that a support network be created for the teachers in the regular classroom who interact directly with LD students. Teachers must have support from fellow teachers and administration to effectively implement the system. Many schools simply do not have this resource available to support their employees. A study by Elbaum (2002) found that if in-class support was available for teachers, they reported fewer behavior problems as well as a greater social acceptance of LD students. Lower levels of loneliness and higher academic self-perceptions were also reported (Elbaum, 2002). Providing help for the teacher in turn helped their students. Through the creation of an environment where teachers can find answers to their questions, support for decisions, and find support during the inclusive process, teachers will be better able to integrate LD students into the general classroom.

2. Parental Involvement

The involvement of parents is a key element in the inclusive process. The attitudes that parents hold toward inclusion go a long way in determining just how effective it will be (Daley & Hanline, 2002). A majority of parents whose children have a learning disability support full inclusion. They view it as an opportunity for their children to experience the “real world” and gain acceptance through interaction. And though they are generally supportive, they are most accepting of the process when their

child has had a positive experience and when they have been involved throughout the entire process (Daley & Hanline, 2002). In general, it is difficult to care about something or even commit to it until some amount of personal investment occurs. As a part of the process parents will be able to gain the necessary information and experience that will not only nurture a sense of caring and responsibility towards their children, the teachers, and inclusion in general, but they will be there to provide help and support every step of the way. Parents, teachers, and administration must all work together to develop the best solution and system for every child.

3. Teacher Instruction and Training

To put it simply, “staff development is critical.” (Daley & Hanline 2002. p.1) That is how Daley and Hanline (2002) put it in their 2002 article in the Phi Delta Kappan. They could not have been closer to the truth. Teachers are the driving force behind the inclusion process. Without them, it could never be done. Existing documentation in Indiana even states clearly that educational programs must help teachers develop the skills necessary to effectively educate all children (IDOE, 1997). That being said, many educators simply do not have the training that is necessary for proper implementation. Certification varies by state, but in the State of Indiana, like many other states, additional licensing or education is not required to teach students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom (IDOE, 1997). Nevertheless, performing this task requires an increase in skill base. Working with special needs children involves additional skills and abilities that many teachers were never given during their initial training. Those who are preparing to become teachers in universities and colleges today do receive some courses in special education but it is still not enough. More must be done to get those who are

educating our future the information and resources that they need. Teacher education can come in many forms such as in-service workshops, staff meetings, individual consultation, supportive feedback, on-site demonstrations, direct observation, and written materials (Daley & Hanline, 2002). All of these are possible ways to provide educators with the information and experience that they need to effectively support and propel inclusion. The best method depends on the school as well the individuals involved, but no matter the method, it should be responsive to the needs of the individual teachers. If the teachers do not gain anything from the experience, then it is not worth the time or effort. Also, in order to be completely effective, training must be available to all teachers including those who specialize in special education. The roles of these individuals have also been drastically changed and they too must develop new and more effective skills.

4. Class Size

The number of children that are in each classroom is a topic of much discussion and controversy in the realm of education. It is an especially important issue in classrooms that integrate both LD and non-LD students. Children with learning disabilities are big responsibilities that often require extra time and attention. When the time and energy they require is added to that of the non-LD students, it is nearly impossible for a teacher to provide all students with the necessary resources. And the more children there are, the less resources there are to go around. These deficiencies are even more pronounced when there are multiple LD students in the same room. For teachers to be able to teach all students effectively there must be fewer students in each classroom.

5. Prepare the Non-LD Students

Being a child can be tough. Few individuals are more critical of their peers than children. Being different can be even more difficult, especially if the difference comes as a result of a learning disability. Differences often come coupled with fear, fear of the unknown. The only way to truly dispel these fears and incorrect beliefs is by providing children with information. As we have seen above, acceptance by non-LD students is a key component in the success and happiness of children with learning disabilities. In fact, peer acceptance is a major risk indicator in terms of psychological adjustment in the both childhood and adulthood (Elbaum, 2002). Creating an environment where acceptance is possible and supported is an essential part of the inclusive process. A successful example of this occurred in a fifth grade classroom at Deer Run Elementary in Indianapolis, Indiana (R. Billings, personal communication, September, 2003). Jared is an autistic student who has participated in an inclusive setting since he began his schooling in kindergarten. When he entered the fifth grade, his parents as well as his teachers and counselor felt that it would be beneficial to all involved to educate the students about Jared and his disorder before he became a regular part of the classroom. In order to do this, they set up a series of experiences to help the students understand how Jared viewed the world and what exactly made him different from everyone else. Through the use of lights, sounds, and touch they were able to create an environment similar to the one that Jared lives in on a regular basis. Students were asked to perform normal, everyday tasks and then expected to reflect back upon what they saw and how they felt throughout the experience. They then explained that even though he experiences the world, he is more similar to them than he is different. This helped the children to not only understand him better, but to be more accepting of his differences. In the end, it

allowed integration to be more effective for all students. This success story illustrates how preparing and educating students for interaction with LD children helps to alleviate fear and promote acceptance. If more schools were able to do similar exercises in their classrooms, it would allow for increased success in the integration of LD students.

6. Flexibility

Teaching is a profession based on traditions. Most teachers develop a routine early on in their careers and then continue to follow it until the day that they retire. Rarely if ever do they deviate from their own predetermined norm. Unfortunately, the way that it has always been done may simply not work with the implementation of inclusion. Many of the regulations that have resulted as a means to support inclusion are based on the assumption that educating both groups of children requires very few changes in procedure (IDOE, 1997). However, those who have experienced the modification that inclusion entails would certainly disagree. The belief is idealistic, not realistic. Effectively applying inclusion to the general classroom often involves a good deal of flexibility by all parties involved, especially teachers. Teachers must be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. They must be willing to embrace change while still providing their students with the best learning opportunities possible. The key in all of this is willingness. The more teachers resist the changes that inevitably come along with inclusion the more difficult it will be for the children to succeed. To many this may seem overwhelming and there may be times of discomfort, but many of the activities designed for elementary aged children allow for a range of developmental stages (Daley & Hanline, 2002). Hopefully this will allow teachers to retain some of their basic teaching strategies. In the end, “the needs of young children with disabilities can usually

be met within the context of developmentally appropriate activities.” (Pfeiffer & Reddy, p.99) Change is inevitable and those who are willing to participate will find that it is possible.

Flexibility must also be shown by those who are in charge of the placement of LD children. When deciding on the assignment of students who possess learning disabilities, the general classroom is the preferred placement option. However, not all children or situations are the same. There may be some cases where certain factors may not allow for the integration of the student. If a child disrupts the learning of others or if the student is not benefiting from current placement in any way, a more restrictive environment may be required (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1999). It is up to those in control of placement to look at each child on a case-by-case basis. Doing this requires flexibility and a willingness to consider multiple options. Placement among non-LD peers is the first choice, but this does not always mean that it is the best choice. And though it may be easier to generalize placements to all students, inclusion will only be effective if those who participate in the process truly belong there.

7. Universal Definition of Inclusion

The term ‘inclusion’ is simple word. The meaning of inclusion is much more complex. As of now, there is no generally agreed upon or technical definition of inclusion. This fact can lead to many problems for those who regularly deal with the process. Without a universal definition, it is impossible to pinpoint exactly what inclusion is or what it entails. Some may see it as simply including children with learning disabilities in the general classroom while others see it as integrating these children into a setting where they can thrive and develop as individuals. People look at it

in different ways and this often results in those same people approaching the process in different ways as well. How one views inclusion will go a long way in determining how they will implement the procedure. Developing a universal definition will eliminate much of the confusion and misunderstanding that comes along with inclusion.

8. Further Research

Today, we know much more about inclusion than we did when it was first implemented over 30 years ago. Yet there are still many questions that we have not answered and many issues where further investigation is needed. In order for inclusion to become even more effective in helping those it is intended to serve, future research is indispensable. There is no better way to learn than to look back at the past and research allows us to see what worked and what did not. From this it will be possible to develop new and more effective techniques and procedures with regards to inclusion. Research also provides insight into how the integration process affects those involved. The information that has been discussed above is just a start. Much more research must be done in order for inclusion to fully be understood and ultimately for it to be effective.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a good deal of information on not only the effects of inclusion but on a number of ways that the process could be improved. The initial question was whether or not inclusion is effective or beneficial to those who participate in the process. In the end, the issue truly comes down to whether the benefits outweigh the negative effects. This is a decision that is difficult to generalize to all teachers and students. All students involved must compare the gains and losses academically, socially, and emotionally in order to determine effectiveness and teachers must also

determine individually if inclusion is beneficial. But one thing that is certain for all individuals is that when inclusion is supported, it has a much greater chance of being both beneficial and effective for all involved. There is no guarantee that the inclusion will work, but when properly implemented, many benefits result.

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