PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of the literature review was to describe inclusion and the successful practices implemented in secondary education classrooms. The literature reviewed studies utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to examine faculty attitudes related to technology use, preservice teacher training programs, administrative support, and collaboration among multiple school districts and higher education institutions. Results and conclusions from the studies researched indicated; a lack in proper teacher training associated with collaboration; students with learning, emotional, or physical disabilities; and implementing inclusive programs. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness of inclusion include; administrative support, meaningful professional development related to collaboration and assistive technology, and a more diverse teacher training curriculum among higher education institutions.
Chapter I: Introduction

State and Federal mandates are changing the educational system. Inclusion among students with special needs into a general education classroom faces many challenges and questions. Are general education teachers prepared for inclusion? What support systems are needed? These questions need to be answered to determine if inclusion is successful for all students.

Statement of Problem

Inclusion among children with special needs in a general education classroom is increasing. Students that are being served in special education has risen 3.4% every year since 2000 (Baber, Cooper, Kurts & Vallecorsa, 2008). In 2001, President George W. Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students with their peers. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) mandated the inclusion of all learners in US classrooms whenever possible. Special needs students with learning disabilities make up 50% of the 6.7 million individuals included under IDEA (Messinger-Willman & Marino, 2010). Both pieces of legislation allowed and required the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom to obtain the same curriculum as their peers. While aspects of these laws have been implemented in schools, the best practice resulting in success is unclear. Three quarters of children with special needs are in an inclusive classroom (Ross-Hill, 2009). Many challenges among teachers, administrators, students, and parents exist in serving a majority of today’s students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. These challenges are also present in preservice teacher training programs. A need exists to examine how they are preparing future teachers to work and feel comfortable with a diverse population. Teachers' professional
development regarding inclusion and access to instructional supports and resources are all tools needed to support teachers (Ernst & Rogers, 2009). Many new expectations are placed on teachers. Proper training is required to ease the stress levels and provide a positive classroom environment for teachers and students. Teachers and administrators face many challenges, such as negative teacher perspectives, lack of knowledge regarding special education terminology, issues and laws, poor collaboration skills, lack of administration support, limited instructional repertoire, inappropriate assessment procedures, and conflict between scheduling and time management (Worrell, 2008). Collaboration, teacher attitudes regarding inclusion, the use of technology, teacher training and professional development must all be examined in order to have an improved inclusion program.

**Research Questions**

What makes inclusion in the secondary setting successful? What factors are involved to implement and measure a successful inclusion program at the secondary level?

**Definition of Terms**

Inclusion: "The term inclusion refers to the practice of including another group of students in regular classrooms, with problems of health and/or physical, developmental, and emotional problems" (Ernst & Rogers, 2009).

Pathognomonic Interventionist Interview: Pathognomonic (P) perspectives focus on the pathological characteristics of the learner, while ‘interventionist’ (I) perspectives consider the learner in terms of how they best learn (Jordan, McGhie-Richmond & Schwartz, 2009).
Chapter II: Literature Review

The term inclusion refers to the practice of including another group of students in regular classrooms, with problems pertaining to health and/or physical, developmental, and emotional problems (Ernst & Rogers, 2009). Laws such as No Child Left Behind and IDEA have placed responsibility on schools to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to complete the same curriculum expectations and requirements. Success with inclusion may depend on proper teacher training, professional development, positive teacher attitudes, collaboration and the use of technology. Schools and teachers are being held accountable for every student’s annual yearly progress through NCLB requirements.

Teacher Training

Proper training of faculty is a necessity for inclusion to be successful. Educators interviewed in four middle/high schools stressed a need for additional professional development training specific to inclusion. The professional development topics should include making appropriate instructional and curricular modifications. In addition, more information and training should be made available on how to effectively support teachers of inclusive classrooms in a variety of ways, including consulting teaching, cooperative teaching, instructional assistants, and teacher assistance teams (Idol, 2006). Different instructional methods must be learned through accredited teaching programs and relative professional development. Rao (2009) asserts that many instructional techniques help teachers assist students of all abilities to succeed in a general education setting. These instructional techniques include:

* Interdisciplinary Themes and Instruction
* Grouping Strategies including pairs, small, and large group instruction
* Collaboration and Co-teaching
Post-Secondary teacher preparation programs are beginning to examine the need to expand on curriculum related to inclusion. Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman and Merbler (2010) conducted a study related to perceptions of pre-service teacher training programs at higher education institutions. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data. There are approximately 1,190 Teacher Education Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) that offer teacher education programs in the field of elementary, secondary, and special education according to the College Blue Book (2003). Quantitative sampling was used to select 323 schools by choosing every fourth school listed for each state. 41 states were incorporated in the survey. Qualitative sampling was used to select 703 faculty members from each IHE school chosen, including a faculty member representing the elementary, secondary, and special education departments.

Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman and Merbler (2010) divided the schools according to type of IHE. Various types included state-supported comprehensive institutions (29%), state-supported university’s (32%), independent comprehensive institutions or university’s (18%), and independent religious-affiliated institutions (21%) (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman & Merbler, 2010).

The Preservice Teacher Preparation for Inclusion Assessment Survey was utilized. The survey was categorized by four sections including: Section 1- About the Survey, Section 2- Demographics, Section 3- Programming Practices, Expectations, and Instructional Needs Rating Scale including Instructional Inclusive Education Programming and Departmental Expectations Concerning Inclusion Instruction, and Section 4- Narrative Inquiry (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman &
Merbler, 2010). A Likert-type scale was used in section three with responses ranging from 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Surveys were distributed via e-mail and selected participants were given the option not to participate. Frequencies and percentages were utilized to analyze results related to the surveys. Faculty members surveyed strongly agreed that introductory courses related to special education were required among elementary, secondary, and special education majors. Faculty members agreed that opportunities existed for cross discipline collaboration regarding the field experience aspect of the teacher education programs. Faculty members also expressed neutral perspectives with IHE’s support for allowing time, resources, and collaboration to create more cross curricular courses among disciplines and majors. Faculty agreed in all departments that more courses related to learning disabilities, inclusive practices, curriculum development, collaboration among disciplines, and co-teaching were important for all educational majors. 70% of faculty said co-teaching courses were not offered at their IHE (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman & Merbler, 2010). Field experiences, internships, and special programs are alternative ways to allow inclusive experience and training outside the IHE setting. Faculty recognized the lack of funding as a limitation of offering more courses.

Assistive Technology

Technology can be used to assist the special education and general education teachers’ ability to work in a cooperative role. In many instances, the general education teacher takes the lead in a cooperative role. In order for inclusion to have a positive outcome, both teachers need to have an equal and specific role. Scheeler, Congdon and Stansbery (2010) conducted a study in which peer coaches’ gave immediate corrective feedback via bug-in-ear technology. Peer coaches were able to give instructional tips and support to the teacher while class was in session. Three
Successful Inclusion

groups were used consisting of five women and one man. After three sessions, the teachers were able to meet the criterion standards established for the study. Then, teachers were able to implement techniques on to other situations and classes without peer coaches. All teachers reported the training was successful and would recommended participation to their peers.

Technology is also being used as a supportive tool for students with special needs. One-third of all teachers receive as much as ten hours of hands on computer training; and most training is designed to use the computer as an object of instruction, rather than a tool for instruction (Howell, 1996). Computer based technology ranges from basic computer software intended to assist students with learning disabilities to adaptive input devices designed to assist students with physical disabilities.

Writing can be an overwhelming obstacle for children with special needs in an inclusive setting. Frustration with not meeting requirements can lead to a lack of success and disengagement from the educational process. Writing is an essential skill in order to be successful in not only core curriculum classes, but all classes. Technologies are available to assist teachers in accommodating the needs of inclusive students. Barbetta and Spears-Bunton (2009) acknowledged seven useful technologies to assist struggling students. The technologies include digital text, text-to-speech, word prediction, cognitive organizational, electric reference, speech or voice recognition, and alternative writing. Digital text allows a printed or web document to be scanned and put into a word processing document. Teachers and students may then edit the text as needed by adjusting the font size, color, and other visual adjustments. Programs exist within digital text assisting in summarizing main ideas, which allows content to be manageable. Text-to-speech programs allow text to be put in audio format. Students with a below grade level reading and visually impaired students benefit from this technology. Word
prediction technology assists students who have spelling issues or are physically handicapped. Word prediction programs allow students to focus more on the writing process then the spelling aspect. Cognitive organizational tools assist students to better organize information and ideas. Technological programs consisting of graphic organizers and organization utilize skills of visual learners. Electronic reference technology assists students with low vocabulary skills by having dictionaries and thesauruses in electronic form making research easier. Speech and voice recognition software allows students with physical and specific learning disabilities to convert words to text by speaking through a microphone. The ability to control computer functions through speaking is another benefit of this technology. Alternative writing tools specifically function as a word processor. The recognized benefits include; flexibility of writing, limits handwriting errors, assists in proofreading, and emphasizes writing content (Barbeta & Spears-Bunton, 2009).

**Teacher Attitudes**

Often inclusion is implemented within a school to satisfy the requirements of the law and without proper support. The role of the administration is essential to promote positive teacher attitudes regarding inclusion. A study of eight schools consisting of four elementary and four high school/middle schools in a southwestern United States city supported the need for positive administration. Data was collected through a series of interviews with staff and in the form of a questionnaire. The majority of educators at each of the four secondary schools viewed the principal as being supportive of inclusion. Results of the survey indicated the following percentages; High School H, 85%, Middle School E, 83%, Middle School F, 81%, High School G, 74% (Idol, 2006). The administrator is no longer solely the school manager. Administrations are also expected to be the educational leader of the school. Administrative roles now include
contributing to curriculum development and working closely with the special education department. Out of the 166 secondary educators interviewed (68% and 54%) of faculty in the middle schools viewed a principal as having a dual role as instructional leader and administrative manager. This number was slightly less at the two high schools being (42% and 34%) respectively. These numbers are skewed due to the fact that faculty at one high school attributed their belief in the principal fulfilling the role of just administrative manager to his interim status. Out of the four secondary schools interviewed, 51% felt the administration performed dual roles.

Jordan, McGhie-Richmond and Schwartz (2009) conducted a Pathognomonic–Interventionist interview with teachers throughout the school. Faculties were asked to reflect and examine their experiences working with two special education students in the previous year. Teachers with more pathognomonic perspectives tended to believe they did not have the expertise or the ability to accommodate students with special needs. These teachers tend to blame the student and parents for failure to learn and often refer students to external help while students with special needs get further behind. Teachers with interventionist perspectives tended to be more sympathetic for students with special needs. Teachers requested more information regarding the student and engaged in communication with parents and colleagues. About 25% of general education classroom teachers in the studies held pathognomonic beliefs, while 20% held interventionist beliefs. Approximately 55% of the teachers held beliefs involving characteristics of both. The more interventionist perspective resulted in teachers’ classroom management, time management and lesson presentation skills related to their interactions among students with disabilities and the general population.

Teacher’s attitudes towards assistive technology play a role in the success of inclusive programming. Boon, Fore and Spencer (2007) conducted a study of teacher perceptions and
outcomes associated with technology-based instructional tools (Inspiration 6 software) in a secondary social studies classroom. The study involved a Southeastern high school in the United States consisting of 1,875 students of grades nine through twelve. A qualitative method was used utilizing a six question teacher satisfaction survey. The participants included one general education social studies teacher, one special education teacher, and one teacher with dual certification in special education and general education with a social studies endorsement. Survey questions were centered on the strengths and weaknesses regarding the computer program, Inspiration, and teacher perceptions. Results indicated a positive view of incorporating computer based technology in the social studies classroom. Strengths with incorporating the technology included; increased student achievement, more time spent on-task and engaged, and an increased motivation for student learning. Weakness with incorporating the technology included; increased planning time, lack of computers, training needs, and assisting students during instruction. The study provides insight to teacher perceptions, but is limited due to the small sample of individuals that participated.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration between teachers of general education and special education is often a challenge. Schools typically use three types of support systems for teacher collaboration. The support systems include; consulting teacher model, supportive resource programs, and instructional assistants (Idol, 2006). The first is the cooperative teaching model. Teachers in general education and special education work in a variety of ways to co-teach within the same classroom. The teacher in special education and general education develop curriculum and instructional strategies to assist students with special needs within the classroom. This model allows the teacher in the special education classroom the ability to work one on one or in small
group settings within the general education classroom. The second is the consulting teacher model. A professional in special education acts as a consultant to the general education teacher. Typically, districts ISD or other outside source meets with the general education teacher as an instructional coach. Professionals in special education suggest different strategies and methodologies the general education teacher can use within the class. The third is supportive research programs. Teachers specializing in resource special education and general education are given the ability to collaborate on individual curriculum to be taught in a resource room setting. The student then applies learned skills in the general education classroom. The fourth is the use of instructional assistants. Instructional assistants are typically paraprofessionals who work with an individual student throughout the day. Instructional assistants may work within the general education classroom or in an alternative location, allowing one-on-one instruction. Typically, Instructional assistants are reserved for students with more severe disabilities. Cooperative teaching is being implemented more and more in today’s schools. Studies implied mixed results, as more training in a cooperative role is needed before implementation in order to be successful. (Magiera & Ziqmond, 2005). Boudah, Schumacher and Deshler (1997) examined the implementation of a collaborative instruction model. Eight classes participated in the study consisting of secondary schools in an urban Midwest setting. Teachers were teamed in pairs of two. The study examined four classes where teachers were trained in the collaborative instruction model and four classes where teachers were not. The classes included students who were low achieving (LA) and students that had mild disabilities (MD). The study concluded mixed results with the collaborative teaching model. Test and quiz performance had little change in relation to teachers trained in collaborative teaching model. MD students test scores averaged 63.79% before training and 58.19% after training. LA students test scores averaged 66.16% before
teacher training and 71.96% after training (Boudah, Schumacher & Deshler, 1997). Student engagement and strategic skills learned had minimal positive or negative change. Teachers were involved in two training sessions prior to the implementation of the collaborative instruction model.

Collaboration must include informing parents regarding accommodations concerning special needs students. Accommodations are in place to ensure the success of students. One aspect of a student’s success is performance on standardized tests. In many instances, parents are not aware of accommodations allowed in test taking or how to interpret test scores (Crawford & Tindel, 2006). The ability of teachers, administrators, and parents to communicate related to accommodations and test scores ensures better understanding and less chance of conflict.

**CH III: Research Results and Implications**

**Teacher Training**

Research indicates a need to train teachers in areas that relate to serving students with special needs in an inclusive setting. Opportunities for preservice teachers and established secondary teachers to receive better training are needed. Idol (2006) suggests professional development opportunities that include: visiting schools where inclusion is practiced, instructional and curricular support, instructional assistants, and cooperative teaching. New ways of implementing professional development are needed. Professional development needs to shift from one time work sessions, conferences, and courses that have little carry over to the classroom and are not a consistent aspect of the school culture. Robinson and Carrington (2002) suggest successful professional development as an on-going process that requires time, commitment and clear objectives. Feedback, reflection, observation, and collaboration among colleagues all contribute to more meaningful professional development and growth. Preservice
teacher training programs must also diversify classes offered to address the changing classroom. Higher education teacher education programs must provide more opportunities for collaborative courses related to both special and general education programs. Introductory courses in special education do not offer adequate training to prepare future general education teachers to excel in an inclusive classroom. Classroom management issues are also a concern for preservice teachers. Students with special needs may have a learning disability, emotional disability, physical disability, or a combination. Attention seeking behaviors, hyperactivity, and malicious behaviors pose a difficult and unique challenge. Often skills related to classroom management are developed through experience, which may increase stress among beginning teachers. One study identified 39% of student teachers that experienced high levels of stress and anxiety related to classroom management in an inclusive setting (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006).

**Assistive Technology**

Technological devices are a positive tool for teachers and students with special needs. Programs, software, and devices that assist in tasks and instructional modifications are the most useful. Technology does exist to assist teachers in a collaborative role with instructional coaches, but the practicality of this strategy is not realistic in today’s classroom. Technology should assist students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities often struggle with material within their grade level content expectations. Messinger-Willman and Marino (2010) found a majority of students diagnosed with a learning disability at the secondary level read at a fourth or fifth grade level. A student’s ability to organize information, incorporate higher level thinking skills, make connections between text, and utilize context clues become increasingly worse as students engage in more challenging and grade appropriate material (Messinger-Willman & Marino, 2010). Technological programs, software, and devices can
assist with these difficulties through digital text, voice recognition software, cognitive organizational tools, and multiple word processing programs do assist in the challenges students with learning disabilities encounter. Quenneville (2001) found students who utilize technological tools feel a greater sense of belonging, are able to participate in more cooperative assignments with peers, able to complete assignments, and have an increased motivation in school. The combination of these factors support the positive role technology plays in an inclusive classroom. The use of technology does not come without limitations. Teachers and students need to be trained in the proper utilization of technological tools. School districts may not have the financial resources to implement the use of technology or train teachers effectively in the use of technological devices.

**Teacher Attitudes**

Stakeholders within the school need to have a sense of responsibility in relation to inclusive programs within the school. Individuals with interventionist perspectives tend to be more sympathetic to students with special needs. Administrators must create a positive climate and provide expectations and appropriate resources regarding inclusive practices within the school (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). Teacher attitudes related to inclusive programs tend to be mixed. Reeves (2006) found mixed perceptions among teachers in regards to inclusion among English-language learners. Many teachers had a neutral to slightly positive perception of inclusion practices, but noted positive perceptions may increase over time and with increased standards and acceptance of inclusive practices. More studies are needed to correlate student outcomes and teachers perceptions of inclusion programs. Negative or neutral attitudes of inclusion tend to relate more with a feeling of unfamiliarity and lack of training than with the actual concept of inclusion. Teachers who feel more comfortable with inclusive practices and
incorporation of assistive technologies have a more positive view. Overall, the more a teacher feels responsible to educate students with special needs, the better everyone in the class is through better connections and teaching practices. Teachers and administrators have to create a feeling of belonging for all students. Students with special needs should not be treated separately within a general education class. Accommodations must be made, but an overall sense of belonging and community must exist (Soodak, 2003).

**Collaboration**

Collaboration between professionals in a secondary classroom reveals mixed results related to success of inclusion programs. Research indicates that there is a disconnect between actual achievement and cooperative teaching practices. Improved professional development and training are needed within the profession to consistently observe improved performance. Many collaborative practices are implemented in classrooms with a lack of understanding on proper execution of theory. Bauwens and Hourcade (2001) suggest cooperative teaching strategies are successful given proper training and common planning time. Carpenter and Dyal (2007) express the need for shared responsibility among cooperative teachers in order to be successful. Collaborating teachers must have a shared responsibility associated with planning, classroom management, and evaluation. Useful professional development as it relates to cooperative needs further enhances the success of cooperative teaching situations (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). Collaboration with parents of special needs children also lowers possible conflict and stress levels among both parties.
Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

Successful inclusion programs in secondary classrooms require consistent commitment from administrators and staff. Meaningful professional development opportunities related to collaboration, strategic planning, multiple learning styles, and assistive technology would be useful. Visiting inclusive classrooms in other schools allows for observation and reflection. Successful practices and techniques may then be implemented in the visiting teacher’s classroom or school. Collaboration among professionals do produce positive experiences in the classroom when teachers are properly trained, have common planning, and have a commitment to the process. Higher education institutions are beginning to offer more courses with collaborative and cross discipline themes, yet more must be done. Teacher attitudes related to inclusion are hindered when novice and veteran teachers lack training and do not receive consistent support from administration. Administration must create a culture embracing environment and be committed to inclusive practices. Supporting teachers through the inclusive process and creating clear goals helps add to a positive teacher attitude towards inclusion. Assistive technology can also improve teacher’s attitudes and achievement in inclusive classrooms. Assistive technology allows students with special needs to have a more active role in the general education classroom, in turn, improving the climate throughout the school. Digital text, cognitive organizational tools, and multiple word processing programs are tools that can benefit students with special needs. Assistive technology should only be purchased when proper training can occur and the technology has many functions to assist multiple students with disabilities. Financial limitations do exist, making selection of assistive technology extremely important.
Areas of Further Research

No Child Left Behind requires all students to make annual yearly progress. Schools are accountable for children achieving these goals. Further research must be done to establish a correlation between inclusive practices and the annual yearly progress of students with special needs. Qualitative studies should be implemented to show statistical relationships between schools that implement successful inclusive practices and those that do not. Schools that emphasize professional development related to inclusion, support collaboration and cooperative teaching, and have consistent long term goals can be statistically measured to schools that lack in these areas through standardized test scores and annual yearly progress. Schools that properly utilize assistive technology and those that do not may also be examined. Variables do exist when comparing standardized test scores with the diverse socioeconomic populations throughout the United States, which makes comparing different schools difficult. Similar districts related to population, socioeconomic status, and location may reduce the variables to provide a more viable study.

Conclusion

The passing of No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) have mandated that all students receive equal educational opportunities. Three quarters of children with special needs are in an inclusive classroom (Ross-Hill, 2009). Current research does provide insight associated with successful inclusion programs. Positive teacher attitudes toward inclusive settings are important in creating a positive climate throughout the school. Meaningful professional development related to assistive technology, collaboration, and learning disabilities ease stress and reluctance from teachers in inclusive settings. Higher education teacher training programs are beginning to examine offering
more opportunities for students to take cross discipline courses related to students with special needs and inclusion. Administration must support and provide common planning, consistent and meaningful professional development, and resources needed to implement a successful inclusive program. Teachers that receive proper training, administrative support, and feel comfortable in an inclusive classroom tend to hold a greater sense of responsibility for students with special needs. Further research must be done related to the success of inclusive practices and the relationship between annual yearly progresses among students with special needs. Financial considerations may also influence a schools ability to implement components needed for a successful inclusion program.
References


