

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF INCLUSION ON STUDENTS AND STAFF IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING?

In support of *This We Believe* characteristics:

- Multifaceted guidance and support services
- Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning
- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
- High expectations for every member of the learning community

Defining Inclusion

Inclusion can be deeply disturbing because it challenges our unexamined notions of what "ordinary" and "normal" really mean (Pearpoint and Forest, 1997). To understand inclusion, we must look at its definition, origins, implications, and past and present research. In the educational setting, inclusion means that all students, including those with mild and those with severe disabilities, be placed in the least restrictive environment available. This often means the regular classroom.

Inclusion is not synonymous with mainstreaming. While mainstreaming is viewed as a benchmark where students "earn" their way back into the classroom, inclusion establishes the student's "right" to be there in the first place. Services and supports are brought to the regular classroom as needed. The current inclusion movement challenges educators to look beyond mainstreaming to find inclusive strategies to meet student's individual needs. Inclusion calls for a more complete merger of regular and special education (Hines and Johnston, 1996).

Inclusion is a philosophy. The philosophical position of inclusion is based primarily on two arguments:

1. Segregating children in special classes or programs denies these children access to normal experiences.
2. Segregated services have not resulted in adequate education for handicapped students.

(Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children, 1996)

True inclusion exists in all facets of life (Schleien and Heyne, 1997). All-inclusive schools set an example for students' other areas of life. For example, a parents of a 12 year old boy with down syndrome living in a small community have found the community recreation programs to be inclusive for all children in the family. In the sports programs, the parents feel their son is "treated like a team member, with only subtle differences." The parents see the benefits for their son as being enhanced self-esteem, the building of a habit of physical activity, and a feeling of membership with his siblings and peers. "Children look to do what everyone else is doing. Children with down syndrome are no different" (Schleien and Heyne, 1997).

In an inclusive setting it is crucial to invite parents, teachers, community members and students to join together to be part of a new culture. Every person should be encouraged to participate to the fullness of their capacity – as partners and as members (Pearpoint and Forest, 1997). The current paradigm shift to less restrictive models for educating students with disabilities requires collaborative planning, routine modification of instructional materials, and the inclusion of parents and peers as important components of the educational process. Programming decisions should be based on individual student needs, attributes of the school, and the expertise of building professionals (Bradley and Fisher, 1995).

Middle Schools as Settings for Inclusion

The structure of most middle school programs facilitates professional collaboration and peer support, important ingredients for successful inclusion. Interdisciplinary team organization is a distinguishing characteristic and foundation of the effective middle level school. Interdisciplinary teaming allows the same group of teachers to work with the same group of students. This gives the team of teachers the flexibility and autonomy to create the most efficient learning environment for each student in the group. Middle school edu-



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cators claim that teaming offers students an opportunity to maximize their learning. (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Diversity is a hallmark of middle level learners. Middle schoolers range from child-like to adult-like, from socially awkward to socially adept, from emotionally insecure to brimming with confidence, and from concrete to abstract in thinking – sometimes seemingly all in the same student on the same day (Tomlinson, Moon and Callahan, 1998).

Belonging is especially crucial during early adolescence. Some early adolescents may choose to join gangs rather than be seen as "outside" the mainstream. Belonging is not incidental – it is primary to students' existence (Pearpoint and Forest, 1997). When students are given the opportunity to interact with others, they learn to appreciate abilities, interests, and differences. They have a feeling of belonging.

Policies/Regulations

The widespread shift to inclusion was prompted by Public Law 94-142, The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975. It required that special needs students be educated in the "Least restrictive environment." The legal definition of "least restrictive environment" requires that students be placed in the environment where they can be the most successful. However, the general education classroom is not necessarily the least restrictive environment for all children. If the presence of a student with a disability compromises the quality of education in the classroom, the placement is inappropriate. (Morrissey, January 1998). With the implementation of Public Law 94-142, most states did not interpret the least restrictive environment as the regular classroom but instead they implemented "pullout" placement options (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

In 1990, the 1975 Legislation Education for Handicapped Children Act was updated. The new law, "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," (IDEA) replaced Public Law 94-142 and mandated "free, appropriate public education for every child or youth between the ages of three and twenty-one, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability he or she may have (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

The latest legal addition to inclusion, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, was signed into law by President Clinton on June 4, 1997. A primary implication of the 1997 Amendments is the need for all educators to share in the responsibility for services provided to all students, including those with disabilities. "The IDEA Amendments reflect a step beyond compli-

ance in pursuit of quality" (Williams, Katsiyannis, 1998) The amendment allows educators to plan for at-risk students even though they are not disabled.

Current laws and interpretations in the most recent litigation continue to favor inclusion over exclusion for students with special education needs (Farlow, 1996). Vandover (1997) predicts that court cases in the next decade will clarify what an appropriate program should be for students with disabilities.

Implications for Special Education Students

Inclusion advocates typically support the argument that the segregation of a child by diagnosis or handicap is not in the best interest of the child (Schleien and Heyne, 1997). Grider (1995) concluded that those who favor inclusion believe that disabled students in the regular classroom will be more accepted by their peers, have balanced relationships, and gain more academic knowledge through small group and teacher instruction. As a result, parental expectations will increase as their students become more successful. This in turn, will result in continued higher achievement.

In a study by White, Swift and Harman (1992) eighty-six percent of parents felt their children made more academic progress in the co-teach (or all inclusive) model and 62% said their child had improved behaviorally. Of the students questioned, 42% said they preferred the co-teach model and 28% said they preferred the traditional "pull out" model. Teachers have found that skills taught in isolation rarely transfer in applicability to the context of the regular classroom.

Baker, Wang and Walberg (1995) noted that special education students involved in inclusionary teams made small and moderate gains in academic and social settings. Schattman and Benay (1992) found that special education students in an inclusionary setting are exposed to talented teachers, refine new social relationships with the same-age peer group, and experience more quality programs in a regular education classroom. Stainback and Stainback (1990) concluded that inclusion is an appropriate instructional model because students with disabilities are accepted and supported by their peers and other members of the school community while having their educational needs met.

Non-disabled Students

Even if inclusion of special education students is morally right, some educators and the public sector have questioned whether this approach is the best for regular education students Hines and Johnson (1996). Researchers (Logan, et al., 1995; Staub & Peck, 1995) have concluded that the inclusion of special students



created a caring and accepting community of learners as well as improved student learning for non-disabled peers. Farlow (1996) discussed a case study in which the peer assistant of an adolescent with down syndrome was previously failing social studies but after tutoring the student with the disability the assistant's grades increased.

Staub and Peck (1995) identified five outcomes of inclusion for non-disabled students: 1) reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased awareness, 2) growth in social cognition, 3) improvements in self-concept, 4) development of personal principles, and 5) warm and caring friendships. A common concern of parents of non-disabled students is, "Will non-disabled children lose teacher time and attention?" as a result of inclusion. A study by Hollowood, Salisbury, Rainforth, and Palomboro (1994) indicated that the presence of students with severe disabilities had no effect on levels of allocated or engaged time. They also reported that time lost to interruptions of instruction was not significantly different between inclusive and non-inclusive classrooms.

Implications for Teachers

In the inclusive classroom, the roles of regular education teachers and special education teachers are re-defined. The regular education teacher is primarily responsible for providing services for students with disabilities and is supported by the special education teacher (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Although most regular classroom teachers support and believe that inclusion, philosophically, is the best answer, most prefer the traditional "pull out" model for delivering special education services. Regular classroom teachers believe they are not adequately prepared to handle special education challenges within a regular classroom (Hines and Johnston, 1996). Many teachers believe that if they were to receive appropriate training, the inclusive classroom would offer unlimited opportunities to develop more flexible and responsive classrooms. Favorable opinions are reported more by teachers in qualitative studies than in large scale teacher surveys (Hines and Johnston, 1996).

Giangreco (February, 1996) offers ten recommendations for regular teachers in an inclusive setting: 1) work with other team members, 2) welcome the student in your class, 3) be the teacher of all students, 4) make sure everyone belongs to the classroom community and everyone participates in the same activities, 5) clarify shared expectations with team members, 6) adapt activities to the students' needs, 7) provide active and participatory learning experiences, 8) adapt classroom arrangements, materials, and strategies, 9) make sure support services help, and 10) evaluate your teaching.

Collaborative support among school staff has evolved out of the shift to inclusive classrooms. Many inclusive schools now have an instructional support team (IST) which serve as a pre-referral intervention group linking all school resources to better meet the needs of students with persistent academic, social-emotional, or behavior problems. Giangreco (1996) suggests that the IST: 1) ensures that regular education services are used effectively, 2) provides peer support and problem solving assistance for teachers, 3) provides initial screening for students who may need multi-discipline evaluation, and 4) assists teachers who have students with special needs.

Instructional models should stress collaborative planning and problem solving as a means to serve the diverse student population. Working together in inclusive support teams, classroom teachers and support specialists can use their complimentary skills and knowledge to plan, implement, and evaluate the benefits of instructional practices for all students in their class (Walther-Thomas, 1996).

Summary

Vaughn and Schumm (1995) provided several characteristics of effective inclusion programs. They noted that in effective programs, teachers choose to participate and they have adequate resources for the inclusive classrooms. They also indicated that professional development is continuous. Perhaps their most significant conclusion was that the basic philosophy and belief structure that undergirds inclusion guides the school's practices and sets the tone of acceptance of all students.

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MANUSCRIPT REVIEW PROCESS

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USER INPUT

The developers of this summary have attempted to review all primary research available through mainstream research sources. Anyone with significant research, not cited in the existing summary and pertinent to the topic, can send a copy of said research to MLLC for review and consideration in the update of the research summary.

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