

Is Inclusion the Best Special Education Delivery Model for Educating Children with Special Needs?

Approved: Alison Bente Date: 3/17/10

Project Advisor

A Seminar Research Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement of the Degree

Master of Science in Education

Cross Categorical Special Education

By

Heidi Lawton

2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	i
TITLE PAGE.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii

CHAPTER	PAGE
---------	------

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of Problem	
Purpose of the study	
Method of Approach	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	3
Special Education Delivery Models	
III. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS.....	18
Best Special Education Delivery Model for Students with Special Needs	
IV. REFERENCES.....	21

Chapter 1

Introduction

There are many different special education delivery models currently being used in school districts all over the United States. Each of these models has benefits and limitations, and much debate is present as to which model is best for educating our nation's students with special needs. For this seminar paper, literature reviews of research and studies performed on these different delivery models will be used to analyze the different models to help formulate an opinion on what the best delivery model is for educating students with special needs. Prior to completing research on the topic, my personal belief, based on my teaching experiences with some of the different models, is that inclusion is the best way to educate students with special needs. After completing my literature reviews, I will reassess my view on the subject and determine if inclusion is truly the best special education delivery model for educating students with special needs.

Statement of the Problem

Is inclusion the best special education delivery model for students with special needs?

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this seminar paper is to determine if inclusion is the best special education delivery model for educating students with special needs.

Method of Approach

Reviews of literature will be conducted about research and studies done on the different special education delivery models and their success with students with special needs. Literature to be reviewed will be gathered through use of online educational databases from Karrmann Library such as ERIC and WilsonWeb. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The two types of delivery models my research primarily focused on were that of inclusion, where children with special needs are educated in a general education classroom with their non-disabled peers, and pull-out programs, where instruction is done primarily in a resource room by special education teachers.

There are many different levels of inclusion, culminating at a point where full-inclusion is achieved and children spend their whole instructional day mainstreamed with their non-disabled peers. Through my experience and research, I have found there to be several components that need to be present in an inclusive classroom in order for it to be successful in educating all children. Three of the articles I read focused on these key components.

To better understand how teachers perceived their inclusive classrooms, Jane Leatherman conducted a narrative study of eight teachers in early childhood inclusive classrooms. She asked open-ended questions to learn more about what they had experienced when teaching children with and without disabilities in the same classroom.

After conducting the research study, she found that all of the teachers believed that the inclusive classroom is very beneficial for both children and teachers. However, there are factors that are important to provide the best possible inclusive experience. The first is adequately trained personnel. The

teachers in the study suggested that while they felt that they were successful, they would benefit by having more training that focused on teaching in an inclusive setting. Also, the teachers expressed the importance of a strong support system consisting of administrators, peers, and therapists. Finally, the teachers made note that their positive attitude toward inclusion helped create positive experiences in the classroom, which have made it easier for them to have success (Leatherman, 2007). The results of this study support previous studies that focused on the key factors of inclusion that Leatherman discussed at the beginning of the article.

The second article relating to the topic of key components of an effective inclusion program was written by Mary Kathleen Barnes. Mary, a regular education teacher in the mornings, and Lisa, the other regular education teacher for the afternoon group, did not feel that their school's current "pull-out" model provided the best teaching environment. They felt that this model, which consisted of routine exclusion of identified children from the regular classroom, was affecting the entire classroom community. Instead of just teaching through this concern, Mary and Lisa decided to do something about it. They, along with Julie, a resource room teacher, and Caroline, the speech pathologist, developed a model that they called the Collaborative Inclusion Model (Barnes, 1999). What is different about this way of teaching is that it was developed by this group of teachers in a "bottom up" manner instead of the typical "top down" approach mandated by

administration. This method makes more sense when it is the classroom teachers that need to teach with the chosen model.

These teachers felt the “top down” approach gave no ownership to the people actually doing the teaching. The approach is mandated to be implemented, even if the teaching staff does not buy into the chosen program. When this happens, there is no commitment or sense of ownership among the staff. The mandates are sometimes generic and not focused on individual student needs (Barnes, 1999). As with the other articles I have researched, teachers’ perception of the program is vital to its success. This group of teachers was committed to creating a program that would meet the needs of all of their students.

A key to the Collaborative Inclusion Model developed by these teachers was a focus on the process. Instead of modifying curriculum to accommodate students with special needs, as is common practice, this model modifies the structure of the classroom learning experiences. The teachers found that they were able to create more opportunities for students at various developmental levels by providing a wide range of classroom experiences. This has required additional planning time to make sure that there is time for individual instruction and support for remediation and enrichment, but the extra investment has paid off with a better learning community (Barnes, 1999). However, these teachers found that they needed more time than what was built into their daily schedules for planning and collaborating. In the

future, support from administration would be needed to allow more time for this planning.

At the heart of the Collaborative Inclusion Model is the belief that a community of respect, acceptance, and appreciation of everyone's strengths and weaknesses is vital (Barnes, 1999). By focusing on the combination of strengths and talents in the classroom rather than separating students by their weakness and deficits, this model will help prepare students for the natural diversity of larger world communities.

The final article I would like to address on this topic was written by Lorna Idol. The article discussed a study that examined how special education services were provided in four elementary schools and four secondary schools in a large metropolitan school district. The intent of the evaluation was to see how much inclusion of students with disabilities was occurring in each school and better understand how each school provided the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. All of the schools practiced various levels of inclusion (Idol, 2006).

Perhaps the most notable discovery from the evaluation was that in six of the eight schools (3 elementary and 3 secondary), there was a noticeable improvement in the average statewide test scores over a period of four years. In the other two schools, the average test scores remained about the same (Idol, 2006). In all of the schools, students with disabilities were included in general classrooms for at least part of the day. This data helped provide support for the teachers' beliefs that including students with disabilities in

general classrooms did not have a negative impact on the performance of their non-disabled peers.

Similar to the first two articles, administrative support stood out as a key factor in the success of inclusion. Specifically, this study showed that when administrators had background in instructional strategies as well as strictly administration, they were better able to support and develop their staff in teaching in an inclusion environment (Idol, 2006).

This study also found that inclusion would be most successful if extra adults were available in the classrooms to work with any student in need of assistance not just those with special needs. With respect to the teachers, they had positive impressions of how students with disabilities impacted other students in their classes. The participants in this study also agreed that more professional development was needed to help them better educate their students with special needs in the regular education classroom (Idol, 2006).

Another topic I felt necessary to research was how inclusion-based education programs and pull-out programs affect the likelihood of eventual independence of students with special needs. Since the idea of a transition plan was added to a student's IEP, schools have been required to prepare their students with special needs for life after high school. Unfortunately, despite this transition planning, a relatively low number of students with special needs are actually going out to live and work on their own after school.

An article by Christopher M. Sun summarized the results of the National Longitudinal Transition study from 1992 (NLTS) and the NLTS-2

study due to be completed in 2010 about this topic. When looking at the data from these two studies, the main finding is that students with special needs, regardless of their disability type, will have a higher likelihood of living independently after leaving school if they participate more in the regular education setting (Sun, 2007)

There were several variables that had a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of a student becoming independent after high school. These include the number of academic hours spent in academic classes, the education level of the parent, having more siblings in the household, the intellect of the students, and earning a high school diploma. A piece of data that stood out to me determined that the average student with special needs spends about 43% of their day in the regular education setting. When increased to 100% of the day in regular education, their odds of living independently rose from an average of 26% of the population to about 37% (Sun, 2007).

Another key finding of this study showed that since the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, teachers can and should hold students with special needs to similar standards of their non-disabled peers (Sun, 2007). This has been shown in several empirical studies to dramatically affect student achievement. Teacher expectations are critical to the achievement of students with special needs. These findings further reinforce that being taught in the least restrictive environment is beneficial for students with special needs.

Another key question I sought out to answer in my research was, “How do students with disabilities feel about inclusion vs. pull-out instruction?” In this study, thirty young people between the ages of 13 and 25 with physical impairments relating to mobility, dexterity and speech were interviewed about their views of being mainstreamed into regular education classrooms or educated in pull-out programs in special schools.

Questions in this study asked the students to describe their educational experiences in, and preferences for, special or mainstream education. They were also asked to report on any formal or informal practices that had been used to educate them and how they felt these practices facilitated or hindered their educational and social inclusion (Shah, 2007).

Three themes the article focused on were Support and Facilities, Friendships and Relationships, and Academic Opportunities. Many of the students who took part in this study felt that the support they received and the facilities in special school placements better met their needs. There were mixed findings when it came to the theme of friendships and relationships. Some students felt more comfortable when being educated with other students like them. They felt it was easier to build relationships. Others enjoyed the diversity of the mainstream placements. Finally, these students felt that they were given more academic opportunities and challenged more in a mainstream setting (Shah, 2007). This is a question that I feel requires more research. The information would be more usable if the study included more students with a greater variety of disabilities. I feel this would provide more

information on which type of placements students actually prefer. I would also be interested in research detailing student preferences about being educated in the general education classroom or in a pull-out program located at the same school. Regardless of the location or type of programming, the key is listening to the students and honoring their wishes instead of making the decision for them.

Another important factor to think about when considering inclusion is how it impacts the other students in the class. A paper detailing the results of a systematic review of literature done by The Inclusion Review Group on behalf of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Center found that 81% of the students without special education needs reported positive or neutral effects of inclusion (Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, and Kaplan, 2007).

The paper also stresses that there is a need for parents, teachers, and pupils to be fully committed to the idea of inclusion. The programs need to be carefully planned and reviewed regularly. Support staff needs to work together as a team with the general education teachers and everyone needs to receive appropriate support and training. There were several limitations to this study, but overall the results should help to ease administrator's minds when considering adopting the inclusion model.

In my experience, the most difficult students to effectively include in the classroom are those with behavioral difficulties. Therefore, I wanted to research the best model for educating students with this type of disability.

The article I found was written by Patrick A. Schwarz. Mr. Schwarz believed heavily the idea that inclusion was hands down the best way to educate children with emotional and behavioral problems (Schwarz, 2007). To demonstrate why he felt so strongly about this, he based his article on a situation he encountered with a student who had behavioral problems and he included ideas for making inclusion work for this child.

To begin with, the student needs a strong support group made up of his parents, teachers, and other special staff that work together to ensure that the student is in the best learning environment possible. To do this, the entire IEP team would have to meet regularly to discuss upcoming lessons, including which individualized education goals should be emphasized and how the student can actively participate and achieve the same outcomes as his or her peers. If this is not possible, the team would select or design appropriate adaptations so the student can achieve the same outcomes as the other students (Schwarz, 2007). Other key factors for including students with special behavioral needs into the classroom include creative teaching based on best practices, having a problem-solving mindset, providing access to social activities and after-school programs, and committing to make it work (Schwarz, 2007).

Another article I chose focused on how to successfully include non-verbal students with autism into the general education classroom. Children with severe cognitive disabilities prove to be a more difficult population to include as well, so I wanted to research what teachers have done to achieve

success with them. This article summarized a long-term qualitative study of five teachers who were committed to including students with autism in their general education classroom (Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005).

As with other articles I read, this one described similar strategies for making inclusion work for the highest number of students. The teachers studied for this article found establishing a community of their classroom to be very important. They purposefully planned lessons that would meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Caring for one another was also a key component to a successful classroom. Students were encouraged to make decisions and work with their classmates in accepting ways without a lot of adult instruction. These teachers set out to purposefully create their classroom environment where students were expected to act in caring ways right from the beginning of the school year (Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005).

The teachers took the time early on to answer the question, “What is autism?” If students with autism were going to be part of the class, the teachers felt it was necessary to explain what autism is so that everyone knew what to expect (Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005). I feel this was a great idea and it was a way to stop some of the problems that could have occurred in the classroom before they even happened.

There were several other actions that these teachers took to help the children with autism be successful in the general education classroom. Some of these actions include making the classroom accessible, offering comfort

with a schedule, working through challenges, reconstructing normalcy, and following the students' lead (Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005). All of these components make a lot of sense when thinking about educating students with cognitive disabilities. Their environment needs to be accessible for them and their needs. All children seem to respond positively to a set schedule. This is especially important when working with CD students. Any change in a routine can be devastating to them. Of course, there will always be challenges when working with children, but these can be heightened with children who are autistic. A teacher must be committed to working through those challenges without giving up or getting overwhelmed.

As much as possible, students' particular ticks and repetitive behaviors need to become accepted as normal. The rest of the class must understand these behaviors and see them as a natural part of the day. This leads to a sense of normalcy and letting things be. A teacher must be able to do this to ensure a positive classroom environment. Finally, it is crucial to follow the students' lead. If a teacher is able to go with the flow of the students, his or her classroom will flow much more smoothly.

The final two articles focused on studies that involved direct comparisons of schools that practice inclusion with those that utilize pull-out and resource room strategies. The first study completed by three researchers at the University of Minnesota compared Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for students in resource and inclusive settings. The study evaluated IEP's of 108 different students from 12 different schools (3 using resource

model programs and 9 using inclusive programs). All students received special education services for reading (Espin, Deno, and Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998).

The study looked to answer some key questions. The first question is whether or not differences existed between IEP's written in resource room settings compared those written in inclusive settings. The data from the study showed that differences did indeed exist. Specifically, when IEP's were written for students in resource settings, they typically had more service minutes, more long-range goals, and used a greater number of sources of information to create short-term objectives than IEP's written in inclusive settings (Espin, Deno, and Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998). On the other hand, the IEP's written in inclusive programs relied more on general qualitative descriptions, including letter grades and discrepancies from average-achieving peers.

Another question in this study looked at the components of the IEP's. In particular, the researchers wanted to see if the components, in relation to student ability level, differed between schools with inclusion and those with resource rooms. The study showed that there was a better concordance between components of the IEP and student ability level for students in resource room programs than for students in inclusive programs (Espin, Deno, and Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998).

The final question looked at whether there was a relationship between the reading programs and the students' IEP's, and whether there was a

difference between the inclusive and resource programs. The results of the study showed that a stronger relation exists between the amount of time allocated to reading and the level of service intensity recommended by the IEP for students in inclusive programs when compared to students in resource programs (Espin, Deno, and Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998). However, this was only true for students whose IEP's recommended high levels of service intensity.

The final article detailed a study done by a group at the College of William and Mary that compared academic and behavior outcomes for students with disabilities in pull-out programs compared to those in inclusion programs. The population for this study was 58 students at two different middle schools. Thirty-eight of the students participated in an inclusive support model while the other 22 students were educated in a pull-out program (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas, 2002).

Prior to detailing the study, the article discussed feelings of inclusion supporters and opponents with regards to inclusion and pull-out programs. Opponents of inclusion feel that moving away from pull-out programs will dilute special education and move kids into general education classrooms with teachers that are not prepared to meet the demands of these students. They also feel that inclusion is simply a cost-cutting effort (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas, 2002). On the other hand, supporters of inclusion feel that by educating students with special needs in general classrooms, the students will

experience improved outcomes through contact with appropriate role models and higher expectations.

The study measured three indicators of students' outcomes: academic achievement, behavior, and school attendance. The academic portion was the result of final course grades in 8th grade in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Also, standard score subtests from the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)* were analyzed. Student behavior was measured by the frequency of in-school and out-of-school detentions, and attendance was measured by the number of days per school year that each student was absent (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas, 2002)

As far as the academic results are concerned, students with learning disabilities (LD) that were educated in inclusive classrooms earned significantly higher grades in all four subject areas of academic instruction than the students in the pull-out programs. Likewise, students with LD that were in inclusive programs earned higher standard scores on the language and mathematics subtests of the ITBS than their counterparts in pull-out programs. The two groups earned similar mean scores on the social studies, science, and reading comprehension subtests (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas, 2002).

When looking at behavior, there were no significant differences between the inclusive and pull-out groups relative to behaviors that resulted in suspensions. This suggests that, despite the increased demands of full-time placement in general education classrooms, students in inclusive programs did

not act out more. Finally, the results of the study showed that students in inclusive classrooms attended significantly more days of school than did the students in the pull-out programs (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas, 2002).

Chapter 3

Conclusions and Recommendations

During the course of reading information to prepare me to write this Seminar Paper about the best special education delivery model, I found a large amount of information about the many benefits of inclusive classrooms. However, I also found that a school or district cannot just decide to become inclusive overnight. There is a lot of planning and several key components that need to be in place for this type of environment to be beneficial for students with special needs. Several of the articles I read focused on these key components for setting up a successful inclusive classroom.

As I thought about other important factors when considering what the best special education delivery model would be, I came up with several questions and I sought out to answer them through my research. I wanted to make sure I was gathering information about all of the disability areas including, learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disabilities. Each group has their own unique concerns, and I wanted to make sure there was research out there detailing how a teacher and school can make the inclusive classroom a great place for children with any disabling condition successful.

I was also concerned about how inclusion affects the other children without disabilities in the classroom. I have been in rooms, even resource rooms, where one child with severe needs can hinder the progress of the other students in the class. It was important to me to explore what research has

found about how to include these especially difficult children in the general education classroom without negatively affecting the other students in the class.

A third topic I felt necessary to research was how the educational placements of students affect their long term independence. A lot of energy is being put into transition planning for students when they leave school, so I felt this information would be good at helping me come up with a conclusion on how to best educate students with special needs.

I am a strong proponent of getting input from the students themselves before making decisions about their life. Therefore, I felt it important to research how children with special educational needs feel about the different placement options they have available to them.

Finally, I found it necessary to research how placement affects students academically and behaviorally. This was very important to me as the main purpose of school is to prepare us academically for our adult lives.

After studying all of this research for months, I have come to the conclusion that inclusion is the best special education delivery model for all students with special needs despite their disabling condition. Although each condition has its own special concerns, I believe that with very few exceptions all students can be educated in the general education classroom.

Having said that, it is also important to note that, before becoming inclusive, there are several things that need to happen to make this model effective. Teachers in inclusive classrooms must have a positive attitude

about having students with special needs in their classrooms. If possible, the decision should be made from the “bottom up” and not just a mandate from administration. Also, the staff in inclusive classrooms must be provided adequate training and professional development opportunities to ensure that they are prepared to work with students with special needs in their classes.

A very important component for setting up a successful inclusive environment is having the support of your administration. Without that piece, teachers who try to practice inclusion will find their road a very hard one to travel. The administration needs to be on board to help with the proper scheduling for teachers, resource specialists, and support staff schedules. I do not believe inclusion can be successful without the availability of other adults to collaborate and co-teach with the general education staff.

Teachers in inclusive classrooms must have access to a multitude of support services as well as adequate resources. It will undoubtedly take more planning time and collaboration with other specialists within the district to meet the variety of students needs in the general education classroom. These professionals will need to be allotted time to plan and work together to formulate varied lesson plans that will be beneficial for all of the students.

In conclusion, if these key components are in place, research clearly shows that inclusion is the best special education delivery model for students with special needs. Administrators and teachers should feel confident that they can meet the needs of their districts special populations in the least restrictive environment through inclusion.

References

- Barnes, M. K. (1999). Strategies for collaboration: A collaborative teaching partnership for an inclusion classroom. *Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 15(3), 233-38. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC
- Espin, C. A., Deno, S. L., & Albayrak-Kaymak, D. (1998). Individualized education programs in resource and inclusive settings: How "individualized" are they? *Journal of Special Education*, 32(3), 164-74. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from ERIC
- Idol, L. (2006). Toward inclusion of special education students in general education: A program evaluation of eight schools. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(2), 77-94. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from ERIC
- Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A., & Kaplan, I. (2007). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 365-382. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC
- Kasa-Hendrickson, C. & Kluth, P. (2005). "We Have to Start with Inclusion and Work it Out as We Go": Purposeful Inclusion for Non-Verbal Students with Autism. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 2(1), 2-14. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://www.wholeschooling.net/Journal_of_Whole_Schooling/articles/2-1%20Hendrickson%20&%20Kluth.pdf
- Leatherman, J. M. (2007). "I just see all children as children": Teachers' perceptions about inclusion. *Qualitative Report*, 12(4), 594-611. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC
- Rea, P. J., McLaughlin, V. L., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2002). Outcomes for students with learning disabilities in inclusive and pullout programs. *Exceptional Children*, 68(2), 203-22. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from ERIC
- Schwarz, P. A. (2007). Special education: A service, not a sentence. *Educational Leadership*, 64(5), 39-42. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC
- Shah, S. (2007). Special or mainstream? the views of disabled students. *Research Papers in Education*, 22(4), 425-442. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC

Sun, C. M. (2007). The impact of inclusion-based education on the likelihood of independence for today's students with special needs. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 20(2), 84-92. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from ERIC