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HOW INCLUSION IS DEFINED AND IMPLEMENTED IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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This Study by: Bailey Wright

Entitled: How Inclusion is Defined and Implemented in Elementary Classrooms

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University Honors

Date Dr. Danielle Cowley, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of Special Education

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Introduction

Inclusive education is gradually being implemented to a greater degree, thereby supporting the law and the least restrictive environment, allowing access to general education classrooms and curriculum, peers without disabilities, and equal opportunities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004). This qualitative research will reveal the definitions, barriers, and implementation techniques current scholars and practicing teachers have found regarding inclusive education. Analyzing and synthesizing the existing literature on such topics provides insight for current practicing teachers to apply to their own classroom. The process of opening general education classroom doors for all students is a prominent issue in education today; this thesis explores the implementation as well as what is done in classrooms to meet the needs of all students once inclusion is in place. At the heart of inclusive education philosophy and practice is the desire for equal educational opportunity free from discrimination.

Discrimination has taken many forms throughout history with minority groups excluded from public facilities - the case is similar for student with disabilities. Prior to 1975 with the first iteration of IDEA, many children with disabilities were excluded entirely from public education and were warehoused in "schools" better defined as institutions. Their humanity was denied as they suffered countless instances of abuse and neglect. While this shame of our nation has since passed, students with disabilities, particularly those with more complex learning needs remain segregated from their nondisabled peers.

Brault (2012) states that in 2010, 56.7 million people reported having a disability, a number continuing to grow. Education is continually altered to improve our future

generations, yet our classrooms are not accessible to all students. Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2009) acknowledge the deficit, stating, “We cannot be satisfied with schools that work only for some” (p. 47). We have opened the doors of public schools, but the classrooms within those schools remain largely segregated.

Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has had significantly positive impacts on both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Research has demonstrated that achievement and learning outcomes are improved for ALL students, because they work to create strength-based classrooms, increase student access to resources and technology, implement differentiated instruction, and teach skills for collaboration and interdependence (Baker, Wang and Wahlberg 1994; Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax, 2000; Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, Demph-Aldrich, 2011; Kasa-Hendrickson & Ashby, 2009; McDonnell, Thorson, Disher, Mathot-Buckner, 2001; Waldron and McLeskey, 1998). For students with disabilities, both the IEP goals and academic learning are achieved at a greater rate (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). And recently, Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, and Theoharis (2013) found that the greatest predictor of math and reading achievement for students with disabilities was the amount of time spent in the general education classroom. It is difficult to argue against the educational benefits of access to general education classrooms and curricula.

As a future special education teacher, it is my job to uphold the law and help all students receive a free and appropriate public education. In my preparation for teaching, coursework and professors have taught the significance of inclusion, yet I have not encountered many fully inclusive educational settings. I am overwhelmed by a stigma

surrounding students with disabilities and the need to pull students from the classroom to learn different material. Upon interactions with students in classrooms, summer camp, and after school program settings, I encounter the unique and valuable qualities each student embodies, and I feel each of these students should be represented in the same classroom. Students from every race, socioeconomic status, gender orientation, and ability level deserve opportunities and supportive climates, and I feel uncovering the meaning, flaws, and successes of inclusion can open this conversation and encourage inclusion to move from beyond the textbook and into our schools.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the various interpretations of inclusion and how we can implement it to a greater and more successful degree in elementary schools. Individuals with disabilities are discriminated against in many education systems, where additionally the law is not being upheld. This thesis provides an accessible, coherent framework for practicing teachers and future educators to gain a better understanding of the definitions of inclusion, the barriers they may encounter, and the best practices to guide them towards inclusive success.

Review of Literature

This thesis was written regarding secondary research on the implementation of inclusion as well as what is done in classrooms to meet the needs of all students. Through the analysis of the inclusion literature, I researched the following questions:

1. How is inclusion defined in current literature?
 - a. By scholars/authors
 - b. Teachers as participants in current/published research

2. What barriers have been identified in the current literature and what solutions have been put forth?
3. How is inclusion implemented in the current literature?
 - a. What does inclusion look like in today's classrooms?
 - b. What best practices support successful inclusion?

In order to answer these questions, I examined three major sources: 1) the current empirical literature on inclusive education, 2) conceptual papers in the peer-review literature, book chapters, and textbooks, and 3) online educator blog posts. I believe these three categories of secondary sources provide a depth and breadth of knowledge related to both the current research and practice behind inclusive education.

After collecting several literature sources from professionals in the special education field, I examined each source for "answers" to the research questions. I also explored several blog posts written by practicing teachers. When working with the current literature and these blogs, I conceptualized this content as a narrative, or a "story" of sorts that was being told about inclusive education. I summarized the main points of each author relative to the research questions.

I then conducted a thematic analysis to uncover and categorize themes related to this topic: documented teacher's experiences with inclusive education (Riessman, 2008). To help with this analysis, I physically cut out my summarizations and organized them into clusters of other authors to uncover themes and similarities within the literature. Based on my thematic analysis, three major stories answered the questions related to defining inclusion: a) the law, b) placement, c) process and d) philosophy. Related to the research

question of barriers to inclusion, a) pressure, b) negativity, c) lack of improvement, d) time, e) the law, and d) money. Finally, the following themes answered by research question relative to best practices for inclusion: a) developing a belief system, b) collaboration, c) co-teaching, d) redefining roles, e) differentiated instruction, f) universal design for learning, and g) professional development.

Defining Inclusion

Current research suggests a variety of definitions for the term inclusion. Most definitions align with the following four themes: the law, as a placement, as a process, or as a philosophy. Scholars proposed the dilemma and difficulties the ambiguous definition causes. Without a unifying meaning, there is not a common goal to work towards, and the end result can become skewed and vary amongst schools. Halvorsen and Neary (2001) explained the differences in definitions. They claim some think of it as attending the same school as peers without disabilities, some believe inclusion is being in the general education classroom for a portion of the day, and others believe in full inclusion. Full inclusion is thought of as all individuals with disabilities belonging in the general education classroom without exception. To unravel the complexities of inclusion, the first goal was to develop a consistent definition or reference point of the term.

The Law. Legally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 describes inclusive education in terms of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), or that “to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are not disabled... Removal from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes

with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (PL 94-142, Section 1412 (5) (B)). In addition, court cases such as *Oberti v. Clementon Board of Education* (1993) have determined that school districts must demonstrate a preponderance of evidence that students with disabilities cannot be satisfactorily educated in the general education classroom, and that sufficient steps must be taken to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms first. And *Roncker v. Walter* (1983) established the concept of portable special education services, meaning that special education is a service rather than a place, and that if such services can be provided in the general education classroom, they should.

However, the interpretation and models vary across regions of the United States. According to Ryndak (2014) the principle of LRE has led to the “continued misinterpretation of special education as a specific location, rather than a set of supports and services to be delivered in any location” (p. 67). Although the law indicates a preference for inclusion, decisions regarding special education services continue to be conflated with location, resulting in many students with disabilities being educated in segregated settings (Ryndak, 2014).

Although the law appears to indicate a preference that students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms alongside their nondisabled peers, there remains ambiguity as to the extent of inclusion. The many shades of gray within the wording of ‘maximum extent appropriate’ can bend in favor or against inclusion, and has been used to support both sides of the issue. The law has been an underlying theme for defining and

implementing inclusion in the education system. Closely linked, many define inclusion from a placement perspective.

Placement. In perhaps its simplest form, inclusion is defined as the placement of individuals with disabilities with students without disabilities. Turnbull, Turnbull and Wehmeyer (2010) align the definition closely with the least restrictive environment concept, claiming, inclusion means students with disabilities are participating in academic, extracurricular, and other school settings alongside their peers without disabilities. Similarly, Theoharis and Causton (2014) defined inclusion using the placement of students with disabilities having full access to general education curriculum, instruction, and peers to define inclusion. Once students of all abilities receive an education in the same classroom, inclusion is being implemented.

Process. Other scholars insist inclusion must be more than an effort to abide by the law and move students into a single room. Some define inclusion based on principles of how to practice inclusion. Ryndak, Taub, Jorgensen, Gonsier-Gerdin, Arndt, Sauer, and Allcock (2014) suggest not only access to the room, but also the collaboration of the education team to design and evaluate effective instruction. This implies that there is more to inclusion than placement. It takes more than moving students with disabilities into the general education classroom to define inclusion. A student explains:

Teachers must be willing to not just give me a desk and then leave me to fill the chair. I need to be asked questions, and given time for my thoughtful answers.

Teachers need to become as a conductor, and guide me through the many places I may get lost. (Kasa & Causton, n. d., p. 2)

Kasa and Causton (n.d.) also define inclusion as a process where students are given a variety of ways to access content as well as a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge and learning. As the authors note, “The strategy behind inclusion is to design supports-innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations-for every student in the classroom, to include the entire spectrum of learners” (p. 2).

Rief and Heimburge (2006) emphasize differentiated instruction when defining inclusive education and pedagogical choices that meet the needs of all students. The authors claim inclusion should be changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction. Inclusion is providing challenging instruction to motivate students. Inclusion is relevant, flexible, and varied, meaning it is essential learning but is adapted for students particular needs. Students with disabilities need to be actively engaged in the content with their thinking and ideas being challenged and pushed to new limits. Closely aligned to defining inclusion as a process, is defining inclusion as a philosophy, as our actions are closely tied to our beliefs.

Philosophy. Rose and Howley (2007) state that it is not enough to simply place students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Crockett, Billingsley, and Boscardin (2012) believe that it can be problematic to think changing the location makes individuals with disabilities a member of the classroom community. The idea of location and philosophy are combined by McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014), which states inclusion is “places where students with disabilities are valued and active participants and where they are provided supports needed to succeed in academic, social, and extracurricular activities of the school” (p. 4). Inclusion is a philosophy and social justice perspective. It is valuing diverse learning and a core belief system that guides

professional thinking. They claim inclusion is the removal of barriers while providing accommodations in shared environments.

Friend, and Bursuck (2006) hold a similar definition of inclusion, but a different perspective on setting. They state, “Inclusive practices represent the belief or philosophy that students with disabilities should be fully integrated into general education classrooms and schools and that their instruction should be based on their abilities, not their disabilities” (p. 4). However, they feel placement should be determined on a student by student basis and that “[s]ometimes learning must occur in a separate setting” (p. 3).

Villa, and Thousand (2005) also state that inclusion is not just a set of strategies but a belief system. Moreover, it is the opposite of segregation and isolation. “Inclusion is a way of life—a way of living together— that is based on a belief that each individual is valued and belongs” (p. 10). In addition to the Least Restrictive Environment definition, they claim:

Inclusive education is about embracing everyone and making a commitment to provide each student in the community, each citizen in a democracy, with the inalienable right to belong. Inclusion assumes that living and learning together benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference. (p. 5)

Kasa and Causton (n. d.) also mention inclusion as “a philosophy where all students are valued and supported to participate meaningfully with each other” (p. 2). They continue by defining inclusion as utilizing student strengths and providing all students with a sense of belonging. Similarly, Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, and Demph-Aldrich (2011) describe inclusion as viewing diversity as a strength rather than a weakness. “Inclusive education is providing each student the right to an authentic sense of

belonging to an inclusive school classroom community where difference is expected, and valued” (p. 195).

Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) feel each child needs to be an essential member of the classroom and school community in which they feel a sense of belonging. This idea of equality is not limited to students with disabilities, but all students, stating:

Inclusive schools are places where students, regardless of ability, race, language, and income, are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula, and receive collaborative support to succeed. (p. 45)

Practicing Teacher Perspective. In order to obtain teacher perspective on the definition of inclusion, a number of teacher blogs were researched. In a blog written by teacher Chris Chivers (2015), he describes, “An inclusive environment is one where people matter, their needs and aspirations are known but are also supported...An inclusive ethos should allow individuals to express themselves, and, at times, to articulate different opinions” (§ 2). He also explains, “Every child is unique, demonstrably so, educationally, physically, emotionally, socially, through heritage and life experience” (§ 4). Blogger Lisa Parisi (2008) writes that inclusion is all about philosophy. She explains, “Inclusion means to be included, not separated” (§ 6).

Overall, there are many approaches to defining inclusion: through the law, as a placement, as a process, and as a philosophy. While some scholars suggest inclusion in a physical manner of moving students into the proper classroom, others claim there is more value significance to the term. Within these meanings, all call for change to occur. All

demand more rights for individuals with disabilities, and to trudge past our ugly history of discrimination.

Barriers to Inclusion

Lingering barriers cause hardship for inclusion in some schools. Scholars and practicing teachers suggest several potential and existing hardships with the implementation of inclusion, such as pressure, negativity, lack of improvement, the law, and money.

Pressure. The pressure of high-stakes testing has been building for educators in recent years. From No Child Left Behind to most recently Race To the Top, the government is insisting on higher standardized test scores to ensure our future generations are prepared to compete in society and the global economy. In this testing push, teachers are held accountable for the test scores of their students. Rief and Heimburge (2006) feel these high-stakes tests are a barrier to inclusion, because teachers feel additional pressure for students with disabilities to raise achievement and test scores. Similarly, there is hesitancy in the idea of students without disabilities will no longer receive the education appropriate for high test scores once all students are included. Teachers are being held accountable for student learning, and by having all students in their classroom and using different approaches to learning, they may fear lack of test scores to show for it (Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin, 2012).

Lack of Improvement. Closely linked to the pressure surrounding test scores is the lack of improvement of student outcome (Friend, M., & Bursuck, W., 2006, p. 18). Despite all students being in the same classroom, they feel there is not a lot of evidence to support

this idea. McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014) also feel there is a lack of research on co-teaching. Without definitive results to turn to, it can be difficult to fully implement, or develop the optimism vision.

As the number of inclusive settings grows, the research surrounding the improvement of students will also grow. Already, Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) indicate a 500 student school that implemented inclusion went from testing 78% of students to 98% of students and rose in proficiency from 50% to 86%. Another study showed that for every hour spent in a general education classroom, students improved 0.5 points on tests in reading, and 0.37 points on tests in math (Cosier, M., Causton-Theoharis, J., & Theoharis, G., 2013, p. 329).

Negativity. Pessimistic mindsets of teachers, parents, and students are barrier to inclusive education. Crockett, Billingsley, and Boscardin (2012) recognizes the negativity some teachers hold regarding inclusion. In a study, 20% said negative teacher attitudes were the largest struggle. They also claim there is a lack of shared philosophy of the definition of inclusion (Causton-Theoharis, J., Theoharis, G., Bull, T., Cosier, M., & Demph-Aldrich, K., 2011). Some may feel students with disabilities are not their responsibility. Similarly, teachers may feel students with disabilities need a specialized setting to benefit, and that not all students should be held to the same academic standards (Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., & Wehmeyer, M., 2010). Teachers, administrators, and parents may also quickly think of exceptions, or cases in which it would not work, rather than cases in which it would (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008).

Villa and Thousand (2005) refer to those that are against inclusion as segregationists, and feel they are a barrier to inclusion. As the authors note, “Segregationist thinking assumes that the right to belong is an earned rather than unconditional human right” (p. 5). They feel this is problematic because “segregated education creates a permanent underclass of students and conveys a strong message to those students that do not measure up, fit in, or belong” (p. 5). Some segregationists may feel that it is inappropriate for some children, or it could be a safety issue for students.

Negative social experiences are also a potential downfall of inclusion. Students with disabilities may fear the general education classroom will result in teasing (Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., & Wehmeyer, M., 2010). McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, B. (2014) recognize that with inclusion, students often have paraprofessionals with them for assistance which can be stigmatizing. Especially in the early stages, as students are initially integrated into the same general education classroom, students are learning and adjusting.

Additionally, Friend and Bursuck (2006) suggest “some parents find their children seem more comfortable in a special education classroom that has fewer students and more structure” (p. 18). Turnbull, Turnbull, and Wehmeyer (2010) recognize some parents of children with disabilities feel the general education classroom is not welcoming or appropriate for the child. Parents of students without disabilities sometimes feel concerned it will negatively impact their child’s academic performance. Villa and Thousand (2005) also recognize some believe the inclusion of students with disabilities may hold back gifted children.

Time. Friend and Bursuck (2006) state the time it takes for shared planning and collaboration can be difficult for teachers to find. Rather than being able to work on their own time and during breaks in their day, to effectively practice inclusion they now must plan with their team. Time is also mentioned by Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, and Demph-Aldrich (2011), explaining teachers are pulled to several meetings to learn, collaborate, and attend professional development. It can also be difficult for paraprofessionals. Many meetings take place before and after school, which is often when paraprofessionals have other duties such as watching the lunchroom, helping students to the bus, or being a crossing guard. Due to the large amount of time and difficulties planning, another barrier is the lack of preparation of teachers (Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin, 2012, p. 53).

The Law. Just as the law can be used in support of inclusion, it is considered another barrier to inclusion (Schwarz, 2006). The continuum of services is used as a scapegoat. The law states that students with disabilities should be included “to the maximum extent appropriate”, but does not clearly identify the line that separates appropriate from not. Thus, many have different views of the appropriateness for students to be included. Schwarz (2006) feels the law regarding education is commonly being broken.

Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) feel a barrier is bringing students into the general education classroom and leaving everything else the same. The law does not specify how students should be brought into the classroom, so schools may abide by the law and include students, but not take any further measures. The scholars recognize the need for restrictive settings only for short-term support when needed.

Money. Finally, as seems to often occur in education, funding and costs for inclusion can be a barrier. The IDEA (2004) mandates a free and appropriate public education to all children with disabilities (Crockett, Billingsley & Boscardin, 2012, p. 97). With all students in the general education classrooms, it can call for more paraprofessionals, special educators, and specialists to help inclusion run effectively. There also may need to be increased technology in the general education classrooms as well as communication devices. Schools are unfortunately on a budget, and many may view inclusion as a costly endeavor (Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin, 2012).

Practicing Teacher Perspective. Teacher blogs reflect many similar barriers of inclusion. Lisa Parisi (2008) defines one problem within co-teaching as “you have your students and I have mine” (¶ 5). She believes all students are to be considered ‘our’ students. Rather than separating by students, she is suggesting the redefinition of roles to accommodate inclusion and all students. She also believes disabilities and supports should not be quieted but embraced. She feels fidget tools should not be hidden for fear of stigmatizing students but offered to everyone in the classroom.

Many teachers pinpoint the issue of time. Jmh0380 (2011) writes, “...inclusion is wonderful if there is enough time and help...everyone is pulled pretty thin”. Angelia Grimes-Graeme (2011) explains, “...I don’t see how I could be in so many classes at once since I have several grade levels. These narratives also suggest the school may be understaffed, resulting from lack of funds. A special education teacher, Tori (2013) explained that she has given her notice for her job after ten years. She stated, “I am

frustrated with special education and the lack of funds to support the need for more teachers to support the increasing amount of students in special ed”.

Teacher Eshepherd79 describes barriers of accountability, pressure on high stakes testing, and high expectations. They state:

I think our setup is effective, but how the special ed teacher is held accountable should be considered. They don't bear the weight of test scores as much as the gen. ed. teacher does. What needs to be changed are the way interventions are done. Students need to have weekly goals to work towards and expectations that need to be met and set by the special ed. teacher.

Through their input, it is evident that she feels that through their inclusion models, special education teachers are not held to the same standards as general education teachers, because students with disabilities are not held to the same standards as students without disabilities.

Scholarly research suggests issues that hinder successful inclusive education including pressure, lack of improvement, negativity, time, money, and safety. Many of these can be difficult to maneuver in education. However, research also recommends several best practices that may boost the implementation and proactively avoid the difficulties surrounding inclusion.

Inclusive Practices

Professionals approach inclusion using several different methods. In order for inclusion to be implemented within a school system, most agree that is a multi-step process. Some of the practices mentioned by professionals are the development of a belief

system, collaboration, co-teaching, redefining roles, differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and professional development.

Developing a Belief System. Similar to defining inclusion by professionals, Theoharis and Causton (2014) feel a critical step towards implementing inclusion must be the development of a shared vision for the school. Villa and Thousand (2005) feel the belief system should include, “each student can and will learn and succeed. Diversity enriches us all. Each student has unique contributions. Each student has strengths and needs. Service and supports should not be relegated to one setting. Effective learning results from collaborative efforts” (p. 8). They feel there should be an opportunity to think creatively, and there should be high expectations for all students.

Additionally, Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, and Demph-Aldrich (2011) feel that teachers should see all kids as their responsibility. With the development of a vision, teachers and administrators alike should share optimism for the approach, and pledge to work together to make every child successful. The unified vision ensures everyone has the same idea and understanding.

Collaboration. Once the transition to classrooms in which all learners are included, further strategies must be implemented for all students to benefit from instruction. According to Jackson, Ryndak, and Wehmeyer (2008-2009) access to the general education curriculum entails collaboration between special education and general education teachers, access to contexts with same-age peers. Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, and Demph-Aldrich (2011) indicate statistics of research done show improvements from collaboration. With collaboration, the scholars suggest teachers working together and developing a team as

well as the school counselor and special education teacher. Through their collaborative work, teachers will plan and be prepared for all students to show mastery level performance.

Paraprofessionals and specialists should be included in the teams of teachers (Theoharis, G. & Causton, J, 2014). Jorgensen, McSheehan, Schuh, and Sonnenmeier, (2002) feel there should be an additional family school partnership to extend the collaboration beyond the school building. By including all in the planning process, each will contribute their knowledge to create the best learning experience for all students. Through the team collaboration, common content standards should be arranged for all students as well as authentic assessments. Myers, Jenkins Lindburg, and Nied (2013) state, “disability education is for everyone by everyone” (p. 11).

Co-Teaching. Kasa and Causton (n. d) feel there should also be shared resources and co-teaching. McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014) explain that with co-teaching, there should be mutual goals, parity, shared participation, shared resources, shared accountability, and voluntariness. In co-teaching, two educators teach the lesson together. There are five models of co-teaching, including one teach, one assist, alternative teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, and team teaching.

One teach, one assist involves one teacher taking the lead of the lesson, while the other teacher works with behaviors, helps particular students, and distributes materials. Alternative teaching is one teacher teaching the majority of the students, while the other teacher leads a small group with a different lesson. This can be used to help students catch up on a missing assignment, for remedial work, or for extension of the lesson. Teachers

split the classroom in half and teach the same content simultaneously for parallel teaching.

This allows teachers to work with smaller numbers, and it also allows teachers to separate students who need to be for various reasons. Station teaching involves each teacher being responsible for a part of the content. The students move from one teacher to the next in order to receive the entire lesson, but from two teachers. Finally, team teaching is both teachers equally planning and giving instruction through a conversation rather than lecture format. The teachers are seen as equals, and both are in charge of management of the lesson as well.

Commonly, co-teaching is done with a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Rather than sending students with disability labels to the special education teacher, the special education teacher comes to the students with disabilities. In these formats, all students receive the benefits of two teachers in the room.

Redefining Roles. With the adoption of inclusion in schools, staff will redefine their roles. Many encourage redefining of the special education teacher. Just as the special education teacher is seen in a different light for co-teaching to occur, McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014) suggest the special education teachers are assigned to classrooms and content areas, not specific students. The emphasis of students with labels is removed from their description.

Crockett, Billingsley, and Boscardin (2012) share that principals are key for inclusion. Principals that share the belief system and are not resistant to the idea are important for the development of inclusion. Similarly, Ryndak, Taub, Jorgensen, Gonsier-Gerdin, Arndt, Sauer, and Allcock, (2014) claim, “for change to occur at the district level,

policies addressing equitable access to both general curriculum and contexts must be adopted” (p. 69). This implies inclusion as a schoolwide procedure. McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014) also feel teachers must be involved in school data-based decision making. There should be opportunities for teacher leadership with greater responsibility. Schwarz (2006) states, “it is time for a new type of school system that promotes equity, dignity, and possibilities, time to rise above mindsets that encourage mediocrity” (p. 50).

Differentiated Instruction. Nearly all professionals that delve into methods of practicing inclusion include the idea of differentiation. Friend and Bursuck (2006) describe differentiation as making instructional accommodations to facilitate student learning. Essentially, they are removing the idea of ‘one size fits all’ education. Schwarz (2006) states, “the strategy behind inclusion is to design supports-innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations-for every student in the classroom, to include the entire spectrum of learners” (p. 35).

Many methods of differentiation are mentioned by Rief and Heimburge (2006), including having a variety of materials, tasks, and learning options, including multisensory lessons, assessments, and projects. There is also a varied degree of support and scaffolds and students have choices about topics and the way they learn. Teachers make adaptations and modifications as needed and provide multiple approaches to instruction (Causton, J., & Theoharis, G., 2008). Through the multiple approaches, they feel it is important to take multiple intelligences into account. Multiple intelligences imply that students hold different strengths in learning, including kinesthetic, visual, mathematical, musical, interpersonal,

intrapersonal, natural, and verbal. By incorporating multiple intelligences, teachers provide students opportunities to utilize their strengths of the multiple intelligence and express their knowledge in different forms.

Universal Design for Learning. Universal design for learning presents content in different ways, allows students to express their learning in different ways, and motivates students. As Hehir and Katzman (2012) indicate, Universal Design for Learning is created under the premise that students with diverse learning needs, including students with disabilities will participate in all aspects of schooling, including the general education classroom. Teachers who employ Universal Design for Learning anticipate diversity in advance and create curriculum, strategies, and practices to ensure access for all learners. Lessons are planned assuming all learners will be present, and a wide range of academic levels will be reached.

According to Halvorsen and Neary (2001), a universal design for learning philosophy claims “learning barriers are less a function of the learner’s capacity and more the fault of inflexible materials and methods” (p. 14). Teachers must be able to anticipate and accommodate all students. Their suggested methods of adapting to individual differences include infusing technology, service learning, and peer tutoring.

Villa and Thousand (2005) recommend similar methods for universal design adaptations can be made to lesson content, processes of instruction, and products showing student success. Instruction can be altered with technology in the classroom, multiple instructional agents, authentic assessments, and peer mediated instructional approaches.

Professional Development. Explicit training, in service, or ongoing professional development are also listed as practices for inclusion by several scholars. Rather than

insisting on the implementation of inclusion without proper preparation, school systems bring the professionals and trainers to the teachers. Within these trainings, all staff are given the opportunity to receive additional supports and guidelines for differentiation, universal design for learning, and practicing inclusion (Jorgenson, McSheehan, Schuh, & Sonnenmeier, 2002). Just as many suggest the common belief system that must be held by the school for successful inclusion, Villa and Thousand (2005) also point out the need for school-wide practices and approaches. Students will receive consistency from teacher to teacher, grade to grade, and all teachers will hold their students to high standards under high expectations.

Practicing Teaching Perspective. In teacher blog Lisa's Lingo (2008), Lisa describes her ideas for proper implementation of inclusion. She believes children should not be separated, teachers should be mixed up and children allowed to choose their style of learning. She practices co-teaching models through her teaching that the perfect classroom consists of two teachers working together towards a common goal. She also believes in project-based learning. With this method of differentiation, all students are able to find success.

As mentioned by both Lisa Parisi (2011) and several teachers and parents of students with disabilities commented, another step towards inclusion is acknowledging special needs. Lisa states, "Point out that we all need assistance at times. Make it available to everyone" (¶ 8). A mother of a child with Down syndrome explained her yearly discussion with students regarding disability. She explains Down syndrome, and is sure to tell students "those with disabilities are more alike than different" (DS Mom, 2012). She

also allows for students to ask her questions. Another mother of a son with autism comes to class while students are learning about the human body. She focuses her discussion on the human brain, and “how everyone’s brain works a little differently”. She also explains that even though her son cannot communicate verbally, he has a very high reading level. Following the success of her presentation, the student himself worked with the school counselor to give his own presentation on differing abilities.

In the blog *Let’s Talk About Inclusion*, author Karen Wang (2012) describes the most effective intervention for students with autism as peer-to-peer support. Not only does it help students with autism, she also claims it is helpful for peers who receive training. They also gain the experience and interdependence. She describes it as an essential part of education for every child.

Several teachers spoke in favor of collaboration. Chrissy Youel (2011) wrote, “I like how we do the collaborative setting, both as a teacher and as a parent...it also helps those students who tend to ‘fall through the cracks’ and don’t receive services for one reason or another (parent denial for testing, etc.)”. Through collaborative settings, both feel all students benefit.

Conclusion

Based on the research and the ambiguity of the law, several different definitions of inclusion exist. The lack of unification is problematic in school settings with teachers and administrators perhaps not sharing a unified vision for their school and students with disabilities. First and foremost, in order to uphold the law, inclusion is the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with students without

disabilities; however, the definition needs to extend further into a belief system and attitude embraced by an entire school, not specific to special education. Inclusion demands human equality.

We have seen this battle fought in different strains countless times throughout history, including racial, gender, and socioeconomic differences. A label should not stand as a divider of students and the quality of education they receive. The idea that all students can and will succeed is critical for entire schools to accept and believe. With these beliefs, access to the general education classroom and curriculum can be seen as a right, not a privilege to be earned. As Causton-Theoharis, J. and Theoharis, G. (2009) suggest, “We cannot be satisfied with schools that work for only some” (p. 47).

The term inclusion has the capability of extending far beyond the context of special education; individuals of all different backgrounds, cultures, and ability levels can benefit from inclusive practices. Many view the purpose of school as a preparation for life as a citizen in our society. In segregated schools, the preparation for society is limited; students with disabilities will not be exposed or experienced with other peers and the knowledge others have upon graduation. Likewise, students in general education classrooms will not have experience with students with disabilities. The classroom is no longer a natural setting which is not realistic for the future of our students.

Many of the barriers found within inclusion can be defeated with the use of the best practices, such as collaboration, the development of a belief system, and differentiating instruction to meet all student needs. The creation of a vision and definition is a critical

component that is frequently overlooked; inclusion has an assumed definition, when in reality there are many different perspectives.

Throughout the research, it is evident that several steps and practices are suggested for proper implementation of inclusion. As many suggest, a proper first step is the development of a belief system to be shared by the school promoting optimism, success for all, and high expectations. Following, it is important to redefine roles as a team. Just as it is important for everyone to share the same perspective of what inclusion is, it is also important for everyone to share the perspective of the jobs everyone holds and their role in the process. As mentioned by teachers and parents in blogs, it is helpful to directly teach acceptance of differences to students and acknowledge and value diversity. By having this conversation with the class, it may prevent barriers in the future. It is especially novel to incorporate it directly into academics during a unit on the body, or even having a student with a disability share with the class.

Once these ideas have been established, collaborative planning for differentiation, universal design for learning, and co-teaching is also critical. Though timely, team planning allows ideas to greet many professionals before being administered to the class, and it also allows for other paraprofessionals, co-teachers, and specialists in the room to understand, follow, and contribute to the lesson. By differentiating instruction, no child is left out. Inclusion is more than just a place. Having a chair in the general education classroom is not enough. True inclusion occurs when ALL students belong and ALL students learn.

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