

Orientation of Special Educators and Teachers Promoting Inclusion

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Abstract

Inclusion as we know it today has its origins in Special Education. The development of the field of special education has involved a series of stages during which education systems have explored different ways of responding to children with disabilities, and to students who experience difficulties in learning. Competence and Attitudes of special educators and teachers affect the extent to which teachers are willing and able to implement inclusive practice. One of the greatest challenges in teacher's preparation for inclusive practice, apart from providing teachers with skills, knowledge and understanding, is to ensure the development of positive attitudes toward students with Special education needs and their inclusion in regular classrooms This research paper focuses on the factors associated with the successful implementation of inclusive education. It considers teacher characteristics that may facilitate or hinder the inclusion of students with special education needs. Recently, including and instructing students with disabilities in the general education classroom, has been a topic of heightened interest and provides powerful implications for rethinking education for all students.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Special education needs, Teachers.*

Introduction

Inclusion is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. It is the placement of students with disabilities into the general education classroom. If the student requires specialized services, they are provided within the general education setting. Inclusion promotes quality and equity education for all, without any type of barrier or exclusion, including those who may be potentially marginalized due to disability, gender, emotional/ behavioral problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness, migrants, poverty, hearing or visual impairment, language delay, among others.

As teachers will have the main responsibility for implementing inclusion policy, teacher's characteristics are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practice (Norwich, 1994; Shade & Stewart, 2001; World Health Organization, 2011). It is therefore important to understand the factors associated with teacher's ability and willingness to accommodate students with differing needs in their classrooms as to facilitate inclusive practice.

Role of Special Educators and Teachers for Promoting Inclusion:

Inclusion requires a large vision and specific competencies for all Special Educators and Teachers. They need to know that diversity is present in the classroom, and that they should attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. In this frame, it is imperative to prepare special educators and teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans. The three important educational aspects that every special educator and teacher needs to be inclusive are:

- Equality - promoting the same opportunities for all
- Quality - offering functional and meaningful learning
- Equity - responding to special educational needs.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes for all inclusion teachers and special educators must emphasize that the purpose of all teacher interventions is the student's learning. They also need to have high expectations for all (inclusive vision), develop inclusive projects including diverse teaching strategies and support systems (inclusive practices).

The multidimensional model of teacher competence (Kunter et al., 2011, 2013) reflects that teacher competence not only includes cognitive aspects, such as skills and knowledge, but also beliefs related to learning, motivation and self-regulation. That is, teachers' professional competence involves skills and knowledge as well as beliefs and motivation, which, in interplay, will determine the extent to which a teacher can successfully master the situation (Klieme, Hartig, & Rauch, 2008).

The UNESCO states that teachers and special educators have a key role to play in preparing pupils to take their place in society and in the world of work and points out that teachers and special educators in particular need the skills necessary to:

- Identify the specific needs of each individual learner, and respond to them by deploying a wide range of teaching strategies
- Support the development of young people into fully autonomous lifelong learners
- Work in multicultural settings (including an understanding of the value of diversity, and respect for difference)
- Work in close collaboration with colleagues, parents and the wider community.

Goals of Inclusion

The following goals for inclusion have been identified by several key educational organizations (Council for Exceptional Children 1994; National Association of State Boards of Education 1994):

- **The focus of Inclusion should be on the Student** - The services and resources should help the student build self-esteem and self-worth, while providing positive experiences. Helping students with special needs feel "ownership" and a part of the school community is a necessary component of successful inclusion.
- **Multiple Intelligence** - The concept of multiple intelligence provides an alternative way to consider the abilities and special talents of each student. For example, aptitude in music, sports, creative arts, dance, and drama should be highlighted in all students.
- **Adaptive Curriculum** - Inclusive schools should provide curriculum programs that meet the needs of all students. This includes minority, limited English proficiency, gifted, students with disabilities, and general education students. Adapting and enhancing the curriculum for all students is an ongoing part of teachers' roles and responsibilities.

Effects of Training provided to Special Educators and Teachers

In response to the significant challenges of implementing inclusive educational practice, educators and researchers have started to investigate the extent to which training can better prepare teachers for the accommodation of students with diverse educational needs in their classrooms. To this extent, several authors have argued that teacher training should entail not only courses to extent their skills, knowledge and understanding, but also address attitudes and promote teachers' willingness to include all students in regular classrooms (Borg et al., 2011; Forlin, 2010). The potential effects of teacher education on perceived competence and attitudes are confirmed by empirical research. For example, studies in the UK and US have demonstrated that teacher education can have positive effects on both teachers' perceived competence and attitudes toward integration (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Cheney & Barringer, 1995).

Essential Components of Inclusion for Orientation of Special Educators and Teachers

- The Inclusive Teacher should be a professional in education with a **strong commitment to his/her community** because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment; It is important to recognize the school as a point of encounter among different people, it promotes agreements among all the members of the community and meaningful relationships among the components that impact the learning of the students by removing barriers, promoting high expectations and a positive environment characterized by continuous improvement and values.
- The Inclusive Teacher should **recognize individual differences and implements learning strategies** for all. The educational intervention is oriented to diversity and promotes learning strategies for all (equality), for quite a few and for only one (equity).
- There should be **collaborative work among educators** which includes a team sharing knowledge, making decisions, solving problems together and generating actions in order to improve the school and to increase the learning for all students collectively.
- Inclusive education must characterize all training teacher programs, offering skills and common benchmarks for everyone regardless of education level to be entered (e.g. Primary, Secondary and High Education). This versatile training enables various teachers, regardless of their field or level of training, to collaborate and participate in the **diversity of educational contexts** together.
- New teachers must participate with experienced teachers at least during the first two years. This includes dialogue sessions, reviews of situations, decision-making arrangements and work plans, among others to provide the following to the new teacher: intervention (guidance), facilitation (advice), and cooperation (co-responsibility). The new teacher needs **counseling and mentoring** actions to consolidate his/her skills as an inclusive teacher.

Although teachers are increasingly confronted with the reality of more heterogeneous classrooms and may generally support inclusive practice, research shows that they often feel unprepared and concerned about their ability to cope and are hence less willing to accommodate students with Special education needs (Blanton et al., 2011; Lambe & Bones, 2006).

Practices to be followed by Special Educators and Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Students in an inclusive classroom are generally placed with their chronological age-mates, regardless of whether the students are working above or below the typical academic level for their age. Also, to encourage a sense of belonging, emphasis is placed on the value of friendships. Teachers often nurture a relationship between a student with special needs and a same-age student without a special educational need.

Another common practice is the assignment of a buddy to accompany a student with special needs at all times (for example in the cafeteria, on the playground, on the bus and so on). This is used to show students that a diverse group of people make up a community, that no one type of student is better than another, and to remove any barriers to a friendship that may occur if a student is viewed as "helpless." Such practices reduce the chance for elitism among students in later grades and encourage cooperation among groups.

Other common practices which can be utilized by Special Educators and Teachers are:

➤ One teach, one support

The content teacher will deliver the lesson and the special education teacher will assist students individual needs and enforce classroom management as needed.

➤ One teach, one observe

The teacher with the most experience in the content will deliver the lesson and the other teacher will float or observe.

➤ Station teaching

The room is divided into stations in which the students will visit with their small groups. Generally, the content teacher will deliver the lesson in his/her group, and the special education teacher will complete a review or adapted version of the lesson with the students.

➤ Parallel teaching

One half of the class is taught by the content teacher and one half is taught by the special education teacher. Both groups are being taught the same lesson, just in a smaller group.

➤ Alternative teaching

The content teacher will teach the lesson to the class, while the special education teacher will teach a small group of students an alternative lesson.

➤ Team teaching

Both teachers share the planning, teaching, and supporting equally. This is the traditional method, and often the most successful co-teaching model.

Recommendations for Special Educators and Teachers

They can use a number of techniques to help build classroom communities:

- Using games designed to build community
- Involving students in solving problems
- Sharing songs and books that teach community
- Openly dealing with individual differences by discussion
- Assigning classroom jobs that build community
- Teaching students to look for ways to help each other

- Utilizing physical therapy equipment such as standing frames, so students who typically use wheelchairs can stand when the other students are standing and more actively participate in activities
- Encouraging students to take the role of teacher and deliver instruction (e.g. read a portion of a book to a student with severe disabilities)
- Focusing on the strength of a student with special needs
- Create classroom checklists
- Take breaks when necessary
- Create an area for children to calm down
- Organize student desk in groups
- Create a self and welcoming environment
- Set ground rules and stick with them
- Help establish short-term goals
- Design a multi-faced curriculum
- Communicate regular with parents and/or caregivers
- Seek support from other special education teachers

Conclusion

Inclusion is a big challenge for all but, it is an opportunity to advance the school as a change factor that promotes dialogue and participation, making possible well-being through an education of quality for all without exception, for the commitment of the community. Inclusion has been incorporated into almost every educational system, but we still need to learn and understand the real meaning of Education for All with quality and equity and recognize the fundamental role of teachers in the advancement of social justice, human rights, and opportunities for welfare. Each one of us needs to face the challenges in order to consolidate inclusion for the benefit of our community.

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