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Inclusion for students with special needs & benefits for students with disabilities

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Abstract

Inclusion education means that all students are part of the school community, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. Students with disabilities do not need to be placed in a different institutions. They deserve to have full access to all resources and social interactions that are present in the general education classroom. The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is a current legal requirement in the United States according to the nation's special education law identified as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA ("Sec. 300.8 Child with a Disability." n.d.). Originally, the concept of inclusive education materialized over issues with segregating disabled students in public schools. Children with disabilities faced issues such as school removal, segregated classrooms, or no in-class support. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created to ensure all children receive a free and appropriate public education. Within the legislation is a mandate requiring schools educate a child with a disability alongside children without disabilities as much as possible. Today, becoming a special education teacher means learning inclusive teaching in a special education degree program.

Keywords: Special needs, inclusion, inclusive education, modification and adaptation

Introduction

An inclusion classroom will include both disabled and non-disabled students (this is true of early childhood and elementary education as well as secondary). Modifications and adaptations are typically found in an inclusion classroom. Under IDEA, these tools are referred to as supplementary aids and services. Preferred placement for a child with a disability is the least restricted environment (LRE). Educators will aim to place the child in an inclusive setting as long as he or she is able to stay academically on track with peers in the classroom.

Even if the disabled student is unable to attend classes in a general education setting, the school's placement team is required to still create opportunities for the student to interact with his or her non-disabled peers. The placement team made up of teachers and non-teaching special education experts will need to address objectives of inclusive education as part of developing an individualized education program (IEP) for the student. The inclusion of special needs students in regular classrooms have been shown to improve peer relationships, lead to fewer absences, and offer best post-secondary school outcomes.

Although the concept of inclusive education is universal, an inclusion classroom may not always look identical. For one, the modifications and accommodations listed in the IEPs of the special education students will determine what supports and resources need to be made available. Examples of inclusion in the classroom is providing access to the same routines and curriculum, encouraging participation of all students in activities done inside and outside the classroom, and holding all students up to the highest of standards regardless of a disability.

Inclusive education for kids with special needs means to educate them in a mainstream school instead of a special needs school. Although most special needs children go to a special school, an inclusive approach has many benefits.

But when it comes to having a special needs child in a regular classroom, there are some popular public opinions. Like,

“Special needs kids go to special needs school.”

“To ensure personal attention, separation of special needs kids is better”

“Special education means separate education”

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With the growing awareness and legal rights ensured to special needs kids, we now know that these are merely some age old myths.

Today, let's first burst some of the misleading facts about educating special needs children in mainstream schools. We then talk about the benefits of inclusive education for special needs kids.

A variety of instructional formats may be needed in an inclusive classroom. For instance, some students may benefit more from peer-led instruction instead of teacher-led instruction. Kids could be paired up for class work or placed in small groups. Special education students may be given the same class assignments, but be allowed extra time for completion or be provided with a reduced number of problems. Additionally, students with IEPs may use assistive tools such as headphones, organizers, calculators, and laptops.

History of Inclusion: In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (U.S. Bureau of Education), which was later reauthorized to IDEA (1990), establishing a federal mandate that all students with disabilities would receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). One purpose of IDEA was to include students with disabilities into the educational system who had previously been excluded (National Council on Disability, 1994). According to the Code of Federal Regulations (2006), LRE focuses on including students with disabilities in a general education setting "to the maximum extent appropriate and to ensure that children with disabilities...are educated with children who are nondisabled" (34 CFR 300.114). The U.S. Department of Education stated IDEA presumes that the first placement option considered for each child with a disability is the regular classroom in the school that the child would attend if not disabled, with appropriate supplementary aids and services to facilitate such placement (Code of Federal Regulations, 2006). Thus, before a child with a disability can be placed outside the regular education environment, the individualized education program (IEP) team must consider the full range of supplementary aids and services that could be provided to facilitate the child's placement in the regular classroom setting.

Benefits of Inclusion Classrooms for Special Needs Students

Improved Academic Success

When U.S. Congress reauthorized IDEA in 2004, it updated the law to mandate that students be placed in the "least restrictive environment" for their needs, meaning schools should educate students with disabilities alongside those who are not disabled if possible.

Research has shown that when special needs students are placed in traditional classes, their academic success improves. A study published in the International Journal of Special Education found that students with autism performed better in inclusion classrooms than in special education classrooms. The authors noted the findings indicate students with autism should be provided a challenging curriculum to encourage academic learning as opposed to one based solely on developing functional skills.

Stronger Relationships with Traditional Students

When schools use evidence-based practices in implementing

inclusion classrooms, it can lead to academic and social improvements for both sets of students. That's according to a study published in the Journal of Community Psychology, which measured how schools with Latino and African American students with special needs applied organizational, academic and social inclusion methods into their classrooms. Schools with these practices found that disabled students had higher school satisfaction and felt a better sense of belonging. Non-disabled students in turn got the chance to learn alongside those who were different from them, building acceptance and understanding.

Improving School Climate

- Positive Environment
- Developed their Social Skills
- Developed their Adaptive Skills
- Build Relationships
- Improve Learning Skills
- Improve communication Skills
- Help to Communicate with their Buddies
- Help to Interactions with their Buddies
- Developed their Learning Skills
- Improve Vocabulary
- Improve Understanding Skills.

Benefits of Inclusion Classrooms for Teachers

Creating Unique Lesson Plans

All students respond differently to academic instructional methods, including special education students. Some may excel in collaborative settings while others may learn better by working on their own. It's important to create lessons and a learning environment that addresses different learning types.

Universal Design Learning (UDL) offers insight from cognitive neuroscience research that helps teachers create atmospheres and lessons that support all learners. With UDL, teachers can better engage with every student in class, regardless of learning disability. Whether using UDL or not, the opportunity to create diverse and inclusive lesson plans helps teachers grow in their career and become more in tune with what students need to perform well.

Collaborating with Co-Teachers

Often, traditional and special education teachers work together in collaborative classes. These collaborative settings can take many forms, including assistant teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, and team teaching, among others.

No matter the form collaboration takes, the benefits for teachers are clear. Teachers working in schools with good collaboration saw positive effects in student achievement. Collaboration also allows teachers the chance to creatively plan with a colleague, have access to more resources and gain accountability that they wouldn't have working in a siloed environment.

Broadening Your Mind

For traditional teachers, being in an inclusion classroom may be their first time working with students with learning disabilities. While this can seem overwhelming, it's actually a chance to learn valuable information about the education system. Teachers in inclusion classrooms better understand what an individualized education program (IEP) is, how

students with learning disabilities learn and how to best foster learning across many learning styles. With the number of disabled students continuing to grow, teachers must familiarize themselves with types of disabilities, laws surrounding special education and best practices for working with families. Inclusion allows teachers to improve their skills as they take on new challenges in their classrooms.

Modelling

It's been proved that placing a special needs child with those without disabilities has significantly positive social and academic effects. It goes without saying that children without disabilities act as models for those with specific concerns. They imitate the behaviors of their friends which in turn helps them learn social skills of talking and behaving 'normally'.

Everyone Learns

Another benefit of inclusive education of special needs children is that it is a two way process. Kids without disabilities are, at a very early age, sensitized to individuals who are 'different'. Kids understand that it is okay if their 'special' friend talks loudly to them. Having learnt in such an inclusive classroom, they do not fall prey to the stigmatizing voices of others. They are also more willing to actively help special needs populations.

For the special needs child, being in a normal classroom is in itself a major learning experience. It is only fair to expose them to the same level of education and rights from the beginning as others.

Even teachers observe the interaction the kids have among themselves and learn about the needs of kids with specific concerns. They over time learn to help special children better in the school setting.

Equal Rights To Education

The RTE Act, 2012, states

All children, regardless of their impairment, should be educated in mainstream schools, till 18 years of age.

There has been a rapid increase in Inclusive schools recently. But there are a lot of difficulties that special children in mainstream schools face. For example, lack of flexibility in curriculum, infrastructure, being bullied in class, not getting adequate attention from the teachers etc.

Regardless, there remains a large number of special children trained in mainstream schools who are doing comparatively well. So, the parents of special needs kids might have to do a bit of school hopping initially. But it will pay off well to have your child educated in a normal school.

Ensure special attention at school

Often, special needs kids are accompanied by Shadow teachers at school.

A Shadow Teacher sits right next to a special needs kids throughout the school hours. They use various psychologically tested teaching methods to tune teaching as per the child's mode of learning. In addition, they are sensitive to the child's difficulties and aim to help them with academic as well as social and behavioral concerns.

Positive Learning Environment in an Inclusion Classroom: Whether or not you are in an inclusion classroom currently, it's important to plan for the day that

you are. Understanding how inclusion works and ways to incorporate non-traditional learners into your daily routine will serve you well.

Here are some helpful tips on how you can make your inclusion classroom a positive environment to learn in:

- **Work with your co-teacher:** Whoever your co-teacher is, you two are now a team. To have the best learning environment in class, you two must communicate, create effective learning plans together and hold students to the classroom expectations. It's important that you trust one another, evenly distribute responsibilities based on your individual skills and keep students' needs at the forefront.
- **Assess what motivates your students:** At the beginning of the year, hand out questionnaires to students so you can learn more about their goals and motivators. While beneficial for all students, finding motivation for special needs students can be incredibly helpful when planning your lessons. Once you know their motivations, you can adapt lesson plans to meet their needs and inspire them daily.
- **Consider all types of learners:** Implementing activities such as workshops into your lesson plans accommodates learners of multiple styles as well as injects some fun into the day. You can even set up work stations designed for each type of learner to ensure everyone gets the most out of the lesson.
- **Create classroom expectations with students:** Start the year with a community building activity. Consider what kind of behaviors and attitudes everyone wants to bring into the classroom as well as what they wish to keep out. Students are more likely to take ownership of the rules when they take part in creating them.

Conclusion

As students with severe to moderate disabilities have been taught with their non-disabled peers during most of their school time, those students with disabilities may experience more natural, diverse, interactive, and rich learning environments. In general education classrooms, many students with severe disabilities have been provided well-designed adapted instruction and were stimulated by high expectations and multiple resources, materials, and interactions with people. Instruction in inclusive environments with appropriate support may help students with severe disabilities generalize what they learned in classrooms. In a longitudinal case study of a woman with severe disabilities (Ryndak, *et al.*, 1999) ^[18], the subject showed significant progress (e.g., writing a newspaper article with a facilitative writing process) in her literacy-related skills after receiving 7 years of inclusive education. Before inclusion, at the age of 15, this student had a second grade level of reading comprehension and a very low level of vocabulary development (i.e., 3 years 5 months of oral vocabulary and 6 years 10 months of receptive vocabulary). However, during her inclusive education, this student received comprehensive and collaborative educational support based on the student's needs, including functional literacy skills for her independent living. This instruction also emphasized oral and written literacy strategies, thus strategy-focused instruction enhanced generalization of learned literacy skills across settings, situations, and people. Furthermore, Kliever and Biklen (2001) investigated the literacy outcomes of students with severe disabilities in

natural and rich learning environments, environment which most schools might not provide to those students. While reviewing literature related to the literacy of students with moderate to severe disabilities, these researchers found that inclusive learning environments facilitated student learning in literacy and other areas (e.g., social relationships and adaptive skills) and thus resulted in successful student outcomes. Those two studies have shown that the intensive literacy instruction in natural educational settings led to increasing the potential to learn and increased learning opportunities. Also this instruction helped those students with severe disabilities live their life independently.

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