Examining Inclusion and Teaching Practices for Students with Mild Disabilities

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Abstract

This literature review addresses inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The paper discusses arguments surrounding the philosophy of inclusion (Falvey & Givner, 2005) and reviews inclusive practices for students with mild disabilities. The paper concludes with a discussion of teacher professional development needs to further enhance the educational experiences of all students in inclusive classrooms, and provides recommendations for effective implementation to truly develop an inclusive school environment.

Introduction

The term inclusion has many meanings and generates many definitions (Murphy, 1996). Murphy (1996) stated "Inclusion is a controversial, as yet ill-defined, formula for fundamental reform in education that has as its tenet the full integration of all students with special needs into the schools and classrooms they would attend if they did not have special needs" (p.469). Inclusion is a philosophy, a belief system, not a set of strategies used in a diverse classroom (Falvey & Givner, 2005). Inclusive education embraces all children and commits to developing community and belonging. Inclusive education assumes that learning together benefits all students, those with and without disabilities.

Jobe, Rust, and Brissie (1996) distinguished between inclusion and mainstreaming by defining inclusion as a setting where general education and special education teachers share responsibility of the students' education. A more general and widely accepted definition of inclusion is a model in which students with disabilities receive special education services in general education classrooms (Shade & Stewart, 2001). Salend (2001) reported a broader definition of inclusion by describing a community of learners where all students learn from each other's individual differences, and are supported by teachers who work collaboratively to provide services and accommodations needed to learn.

York, Doyle, and Kronberg (1992) presented a definition of inclusion that delineates pertinent aspects for successful inclusion. The authors defined inclusion as educational settings wherein students: (a) attend the same schools as siblings and neighbors, (b) are in general education classrooms with same age peers, (c) have individualized and relevant objectives for learning and behavior, and (d) are provided the necessary support to be successful in the regular education setting. According to York et al., inclusion is not an educational setting where students spend the entire school day in a general education class without receiving specialized instruction in a small group class. Rather, successful inclusion provides all students with the opportunity to learn together with appropriate provisions and support.

Inclusion versus Full Inclusion

Examination of the literature on inclusion reveals diverse perceptions, most notably the distinction between inclusion and full inclusion (Murphy, 1996). Inclusion is argued as a philosophical approach which commits to educate every child to the maximum extent

appropriate in the setting that he or she would attend as a non-disabled student (WEAC, 2001). The student receives disability support services in the general education classroom rather than receiving ~~the~~ support in a separate classroom setting,when appropriate. Full inclusion is proposed as a mandate where the individual needs of the student with disabilities is ignored and all students, regardless of their disability, receive their educational services in the general education classroom full time (Kaufman & Hallahan, 2005).

Arguments against a mandate for full inclusion often suggest the need for more restrictive placement options for students with higher need disabilities (Kaufman, 1995, Kaufman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Kaufman & Hallahan, 2005). Kaufman and Hallahan argue that the full inclusion mandate ignores the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act's (IDEIA) mandate of a continuum of services, and does not allow the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team to make the best educational decision regarding the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to address the students' individual needs.

In order to address the distinctions between inclusion and full inclusion, this review defines inclusion as placing students with disabilities in the general education environment as much as appropriate based on the students' individual needs as determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team (IDEIA, 2004). An inclusive classroom is considered the general education classroom where the general education teacher has the child the majority of the day with support from the special education teacher as appropriate (Jobe et al., 1996; Salend, 2001; Shade & Stewart, 2001). This literature review will examine the effectiveness of inclusive settings for students with mild disabilities, discuss professional development needs of teachers who provide instruction to students with disabilities, and provide recommendations for effective implementation to enhance effective practices in inclusive classrooms.

Defining Mild Disabilities

Students with mild disabilities exhibit academic and behavioral deficits that adversely affect their educational performance (Raymond, 2008). According to Raymond, students with mild disabilities typically include students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Emotional Disturbance (ED), mild Intellectual Disabilities (ID), Asperger's syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The preceding disability categories account for approximately 90 percent of all children served under IDEIA.

The term "mild disability" is used to measure the degree of disability exhibited by a student or the degree of difference the child exhibits from typically developing students (Raymond, 2008). Typically, students with mild disabilities exhibit "none of the physical characteristics that elicit understanding, assistance, or sympathy" (p.7). Despite the use of the term "mild", students identified with mild disabilities have significant learning and behavioral issues that greatly affect their performance in school and life.

Inclusion for Students with Mild Disabilities

When investigating the most effective placement for students with mild disabilities, a lack of satisfactory academic achievement by students with mild disabilities in pullout classes fueled the reconsideration of special education service delivery (Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). Data on programs for students with learning disabilities revealed that pullout programs produced unsatisfactory results in terms of academic achievement and long-term

benefits. Obstacles to success for students with mild disabilities in special education classes include low expectations, limited curricula that focus on rote tasks, and negative student attitudes resulting from failure and segregation (Andrews et al., 2000). Decades of poor academic results for students with disabilities led researchers to ponder the relationship between class placement and outcomes for students with disabilities (Rea et al., 2002).

Thurlow, Lazarus, and Thompson (2005) argued that having a disability does not mean students cannot meet academic standards. The authors found that a student who was eligible for special education services should receive the services and supports necessary to achieve academic proficiency. Special education eligibility has been used as an excuse for low expectations for students with disabilities, a pervasive problem for these children. Thurlow et al. believed that students with special needs must have greater access to the general education curriculum with accommodations, supports, and high expectations. Since the mid 1980s, an increasing number of students with disabilities have received special education services in the regular classroom (OSEP, 2005).

Components of Successful Inclusive Programs for Mild Disabilities

Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, & Hupp (2002) conducted a study to determine what actually happens in a successful inclusive program. Each school provided evidence of: (a) exemplary learning results, (b) maintenance of the exemplary results, (c) inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, (d) inclusion of students with disabilities in their accountability system, (e) resources and demands on the school including per pupil allocation and student population characteristics, and (f) involvement of parents and the community. The authors reported implications for practice from this study stating that

> active student engagement in academic learning, little time spent exhibiting competing responses, being the focus of teacher attention, and having teachers spend more than three quarters of their time focusing on and preparing students for learning and teaching them appear to be the important factors associated with the successful inclusive high school classrooms included in this study (p.356).

Teachers must be prepared to engage a diverse group of students in academic learning to achieve better results for students with disabilities (Wallace et al., 2002, Waldron & McLeskey 1998, Rea et al., 2002). General educators, special educators, and paraprofessionals work together and know how to implement a variety of instructional strategies to address diversity in an inclusive classroom. This has implications for teacher preparation programs. Skills of collaboration, differentiation, and coordination of classroom roles must be taught to prepare teachers for inclusive settings. Teachers also require school administrators' support to provide planning time and in-service training to support a successful inclusion program.

Restructuring a school to adopt an inclusion initiative is crucial to its success (Mamlin, 1999, Daniel & King, 1997, Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). School restructuring projects are more likely successful if the school principal and the staff supports the initiative (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997, Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). A culture of integration and available leadership to guide the restructuring effort is required (Mamlin, 1999). Schools where inclusive efforts are successful share characteristics of a strong commitment to school improvement, a commitment to diversity, and a propensity for engagement in innovative practices (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002).

Academic and Social Progress/Achievement for Mild Disabilities

Researchers have conducted several studies to determine the efficacy of inclusion services versus pullout programs for students with mild disabilities (Cawley, Hayden, Cade, & Baker-Kroczynski, 2002, Daniel & King, 1997, Rea et al., 2002, Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, & Hupp, 2002, Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Results of these studies varied. Teachers, parents, and administrators do not consistently accept inclusion as an appropriate model for educating students with disabilities (Daniel & King, 1997, Mamlin, 1999). Some teachers who did not accept inclusion believed their school lacked leadership that supported inclusion (Mamlin). Principals did not support restructuring for an inclusion initiative; administrators did not see the benefit of inclusion for students. Parents were skeptical because they questioned the effectiveness of the inclusion program for their children and reported that their children had more behavioral problems (Daniel & King, 1997).

Studies reported by Cawley et al. (2002), and Rea et al. (2002), demonstrated that the academic and social success for students with disabilities in inclusive settings is higher than that of students with disabilities in pullout programs. Cawley et al. (2002) studied students with and without disabilities in inclusive junior high school science classes and found comparable passing rates between general education students and those with disabilities. Also, the authors found that the behavior of the students with disabilities in the general education class posed no problem. The presence of students with disabilities in no way adversely affected general education students. The students' academic and social success was in part attributed to the training given all teachers prior to including the students with disabilities in the general education science classes.

Not all research supports the inclusive setting for students with mild disabilities (Daniel & King, 1997). Daniel and King (1997) reported inconsistent patterns of achievement from their study of inclusive versus non-inclusive placement of special education students. This research examined academic gains, behavior problems, parent concerns, and the self esteem of students in non-inclusion classes. Students in this study were randomly assigned to inclusive or non-inclusive classrooms in the school. Results indicated that students who received educational services in inclusive classroom settings did not consistently make academic gains. Students in inclusion classes demonstrated higher reading achievement, but also higher incidence of behavior problems and lower self-esteem than non-included peers. Non-included students achieved higher mathematics gain scores and reported higher peer popularity than students in the inclusion classrooms.

Need for Administrative Support for Inclusion Models with Students with Mild Disabilities

The design and implementation process of an inclusive model for schools is critical to its success (Cawley et al., 2002, Rea et al., 2002, Salisbury & McGregor, 2002, Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Research that reported positive academic outcomes and improved student behavior, including attendance, concluded that these results do not occur by chance. Successful inclusive programs are the result of an administrator leading and working together with teachers and staff to design and implement program modifications to enable students with disabilities to be successful in inclusive settings (Cawley et al., 2002, Salisbury & McGregor, 2002;Waldron & McLeskey, 1998).

The effective implementation of an inclusion model requires leadership and a modicum of acceptance by the school community (Mamlin, 1999). A study conducted by Mamlin found

that inclusion was not effective due, in part, to unsupportive leadership. Leadership was not deficient; however, the building leader did not allow full implementation of inclusion even after extensive planning occurred. The school principal directed the inclusion initiative but was not considered to be supportive of the program, thus, the community followed the principal's lead by not accepting the inclusion initiative.

A study to determine factors that promoted or hindered inclusion for students with disabilities found that administrative support was one of four areas that made a difference as reported by teachers (Smith & Smith, 2000). The other three areas were training, class size, and time. Successful inclusive teachers reported that the building administrator supported them by providing funds for materials, providing human resources and listening to their concerns. Unsuccessful inclusive teachers reported that their administrators did not know the problems they were experiencing with inclusion. They also reported that their building administrator was unable to provide the supervision to ensure the success of the inclusive program.

Areas of Training Need for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusion requires redefinition of general education teachers' roles and responsibilities (Thousand & Villa, 2005). General education teachers must now share responsibility with special education teachers for teaching all children assigned to the classroom. They must collaboratively plan and teach with other members of the staff and community to meet the needs of all learners. They must seek the aid of special educators and other support personnel for any student experiencing difficulty in the classroom. Specific responsibilities of the general educator in an inclusive classroom include developing lesson plans, preparing student specific materials, providing direct instruction, and communicating with parents (Doyle, 1997). Administrators must make general educators aware of their legal responsibility for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, which is frequently their general education classroom (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Training: What Teachers Believe They Need

Teachers do not believe that they have received adequate training in inclusive practices (Buell, Hallam, & Gamel-McCormick, 1999, Hsien, Brown, & Bortoli, 2009; Liu & Pearson, 1999). Liu and Pearson reported that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience did not feel adequately trained in instructional modifications. Hsien et al. found that teachers with higher educational qualification were more positive toward inclusion and their skills working with students with disabilities than their peers with fewer educational degrees. Buell et al. supported the findings of Liu and Pearson (1999) by surveying the training needs of 289 general education teachers and special education teachers regarding inclusion. The survey addressed three areas: (a) teacher confidence regarding students' success in inclusive settings, (b) teachers' in-service needs regarding inclusion, and (c) teachers' perceptions of supports necessary for successful inclusion. Results indicated that in all areas general education teachers reported a greater need for training than did special education teachers. Areas of need for general education teachers included program modifications, assessing academic progress, adapting curriculum, managing behavior, developing IEPs, and using assistive technology.

Training to Determine Roles of the General Educator in the Inclusive Classroom

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities receive special education services in inclusive settings, and teachers must be prepared to address their needs (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002, Wood, 1998). Meeting the educational needs of all students in the inclusive classroom requires a redefinition of the roles of the general education and special education teacher (Thousand & Villa, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) expanded the role of the general education teacher in the education of students with disabilities. The re-authorization of IDEA in 2004 strengthened the role of the general educator (IDEIA, 2004). Traditionally, general educators taught children who easily fit in the standard curriculum (Thousand & Villa, 2005). Teachers would refer students who did not fit into the traditional program for assessment and possible removal to special education classrooms.

Training to Determine Roles of the Special Educator in the Inclusive Classroom

Special education teachers should be knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, skillful at anticipating and dealing with students experiencing difficulty learning, and proficient in modifying and accommodating curricula and instruction for students with disabilities in the classroom (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002). This is a new role for special education teachers. Special education teachers traditionally provided instruction to students eligible for special education services in special classes or special schools (Thousand & Villa, 2005). Working in an inclusive setting requires collaboration with general educators and other support personnel to meet the needs of all learners. Specific responsibilities for special educators in the inclusive setting include developing individualized instruction, designing student specific accommodations, providing training and support to the general educator and para-educator in the inclusive classroom, and communicating with parents. According to Thousand and Villa (2005), the special education teacher in an inclusive setting should not develop the IEP in isolation, should not assume that the general educator knows how to design individualized instruction, and should not leave all the instruction to the general educator.

Klingner and Vaughn (2002) conducted a qualitative study to examine the changing role of special education teachers over a seven-year period. The study chronicles one special education teacher of students with learning disabilities as she transforms from a resource teacher to an expert inclusion specialist. The researcher used several sources for data: (a) individual interviews, (b) focus group interviews, (c) classroom observation, (d) notes from meetings with general education and special education teachers and administrators, (e) the teacher's journal and other written records and plans, and (f) a think aloud procedure with the teacher. Four categories emerged from the study: assessment practices, teaching, consultation, and interpersonal skills. The researchers concluded from this extensive study that the role of the special education inclusion teacher is complex, and success depends largely on the teachers' interpersonal and communication skills. They also stated that the inclusion special education teacher must have knowledge of the general education curriculum, be adept at anticipating student difficulties with learning, and be skilled in modifying and accommodating instruction to meet students' needs.

Wood (1998) investigated the educational roles in the inclusion of students with severe disabilities. The participants in this study were general education and special education teachers who made up a collaborative teaching team in an elementary school inclusive classroom. The researcher used a qualitative approach to provide detail about the development of a collaborative team in a school district implementing inclusion. A driving question for this research was how to

define the roles of additional teachers and staff who work with students with disabilities within the general education classroom. The researchers found that the special education teachers concurred regarding their responsibilities and role as a part of the team. According to all special education teacher participants, special education teachers should: (a) provide individualized instruction in math, reading, and language within the general education classroom setting, (b) model effective instructional methods for the classroom teachers and classroom aides, (c) develop appropriate behavior plans for the students to provide consequences for their actions, and (d) oversee the instructional assistants who work with the students. The special education teachers also were to be accountable for the design and implementation of the students' IEPs.

Training for Collaboration in the Inclusive Classroom

The area of training for inclusion that teachers consider most necessary is collaborative practices between general education and special education teachers (Liu & Pearson, 1999). Teachers believe that they lack the collaborative skills necessary to work together in an inclusive classroom (Austin, 2001, Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000, Henning & Mitchell, 2002, Liu & Pearson, 1999). Special educators and general educators claim that they require additional training in collaboration to successfully work together to achieve student success in an inclusive environment.

A teaching team is needed to meet the heterogeneous needs of all students in an inclusive classroom (Thousand & Villa, 2005). Team teaching involves two or more people who share responsibility for planning, instruction, and evaluation for the same group of students over an extended period. School districts throughout the United States report that collaboration is the key variable to successful inclusion (Villa &Thousand, 2003). The presumption exists that no single person possesses all the expertise necessary to teach to the diverse needs of all students in an inclusive classroom.

Collaborative teaming can be difficult for teachers, as they typically are trained to work autonomously (Wood, 1998). Teachers working in the same classroom together are not always interacting collaboratively (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Barriers to effective collaboration include lack of time, lack of resources, lack of administrative support, large caseloads of special educators and the unwillingness of the teachers, both general education and special education (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004, Wood, 1998, Thousand & Villa, 2005). Adopting a collaborative approach to teaching requires that teachers change their existing roles, responsibilities and functions (Wood, 1998).

A major barrier to collaborative teaching is the lack of parity between general education teachers and special education teachers (Keefe et al., 2004). General educators consider themselves content experts and view special education teachers as not competent to teach content. General educators often do not recognize special educators' expertise as strategists and in modifying curriculum. Teachers from different disciplines encounter challenges when working collaboratively because they may not understand or agree with each other's strategies. Special educators implementing strategies in an inclusive setting may be viewed as intrusive by general educators if teaming is forced upon the teachers and they do not have collaborative skills.

Teachers often report dissatisfaction with the collaborative or team teaching process citing poorly defined roles, a lack of clear expectations from administrators, and frustration with implementation issues (Cook & Friend, 1998). Gately and Gately (2001) described eight components of the co-teaching or collaborative relationship: (a) interpersonal communication, (b) physical arrangement, (c) familiarity with the curriculum, (d) curriculum goals and

modifications, (e) instructional planning, (f) instructional presentation, (g) classroom management, and (h) assessment. Collaborative teaming is a developmental process, and therefore, teachers progress through three stages as they expand their teaming skills. The first stage presented by Gately and Gately (2001) is the beginning stage of guarded communication. The second stage is the compromising stage, where teachers exhibit give and take communication; they feel they have to give up something to get something. The third stage is the collaborating stage where teachers have open communication, interact with one another respectfully, and display mutual admiration.

Gerber and Popp (2000) conducted an in-depth study of collaborative teaching models to tender a set of recommendations to improve collaborative teaching. Participants included administrators, general education and special education teachers, parents, and students from 10 elementary, middle, and high schools. All schools had implemented collaborative teaching programs for at least two years.

The general recommendations were categorized by delivery of services, administrative issues, and communication (Gerber & Popp, 2000). The delivery of services recommendations included: (a) defining collaboration, (b) setting limits, (c) maintaining multiple service delivery options, and (d) ensuring program continuation. To be defined as a true collaborative team, the teachers should spend a pre-determined minimum amount of time and effort working together in the classroom. The time criteria for a true collaborative team should be identified in terms of hours, percentages, IEP goals met, or any standard set by the school. Schools must set limits on the number of students with disabilities in a class to prevent resources from becoming overtaxed. Schools must continue to offer a continuum of services; collaborative classrooms should be one of the options available to students. Schools should assure parents and students that collaborative settings will continue to be offered to students with disabilities at the subsequent grade level. Elementary, middle and high schools should cooperatively plan for a collaborative program.

The administrative issues included: (a) strategic scheduling, (b) planning time, (c) voluntary participation, and (d) program evaluation (Gerber & Popp, 2000). Scheduling of special education teachers and students with disabilities should take priority when developing a school schedule. Scheduling time to address the needs of the collaborative teams signals administrative support for the model. Effective collaboration is possible only when teams are afforded adequate planning time. Administrators should prioritize sufficient planning time for collaborative teams. Resistance often occurs when administrators introduce change into a school. Therefore, administrators should not force teachers into collaborative teacher roles, but rather ask ~~for~~ general education teachers and special education teachers to volunteer. Administrators and teachers should annually evaluate the collaborative teaching model, systematically and formally. Schools should celebrate successes and address the challenges that they encounter.

The final general recommendation for collaborative teams focuses on communication (Gerber & Popp, 2000). The authors stressed the importance of informing the parents of the students with disabilities and the parents of the general education students that their child is in a collaborative classroom. Another communication recommendation is reporting successes. Teachers and administrators should formally report the successes of the collaborative programs to the entire school, parents and the public to create interest and support.

The training recommendations resulting from the study conducted by Gerber and Popp (2000) focused on personnel new to collaborative teaming. Collaborative teaching requires

interpersonal skills in addition to instructional skills, and therefore, first-time collaborators should receive training before teaching in a collaborative classroom. A mentorship program, school-based consultants, and problem solving teams should be in place to provide on-going training and support for collaborative teams. The authors also recommended training for new administrators to schools that are implementing collaborative teaching models. The success of the model depends largely on the support of the building administrator. The researchers also recommended training on a smaller scale for personnel indirectly involved in collaboration such as other general educators in the building and guidance counselors. This training, on an awareness level, will foster support and possibly serve to recruit other teachers as future collaborative teachers.

Walther-Thomas (1997) conducted a study to investigate the benefits and problems of collaborative teaching. This research studied 18 elementary collaborative teams and seven middle school collaborative teams over a three-year period. The teams taught in inclusive classrooms. The researcher reported benefits of the collaborative teaching model for students and teachers. Benefits for students with disabilities were improved self-confidence and self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved social skills, and enhanced peer relationships. The benefits for general education students in the co-teaching classrooms were improved academic performance, more time and attention from the teacher, increased emphasis on cognitive strategies and study skills, social skills development, and improved classroom communities.

The study conducted by Walther-Thomas (1997) identified several benefits of teaching students with and without disabilities in a collaborative, inclusive setting. The co-teachers in this study consistently reported a high-level professional satisfaction resulting from their success in the inclusive setting. Over time, the teachers saw their students making academic and social progress. They felt good about their participation and their efforts. Many co-teachers also reported that working together had provided them with the best professional growth opportunity of their careers. Another benefit reported was personal support. The teachers in this study reported that it was rewarding to have a colleague with whom they could share the good times and the bad times. They found it reassuring to know that when problems arose, another committed, concerned teacher was there to address and solve the problem.

Discussion

Research has clearly demonstrated that successful inclusion requires teachers who feel competent to address the needs of students with disabilities (Ross, 2002, Singh, 2002). Teachers often believe they have received insufficient training to believe that they are capable of teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003, Liu & Pearson, 1999). Teachers have continued to report discomfort and apprehension when placed in the role of collaborating with others to provide instruction in an inclusive classroom (Austin, 2001, Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000). Administrators, general educators, and special educators have consistently maintained that they require additional and on-going training to adequately serve students with and without disabilities in inclusive classroom settings (Smith & Smith, 2000, Snyder, 1999, Singh, 2002, Ross, 2002). More research is necessary to investigate the efficacy of inclusion in regards to student outcomes. Another key area to investigate are factors that contribute to successful inclusion and the importance of determining the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as mandated in IDEIA 2004 in order to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving quality instruction in the most appropriate setting for their needs.

Additional research is necessary to determine specific areas of training needed for teachers in inclusive settings. The literature concerning inclusion contains an abundance of research regarding teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Two studies, Liu and Pearson (1999) and Buell, Hallam and Gamel-McCormick (1999), examined general education and special education teachers' attitudes and perceived professional needs for teaching in an inclusive setting. The participants indicated a need for additional training in the area of collaborative practices, modifying instruction, characteristics of students with disabilities, and legal issues regarding special education. The focus of these studies was teacher attitudes toward inclusion. However, research on inclusion in recent years has focused more on pre-service training (Jung, 2007; Mintz, 2007) and neglected the professional development needs of current general and special education teachers in the inclusive setting. The purpose of this review was to investigate the research on the training needs of current teachers to effectively include students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom.

Although studies are needed to contribute to the body of research regarding teacher training for inclusion to explore the specific areas in which teachers believe they need training to effectively teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. Teachers at different levels, elementary, middle, high, may have different needs. Special education teachers and general education teachers may require different skills. This information is critical as those responsible for designing professional development courses for teachers of students with disabilities receiving services in a general education classroom. As teachers become more confident of their skills and feel competent teaching in the inclusive setting, their attitude toward inclusion should improve (Ross, 2002). Studies investigating the needs of teachers at varying levels of schooling and in varying roles are greatly needed so that all teachers can be aware of best practices resulting in instructional benefits for all students.

Summary

Overall, including students with disabilities is beneficial for the students with and without disabilities in the classroom. Inclusion can be a positive experience for teachers and students when provided the appropriate administrative support, financial support, and planning time necessary to create a positive inclusive environment. Teachers need to receive adequate training on how to work with students with disabilities in the general education classroom and how to work cooperatively with other teachers to meet the needs of all students. Pre-service teachers need specific training in inclusion and working with students with disabilities in their pre-service programs. Current teachers need appropriate professional development related to the specific needs of each school. Administrators need to have a solid understanding of what is needed to support an inclusive program and provide teachers with the time and training necessary to facilitate an inclusive environment.

Inclusion is a topic of controversy when discussing providing students with disabilities instruction in the general education classroom. Although full time placement in general education with support is not always the most appropriate placement for every student with a disability, all students benefit when schools create an atmosphere of acceptance and high expectations where all students can meet their potential. This is the true purpose behind the creation of an inclusive school and should be the ultimate goal of every educator regardless of the placement of the students. All students have the right to learn to the best of their ability and the inclusive philosophy provides a great opportunity for this learning to occur when appropriate.

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