Economies and effectiveness in educating personnel for individuals with disabilities

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Abstract

It takes a school, as opposed to a single teacher, to properly educate persons with disabilities. In addition to the potential for effectiveness, such an approach may very well come with economic benefits. At one point universities offered teacher preparation programs almost solely for specific majors, such as special education. Now, lines between departments of education are more seamless. Most education majors take one or more courses in special education and get field-based experience with persons with disabilities and special education majors are taking more courses in reading and content areas to be fully certified. The dynamics of the "inclusion" concept has gotten considerable attention at the school level. Educating persons with disabilities in regular classes has been viewed as both more socially and academically beneficial than educating them in restricted settings. However, some professionals think that inclusion may be overly glorified and that eliminating traditional service delivery systems (continuum of services model), may be throwing away the baby with the bath. But if general educators are to be held more accountable for all students, they must be adequately prepared. Is what currently been done in teacher preparation programs sufficient? This presentation reviews former and current practices in educating persons with disabilities and how higher education is leading the way, or responding, in preparing exemplary personnel to meet their needs.

Key words: accountability, cost effectiveness, inclusion, persons with disabilities, and teacher preparation.

Introduction

Obtaining a quality product for a reasonable price is a way of life in America. This includes the preparation of personnel to educate individual with disabilities. Special education in the schools is relatively expensive when compared to regular education. Because of the special personnel (often coupled with low staff-student ratio), resources, and materials needed, separate special education for certain categories of persons with disabilities may cost three to four times as much as for a person in regular education. But what a discovery, as costly as special education generally is, educating students with disabilities in regular classes may be more beneficial.

Since the latter part of the 20th Century a major change has taken place in the education of persons with disabilities. Just prior to passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (now IDEA), persons with disabilities often were denied any decent opportunity to an education. According to Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, and Rentz (2006), more than half of all students with disabilities were receiving no educational services and for those receiving educational services, they often received them in separate classes in regular schools or even in separate schools and facilities. As time passed, resource rooms and the process of mainstreaming students with disabilities into selected regular classes became popular. Currently, inclusion is the most talked about and "preferred" placement for persons with disabilities. The basic educational rationale for inclusion is added benefits in terms of academic and social gains. Though less discussed in the literature, inclusion also has potential economic justifications. If regular classroom teachers can accommodate persons with disabilities with supplementary aids and services, there could possibly be less need for as many special education teachers in separate classrooms. But such a transition should have research-based evidence of the effectiveness of inclusion. This presentation will help inform the profession by providing documented benefits and possible pitfalls of inclusion and reporting how institutions of higher learning might respond to practices and promises in preparing personnel to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Educational mandate for persons with disabilities

When Congress became informed in the mid 1900s that more than half of all students with disabilities were receiving no educational services, it responded by passing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 (now, IDEA). Significant progress resulted to a point that today, it is reported that nearly 14 percent of public school students are identified as having disabilities and receive services under the IDEA. But a quality measure is lacking in that achievement levels for these students are substantially lower than that of their typical peers. According to Feng & Sass (2010), over three-quarters of students with disabilities score below the overall mean achievement level, compared to half of students in the general population. They further reported that more than 13 percent of schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards failed solely because they did not achieve the standards established for their students with disabilities.

Over the years, the educational placement of students with disabilities has been influenced by such factors as (a) placement efficacy research, (b) legal mandates, (c)

judicial interpretations, and (d) changing definition, as with intellectual disabilities (Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006). But almost from the beginning of the movement to earnestly educate persons with disabilities, the least restrictive environment (LRE) or regular class has been the preferred placement. Regulations in the IDEA and its subsequent amendments have defined LRE in terms of a continuum of educational settings. The LRE provision mandates that states educate students with disabilities with students who do not have disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. Separate schooling or other removal of students with disabilities from the general education classroom should occur only when the nature or severity of the student's disability is such that education in general education classes cannot be satisfactorily achieved with the use of supplementary aids and services. The LRE regulation is further strengthened by the requirements that each student's individualized education program (IEP) consider how the student will have access to and make progress in the general education curriculum and explain the extent to which the student will not be educated and participate with students without disabilities (Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006).

Service delivery models

Students with disabilities have, and continue to receive educational services through different service delivery models. Service delivery alternatives or placement options may include general education class, partial day (in general education class), separate class, and separate facility (Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006). For example, students with severe cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities may be served by special education teachers who primarily teach them life skills and basic literacy. Students with mild to moderate disabilities may be served in regular classes, using or modifying the general education curriculum (*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2010-11). Teacher training programs have made available information on the cost of educating students with disabilities by category, for example, those with physical disabilities, in separate classes, but data were not found on the cost of educating them in regular or inclusion classrooms. Such data are crucial for considering economies in educating persons with disabilities in inclusion versus separate placements.

It is suspected that school districts that segregate large proportions of their students with disabilities from the regular classroom are doing more harm than good for many of those students. In fact, the schools may even be in violation of the law. As stated above, federal law (IDEA) insists on placing students with disabilities in the LRE, the regular classroom, unless solid evidence shows a need for otherwise. Many states have laws that require the same. Labeling and removing students from the regular classroom limit student expectations of success and lower student self-esteem, peer acceptance, and academic performance. These are awesome burdens for a student to bear. On the other hand, the benefits of placing students with disabilities in regular classes include higher academic achievement and to an even greater extent, improved social skills (Adkins, 1990). These are principal attainment goals for schools. It is no wonder that data on placement of students with intellectual disabilities show that they were far more likely to be placed in a general education classroom for some or much of the school day and far less likely to be placed in a separate setting than they were decades earlier (Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006). Even though LRE programs

have reported considerable success, some parents and educators oppose returning students with disabilities to regular classrooms. A primary fear is that needed supplemental services will not follow (Adkins, 1990).

Despite the emphasis on the placement of students with disabilities, it is argued that the most important school-based determinant of student achievement is teacher quality. Therefore, the logical starting point for addressing the achievement of students with disabilities is the quality of teachers instructing them. It is an unfortunate commentary that over 12 percent of teachers employed to provide special education services to children ages 6-21 and that 10.5 percent of teachers in general education are not fully certified (Feng & Sass, 2010). These data have direct implications for colleges and universities that prepare teachers. The supply of highly qualified, certified teachers simply is inadequate to meet school district demands and districts end up employing non-certified personnel.

The inclusion practice

The concept of inclusion is indirectly derived from the IDEA; it is not explicitly stated in the law. It was a decade after passage of the IDEA of 1975 that Madeline Will, the former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, called for shared responsibility in educating students with disabilities. This lead to major searches for successful "inclusion" models (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006). According to Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, and Rentz (2006), full inclusion is defined as the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, in their neighborhood schools, in age-appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary aids – for both children and teachers. Thus, the primary goal of inclusion became that of preparing students to participate as full and contributing members of society. Inclusion, therefore, accomplishes the IDEA goal and judicially, becomes a right and not just a privilege for a select few.

The inclusion movement for students with disabilities has become an overwhelming trend in education. Some (Pavri & Luftig, 2001) assert that it is more than just the "right" thing to do, but as noted above, it leads to improved academic functioning for students with disabilities and offers them the opportunity for socialization with their peers without disabilities in general education classrooms. Additionally, students who spend most of their day in regular education classrooms tend to perform better on standardized tests (Feng & Sass, 2010).

Currently, approximately half of special-education students spend 80 percent or more of their school day in regular education classrooms and only about one-fourth spend 60 percent or more of their day outside regular education classrooms. Feng and Sass (2010) indicate that with such numbers in regular classrooms, it is crucial to know just what kinds of training make general education teachers more effective with special education students. This should be thoroughly investigated by colleges and universities that prepare both regular and special education teachers.

In spite of inclusion being a trend, it is not readily accomplished. It is often misunderstood and sometimes resisted by teachers, and it is not always fully understood or supported by school administrators (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert,

2006). Some think that inclusion eliminates the discretion granted parents and guardians and that they will no longer be able to participate meaningfully in deciding where their child should be educated (Wright, 1999). To alleviate some of the issues and concerns of inclusion, a point of explanation is offered. More might be read into inclusion than is justified. The IDEA (1997) stipulates that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment but also requires that districts provide a continuum of placement options. Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, and Liebert (2006) make known that states and districts have some latitude with regard to IDEA implementation.

From an overall perspective, Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, and Liebert (2006) suggested that three major factors contribute to the success or demise of inclusion programs: school leadership, district/state policy, and teacher tenure/turnover. These factors also reportedly impact philosophical and financial commitment to the reform. Summarily, research regarding the effectiveness of inclusion shows that students with disabilities achieve more positive results in the integrated classroom than do their counterparts in the segregated classroom. It further noted that placement in general education classrooms tends to improve their social skills and competence, the strongest evidence supporting the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and schools (Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006).

Preparation of personnel for persons with disabilities

When special education first developed as an entity or discipline, it and general education operated as dual systems at the school level and at the preservice teacher training level. At the preservice level, future educators from both disciplines typically received their training with little or no interaction with the other. But as mentioned above, in the mid 1980s Madeline Will called for an educational partnership in which special education and general education should cooperatively assess the educational needs of students with learning problems and cooperatively develop effective educational strategies for meeting those needs. Her call became known as the "regular education initiative." More recently, the term "full inclusion" became popular (Mayhew, 1994).

With inclusion on the horizon, it is crucial that general education teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities as a part of their teacher training; and that special education teachers are trained to function effectively as inclusion teachers. Now that a vast majority of special education children spend a significant portion of their day in the regular education classroom, Geri (2009) reported that between 67 and 73% of teacher training programs require at least one course on educating children with disabilities and 51 to 58% of teacher preparation programs require some field experience with children with disabilities. The author thinks that the percentages should approach 100. Mayhen (2009) earlier reported that to help general educators prepare to work with these students with diverse needs, some states require special education coursework by preservice general education teachers, some have competencies, and some have both coursework and competencies.

The IDEA highlights the need for collaborative training for general and special educators. In the past, the credential training programs for general educators have emphasized general education curriculum and methodologies, whereas, the credential training programs for special educators have emphasized instructional strategies and

remediation techniques. It is now apparent that both groups, general and special education teachers, need the knowledge and skills of each other to effectively educate students with disabilities (Davis, 2003). After all, teacher education programs are being asked to demonstrate how their candidates impact children's achievement in ways that they have never had to before (Bauer, Johnson, & Sapona, 2004). Considerable collaborative work between regular and special teacher educators is needed to effectively prepare teachers for today's schools.

While many areas in education are experiencing teacher shortages, the shortages of teachers who are qualified in the area of special education have been of critical concern (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004). In response to teacher shortages and more recently to the No Child Left Behind (2001) mandate that all teachers be fully qualified, alternatives to traditional teacher preparation proliferated. It was thought that the shortage in special education could be ameliorated by providing access to teaching to individuals who did not and perhaps could not enter teaching through traditional routes. In typical alternative route programs, coursework is abbreviated and field-based requirements are extended. Sindelar, Daunic, and Rennells (2004) stated that the idea of abbreviating pedagogical training evolved in the context of secondary teacher preparation, where it was argued, subject matter mastery was as important if not more important than pedagogical training. deBettencourt and Howard (2004) reported that in the Unites States, two thirds of teacher education institutions offered some type of alternative licensing routes. Because these initiatives promote quick entry into the profession they appear attractive to many outside the field of teaching. But the authors noted that critics dismiss alternative programs, especially those that remove certain requirements or lower standards for certification. In addition to certification, a number of other factors help to create special education teacher shortages. They include a growing number of students in need of special services, an increase in special education caseloads, and the departure of special education teachers from the teaching profession (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004).

Research (Feng & Sass, 2010) on traditional versus alternative routes showed that graduates of a traditional special education teacher program had superior classroom practices compared to their counterparts from a university-district partnership and from a district "add-on" program. There was little support for the efficacy of in-service professional development courses focusing on special education. It was further observed that teachers with advanced degrees were more effective in boosting the math achievement of students with disabilities than were those with only a baccalaureate degree. Other findings were: preservice preparation in special education had statistically significant and quantitatively substantial effects on the ability of teachers of special education courses to promote gains in achievement for students with disabilities, especially in reading and certification in special education, an undergraduate major in special education, and the amount of special education coursework in college were all positively correlated with the performance of teachers in special education reading courses. Davis (2003) suggested that universities can provide highly qualified, effective teachers for students with disabilities by (1) redesigning credential programs to include collaboration of general and special educators, (2) streamlining admission procedures into teacher education programs, (3) coordinating existing resources, and (4) increasing the ability of local education agencies to participate in career ladder programs. Inclusion

for persons with disabilities has promise but its success will in large measure depend on the quality of personnel that deliver the educational program.

How personnel value their preparation in serving persons with disabilities

The general perception is that the status of regular teacher education and special education has greatly improved, though some critical problems and challenges still exist. Bauer, Johnson, and Sapona (2004) point out that there has been increased emphasis on content knowledge and the establishment of more rigorous, national, performance-based standards that define the expectations of the knowledge and skills of educators that have significantly impacted teacher education programs. The authors further note that where the single course or two on "mainstreaming" was the norm in the preparation of general education teachers, now personnel preparation programs must provide content coursework and experiences that will help teachers organize classroom learning environments and instruction designed to meet the needs of all learners.

A critical challenge that remains for both general and special education preparation programs is recruiting and retaining diverse teachers. The challenge of meeting the needs of diverse learners and addressing the complex needs of families are coupled with the pressure of providing candidates with flexible programs and content knowledge to pass licensure tests (Bauer, Johnson, & Sapona, 2004).

Teacher education programs must address the challenges in preparing teachers for inclusion and quality education in general. Two significant differences between the past and now are (1) the stakes are much higher today than they were in the past. Some policymakers and other critics are so displeased with the teaching profession that they suggest dismantling teacher education programs and creating alternative provisions that do not involve teacher education departments or colleges; and (2) a positive, is the quality of research on teacher education. It is generally accepted that the research on teacher education has greatly improved in the last decade (Bauer, Johnson, & Sapona, 2004).

Some research has been conducted on the type preparation program of which candidates participated and their later performance in the field. From a comparative study of three teacher preparation prototypes: traditional, university-district partnership, and district add-on programs, samples of program graduates were observed during their 1st year of teaching using the Praxis III assessment. A larger sample completed a follow-up questionnaire assessing preparedness and efficacy, and a subset of them had principals submit ratings. On the observational measure, all teachers met minimum standards, but graduates of traditional programs outperformed their counterparts on several instructional criteria. By contrast, principals' ratings favored graduates of alternative programs, particularly partnership programs (Sindelar, Daunic, & Rennells, 2004).

For this presentation further study was conducted to ascertain what teacher candidates in training thought about the quality of preparation that they were receiving. A survey was made of two master's level classes – one was a course in which mainly special education majors enrolled (Class 1), the other was a course in which a cross-section of education majors enrolled (Class 2). The candidates were asked two principal questions to solicit their perceptions on economies and effectiveness in preparing personnel for individuals with disabilities. The questions and follow-up queries were:

1. In inclusion education, regular education and special education personnel (teachers) must share responsibility in providing an appropriate education to persons with disabilities. Do you think universities adequately prepare regular and special educators for inclusion education? Yes _____ No _____. Give a few examples of good things that universities are doing to prepare teachers for inclusion education ("Yes" answer) and/or examples of things that universities should be doing to prepare teachers for inclusion education ("No" answer).
2. In inclusion education, do you think that in the final analysis training both regular and special educators to teach persons with disabilities is More Economical (cost less money) than training only special education teachers? Yes _____ No _____. Give a few reasons why you say it ultimately costs less to train both regular and special educators to teach persons with disabilities ("Yes" answer) and/or a few reasons why it would cost less to only train special education teachers ("No" answer).

As displayed in Table 1, Class 1 had 20 enrollees with 80% being special education majors and Class 2 had 24 enrollees with 67% being general education majors and the others being special education majors. The candidates provided responses to the two major questions. For the first question, Do universities adequately prepare regular and special educators for inclusion education? - from Class 1, 82% responded "yes" and from Class 2, 45% responded "yes." For the question, Ultimately, is it more economical to prepare both regular and special educators to teach persons with disabilities, versus just special educators? – from Class 1, 75% responded "yes" and from Class 2, 75% also responded "yes."

Table 1
Responses of Graduate Students to Questions on Preparing Personnel for Persons with Disabilities

Question	No.	Response Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Do universities adequately prepare regular and special educators for inclusion education?			
a. Class 1 (85% Sped majors)	17	14 (82)	3 (18)
b. Class 2 (55% Gen Ed majors)	20	9 (45)	11 (55)
2. Ultimately, is it more economical to prepare both regular and special educators to teach persons with disabilities, vs. just special educators?			
a. Class 1	16	12 (75)	4 (25)
b. Class 2	20	15 (75)	5 (25)

These findings show that the primarily special education majors class (82%) thought that teacher training programs do a good job at preparing both regular and special education majors for inclusion programs (accommodating persons with disabilities in regular classes). But only 45% of the majority general education majors class thought that training programs do a good job at preparing both regular and special education

majors for inclusion programs. Many of the candidates were currently teaching in the schools. The findings might suggest that special education majors feel comfortable with their training whereas general education majors feel far less comfortable with their training to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The percentage (75%) was the same for the classes in indicating that it is more economical to prepare both regular and special educators to teach persons with disabilities. This makes a strong economic statement for training both regular and special educators for inclusion.

The queries sought information beyond "yes" or "no" responses. They sought input to inform universities on their performance as well as things that they might do to enhance their performance. Additionally, they solicited input about candidates' perceptions on cost and cost benefits of preparing both regular and special educators for inclusion versus training only special education teachers.

Table 2 contains sample responses of Class 1 and Class 2 candidates to four query items: (1) Things universities do well to prepare teacher candidates for inclusion, (2) Things universities should do to better prepare candidates for inclusion, (3) The costs and/or benefits of preparing both regular and special educators for inclusion education, and (4) The costs and/or benefits of preparing only special educators for persons with disabilities.

Table 2
Observations of Graduate Students on Issues in Preparing Personnel for Persons with Disabilities

Query Issue	Observation
1. Things universities do well to prepare persons for inclusion	Class 1 (80% Sped majors) -High-quality professors w/ sped class exp -Having students do more research -Emphasis on theory, method, laws, field exp Class 2 (67% Gen Ed majors) -Research-based techniques for instruction -Knowledge to assess, diagnose problems -Up-to-date on guidelines, standards of inclus
2. Things universities should do to prepare for inclusion	Class 1 -More courses, seminars, conf on inclusion -Master's degree should be undergrad program -Train reg/sped together on co-teaching tech Class 2 -More classes for reg teachers on inclusion -Every teacher to do field study with excep stud -More on behavior/reading support, class mana
3. Costs/benefits, preparing both regular and special educators for inclusion education	Class 1 -Educators working hand-n-hand better for stud -Cross-trained personnel always cost effective -Eliminate numerous teachers, one to do both Class 2

	-Be little need for inclusion teachers in class -More efficient school, economical in the future -Would be on same page throughout training
4. Costs/benefits, preparing only special educators for persons with disabilities	Class 1 -Cost more to train reg teachers to be effective -Cost more, more individuals to train -It requires more time and money Class 2 -Less time consuming, time is money -Not cheaper, requires more individ to train -Should remain separated, individual choice

The face value of the responses to the queries was viewed. For query 1, things universities do well, the classes tended to be complementary of the quality of the faculty, the instruction, and opportunity for candidates to engage in beneficial research. For query 2, things universities should do, attention focused on need for more training for regular educators, more attention to certain teaching strategies, and emphasis on co-teaching for regular and special education candidates. For query 3, costs/benefits of preparing both regular and special educators, there was an air of advocacy for this approach. Such an approach, they thought would enhance the quality of training, increase school efficiency, and reduce personnel need. For query 4, costs/benefits of preparing only special educators, the number of responses to the item were few and those presented tended to make a weak case. They thought it would cost more in terms of money and time because more candidates would be involved, but not much justification was made for this approach.

This survey, though limited in scope, does provide support for the subject of economies and effectiveness in preparing both regular and special education personnel to educate persons with disabilities. Also, to the host university, it reflects some perceived strengths and some areas for possible improvement in its teacher training program. For all parties interested in the education of persons with disabilities, it helps to make the case for inclusion education as a priority for the preparation of both regular and special educators.

Summary and Implications

Roughly one of every ten students in American schools has a disability. Providing them with a free and appropriate education is the responsibility of both regular and special education teachers. When well prepared, these teachers can enable students with disabilities to benefit academically and socially at a higher level in the regular classroom than what they would achieve in a separate special education class. Additionally, perceptions are that in the long run, educating both regular and special education personnel to teach persons with disabilities is more economical than training only special education teachers. However, the real benefits of inclusion unfold at the school level and in later life. During the school years, for example, placement in regular classes can possibly reduce the number of special education teachers needed; after high

school, graduates of inclusion programs may be better prepared for postsecondary education and training; and in adulthood, they should be better candidates for gainful employment, and thereby, become very contributing members of society. For persons with disabilities to attain these lofty levels of achievements, both regular and special educators must in their teaching be organized, patient, able to motivate students, understanding of their students' special needs, and accepting of differences in others (*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2010-11).

Educators sometimes see trees and not the entire forest. Such should not be the case in preparing personnel to educate persons with disabilities. Evidence in this presentation substantiates the need for all educators to be thoroughly prepared to accommodate individuals with disabilities in American schools. Not only is it the "right," legal, and effective thing to do – it is also the economic thing to do. To be efficient and effective in educating persons with disabilities along side their regular peers is more than pruning trees for harvest, it is developing an all-inclusive forest for the future.

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