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Inclusive Practices: How Accepting are Teachers?

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Abstract

This research addressed the question of educators' beliefs about the rights of children with a disability to be included in regular schools in Western Australia. Educators from Education Support Centres (ESCs) and attached primary schools rated whether they considered children with either a physical or intellectual disability should be integrated full-time or part-time depending upon the degree of the disability (severe, moderate, mild). Acceptance of integration was lower for the child with an intellectual disability than for a child with a physical disability. Acceptance decreased as the degree of severity increased. Educators were more accepting of part-time integration, but mostly only for the child with a mild or moderate disability. Educators from the ESCs were more accepting than were their regular school peers, and as educators became more experienced they became less accepting of inclusion. Educators appeared to have strong beliefs regarding inclusive practices and these beliefs did not necessarily reflect the momentum towards greater inclusion. Discussion of this research focuses on the link between acceptance and commitment to the policy of inclusive education.

Introduction

Effective inclusion of children with a disability into regular schools relies upon many variables. While teachers have a responsibility to cater for the needs of all children in their classes their beliefs regarding acceptance of inclusive practices may affect the degree to which they carry out that duty. Prior to the major move towards inclusion in the United States (US) several researchers reported on the beliefs of regular classroom teachers towards inclusive practices. Placement in a regular classroom was not considered the best placement for children with a disability by approximately half the teachers surveyed (Barngrover, 1971; Gickling & Theobold, 1975; Shotel et al., 1972). Immediately following the implementation of PL94-142 acceptance levels did not alter (Ammer, 1984; Horne, 1983; Hudson et al., 1979).

Current debate concerning inclusive practices revolves around opposing views that focus on the four broad issues of academic achievement, emotional development, social development, and teacher attitudes.

Proponents of inclusive education suggest that regular and special education should be merged into one general system (Giangreco et al., 1993; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Thousand & Villa, 1990; Will, 1986; York & Vandercook, 1990). Opponents propose that inclusion should be viewed as one placement alternative within a continuum of services required to cater for the needs of all students (Casey, 1994; Kauffman, 1993; Stratford; 1994; Wilton, 1993).

Although there has been considerable discussion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of either full or part inclusion there has been little empirical evidence to support or justify either position. In particular, few research studies have attempted to clarify educators' beliefs about acceptance of the policy of inclusion even though the

change in educational pedagogy is significant for them (Semmel et al., 1991).

It has been posited that teachers' beliefs regarding the underlying philosophy of inclusion are also important predictors of positive or negative effects (Ringlaben & Price, 1981). Westwood (1993) proposed that educators have definite attitudes and expectations about inclusive practices and that the "values and beliefs of individual professionals often directed the range of choices that were available" (Hasazi et al., 1994, p. 503). Jordan et al. (1993) proposed that acceptance of inclusion depended on whether a person's beliefs were 'restorative', which assumed that the answer to the problem was within the child, or 'preventative' which considered that different environments and interventions would affect the student's achievement. Jordan et al. (1993) predicted that teachers would either be more accepting of the child with a disability in their classroom (preventative types) or prefer referral of the student to alternative segregated placements (restorative types).

The importance of educators' attitudes towards the success of inclusion has been well documented (Casey, 1994; Wilton, 1988). While research has shown that some educators believe that the child with a disability has a right to equal educational opportunities (Harvey, 1992; Semmel et al., 1991), educators' attitudes towards inclusive placements are in general very negative (Center, 1987; Center & Ward, 1987; Giangreco, 1993; Hudson et al., 1979; Ringlaben & Price, 1981; Barnartt & Kabzems, 1992), and have been found to affect the outcome of inclusion (Bain & Dolbel, 1991; Forlin & Cole, 1993; Roberts & Zubrick, 1992; Walker & Gray, 1989;). Teachers have been found to be apprehensive and reluctant to accept a child with a disability into the regular classroom (Hudson et al., 1979; Jenkinson & Gow, 1989).

Several additional variables have been identified that correlate with acceptance of the policy of inclusion. The level of a teacher's education or amount of training about children with a disability were

found to be significantly related to teacher acceptance in four studies reviewed by Jamieson (1984). Similar findings were reported by Stephens and Braun (1980), and Stewart (1983). In particular, teachers who were fully trained special educators had more realistic attitudes towards placement decisions, although they were not necessarily more accepting of inclusive practices (Jamieson, 1984). Negative attitudes have also been linked to ignorance regarding disabilities (Elkins, 1994). Teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour were reported as being negatively correlated with acceptance (Conway & Foreman, 1988; Stewart, 1983).

The attitudes of regular and special educators towards each others ability to cope with inclusion were far from supportive. In a study by Center and Ward (1987) there was a very low satisfaction rate accorded to resource teachers by regular educators. According to the regular class teachers resource teachers appeared to lack specialized training or specific qualifications and regular educators were "extremely doubtful about the current capacity of the resource teacher to be an effective support in the classroom" (Center & Ward, 1987, p. 53). Conversely, in research by Safron and Safron (1988), special educators perceived themselves as possessing substantially superior skills compared to regular class teachers. Wilton (1993) forwarded the pessimistic view that regular teachers will not become as committed, understanding, and insightful as special education teachers. A similar view was expressed by educators in the research by Semmel et al. (1991), who were less than optimistic that regular class teachers would accept responsibility for students with a disability in their classes.

A movement towards greater promotion of human rights for children with a disability by inclusion in regular classrooms is not necessarily reflected by a more positive attitude and greater acceptance by teachers. In turn, acceptance may be influenced by a person's prejudice as a function of the cultural group to which that person belongs.

In the US, where legislation supports the inclusion of students with a disability and provides funding to ensure its maintenance, acceptance of the philosophy of inclusion is still not high. The beliefs of 107 regular teachers in Wisconsin regarding inclusion were investigated (Ringlaben & Price, 1981). The results indicated that 4% of the teachers agreed strongly, 8% disagreed strongly, and the remainder 'agreed somewhat' with inclusion (Ringlaben & Price, 1981). Semmel et al. (1991) found that of the 381 teachers they surveyed in California and Illinois only 18% agreed that full-time inclusion of a student with a mild disability would enable effective special education to be delivered solely within the regular class. Regular and special education teachers from New York and Massachusetts ($N = 221$) suggested strongly that if special education classes were phased out regular teachers would not be willing to accept special education students in their classes (Knoff, 1985). Similar results were found by Barnartt and

Kabzems (1992) in Zimbabwe where educators were very unaccepting of inclusion and 40% of their sample indicated they would refuse to teach a student with an intellectual disability if placed in their classroom.

Acceptance levels have been found to vary depending upon the type of disability a child has. Barnartt and Kabzems (1992) sought educators' beliefs regarding integrating children with four different types of disability (physical, visual, hearing, & intellectual), either full or part time. Children with a physical disability were accepted four times more often than those with an intellectual disability, with 42% of educators considering they should be integrated full-time and 52% part-time. Only 11% considered that a child with an intellectual disability should be integrated full-time and 35% proposed part-time inclusion. Jamieson (1984) reviewed research undertaken in the 1970s which considered teachers' attitudes towards mainstreaming, and found teachers to be more rejecting of children with a behavioural, emotional, or intellectual disability than of any other category. This preference ranking for acceptance indicated the different beliefs of educators when considering different disabilities and the degree of inclusion but did not take into account the severity of the disability. More recent studies have reported less acceptance as the type of disability becomes more severe (Stewart, 1983).

In Australia similar acceptance levels have been found. A study undertaken by Center and Ward (1987) reported on the beliefs of 2219 regular and 332 special education teachers in NSW. They found that teachers' attitudes towards the general concept of inclusion were 'less than reassuring'. They also found noticeable differences between interpersonal characteristics. In their sample principals were more accepting than were teachers. As educators gained in experience acceptance declined, while resource teachers were more positive than regular educators. In Victoria, where there has been a no choice policy regarding full inclusion since 1984, Harvey (1992) reported that although educators ($N = 190$) had become more positive over time towards inclusion of students who had a mild intellectual disability they were still concerned about the appropriateness of a regular class placement for them. While there was not total support for the inclusion of children with mild intellectual disabilities more educators supported rather than rejected such placements. The attitudes of primary school principals ($N = 353$) in Victoria toward the integration of students

with a disability into their local school settings were found to vary depending upon a range of professional experiences (Desai, 1991). Principals were more positive towards including students with a disability when they had received formal training in special education, had been involved with integration over a period of one to ten years, and had taught children with a disability from six to ten years (Desai, 1991). Similarly, in NSW principals with greater than ten years

teaching experience were less positive towards integration (Desai, 1991). Roberts and Pratt (1985) found that in WA only 45% of primary teachers ($N = 245$) agreed with the policy of inclusion.

Several variables have been posited as potential moderators of educators' beliefs about acceptance. Attributions of the willingness of regular educators to accept exceptional children increased when expectations to participate in planning and implementation were high, but decreased when denied such opportunities (Myles & Simpson, 1989). Educators were more accepting when inclusion required no additional instructional time or specific management skills (Center & Ward, 1987), and there was a high degree of support available (Giangreco et al., 1993; Harvey, 1992). Giangreco et al. (1993) found that acceptance was modified by teachers having greater control over outcomes and with an option regarding participating. When given a choice regarding accepting a child with a severe disability teachers were still cautious or negative initially, although Giangreco et al. (1993) found that over the course of a year teachers tended to 'transform' becoming more involved with their students and expressing more positive attitudes towards their inclusion. There was little evidence to support the contention that previous experience with a person with a disability would increase acceptance of inclusion (Barnatt & Kabzems, 1992), although successful inclusion has been linked to greater acceptance (Stewart, 1983).

The purpose of this research study was to investigate acceptance levels of regular primary school and education support school principals and teachers (hereinafter referred to as educators) in Western Australian schools.

Sample

When the data were collected for this study in mid 1992, the Government school system in Western Australia (WA) consisted of 548 primary schools and 58 education support schools/centres. There was a total population of 153 765 primary students and 1 968 education support students. Students placed in education support facilities accounted for .8% of the total school population, although this did not include students who were receiving education support in units within regular classrooms.

Those selected for the present study were educators from all primary schools which had an education support centre (ESC) on site and all educators from the ESC's. WA encompasses an extremely large land area with students attending either metropolitan or rural schools. A total of 48 schools from 24 appropriate school sites were contacted. Twelve school sites were located within metropolitan areas and twelve were rural sites. Schools from five suitable metropolitan sites were not approached as they were already participating in an intervention program focussing on the inclusion of children with a disability in regular classrooms and may have been biased in their attributions.

The primary schools catered for children between the ages of 6 - 12 years and were all co-educational. The ESC's were placed on the same site as a regular school. All educators who participated in the study were therefore familiar with the inclusion process. The ESC's catered

for students who required limited to extensive support according to the American Association of Mental Retardation definition of mental retardation (1992). All the ESC's were autonomous in their operation with their own principal and teaching staff.

The overall mean school response rate, computed on the basis of the return of one or more questionnaires from a school, was 89% state wide. Regular schools had a response rate of 91% and ESC's 86%. The response rate for regular schools was similar for both metropolitan schools (90%) and rural schools (91%). For ESC's there was 100% return rate from metropolitan schools and 75% from rural schools.

The mean teacher response rate from all schools was 61% with metropolitan schools being higher (70%) than rural schools (53%). There was little difference in the overall response rates of teachers between regular (62%) and ESC schools (59%). The overall high response rate was very encouraging and compared favourably with response rates reported by other researchers (Laughlin, 1984; Pierce & Molloy, 1990). Responses from 273 educators from 19 ESC's and 19 regular primary schools were included in the final analysis. The sample consisted of 196 regular school educators and 75 educators from the ESC's. Sixteen percent of the educators had one to five years teaching experience, 32% had six to ten years experience, and 48% had greater than eleven years teaching experience.

Method

Educators were required to complete a written questionnaire regarding their beliefs about accepting a child with a disability in a regular classroom. This was assessed using two dependent variables of acceptance of a child with an intellectual and acceptance of a child with a physical disability. The response format required educators to agree or disagree with acceptance for three levels of disability (severe, moderate, and mild), and for two inclusion options of either full-time or part-time inclusion, for a child with an intellectual or physical disability. Responses were recorded for six categories for each dependent variable. The reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha and was .61 for acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability and .66 for acceptance of the child with a physical disability.

Results

The number of educators who were accepting of each category are

presented as a percentage of the total sample in Table 1.

Table 1

Acceptance of a Child with an Intellectual or Physical Disability

Physical Disability Intellectual Disability

Disability N % N %

Severe

Full-time 156% 21%

Part-time 973% 6023%

Moderate

Full-time 7027% 135%

Part-time 20979% 14053%

Mild

Full-time 13853% 6525%

Part-time 25095% 26686%

As the level of disability increased there was a marked decline in willingness to integrate either a child with an intellectual or a physical disability into a regular classroom. For full-time inclusion

less than 6% of the cohort indicated that the child with either a severe physical or intellectual disability should be integrated. For the child with a moderate disability, 27% accepted the child with a physical disability while 5% accepted the child with an intellectual disability. Noticeably more educators perceived that the child with a mild disability should be integrated full-time, although they were more accepting of the child with a physical disability (53%) than the child with an intellectual disability (25%).

Part-time inclusion was more accepted by educators with an increase in acceptance correlating with a reduction in the severity of disability. Even so, part-time inclusion was supported mainly for the child with a mild or moderate disability, with only a small percentage of educators being accepting of the child with a severe disability.

Overall, acceptance of the child with a disability for full-time inclusion was not high, although educators appeared supportive of the part-time inclusion of the child with either an intellectual or a physical disability. For both full-time and part-time inclusion educators were more accepting of the child with a physical disability than of the child with an intellectual disability across all levels of severity.

Mean Values for Acceptance

The six categories of acceptance of the child with an intellectual and a physical disability were scaled to produce one measure of acceptance for each type of disability in order to employ standard statistical analysis on the data. The statistical package ASCORE (1991) using a Rasch model was employed to confirm the degree of fit for each

educator's response pattern to an hierarchical ordering of the six categories. Analysis of responses produced a continuum of acceptance for both measures (intellectual and physical) from the most accepted child to the least accepted child in the order of:

Mild part-time - moderate part-time - mild full-time - severe part-time - moderate full-time - severe full-time.

With the exception of the central two categories of mild full-time and severe part-time this order confirmed expectations that acceptance would decrease from the least disabled child on a part-time basis to the most disabled child on a full-time basis. Consideration of the item affectivity estimates found little distinction between the order of these two central categories for either variable. For acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability the item affectivity for 'mild full-time' was +0.04 and for 'severe part-time' was +0.06 in the context of a scale of six items whose affectivity ranged from a low of -0.42 to a high of +0.28. For acceptance of the child with a physical disability the item affectivity was -0.05 for 'mild full-time' and for +0.08 for 'severe part-time', within a scale ranging from -0.33 to +0.37. Educators were slightly more accepting of the full-time inclusion of a child with a mild disability than of the part-time inclusion of a child with a severe disability.

Individual person fit to the modelled pattern was exceptionally good, demonstrating high consistency and providing further evidence of strong confidence in the construction of valid measures for acceptance.

Responses were subsequently allocated a numerical rating depending upon their position on the ranked scale. This ranged from 6 for the most accepted category down to 1 for the least accepted category. When the scores were summed for each educator for the six categories (range = 0 - 21) this produced two measures of acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability and acceptance of the child with a physical disability.

The mean value for acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability was 9.64 ($sd = 5.58$), and for the child with a physical disability the mean value was 13.52 ($sd = 5.33$). Based on a 4 - point categorization (not accepting .. somewhat accepting .. quite accepting .. extremely accepting), educators were 'somewhat accepting' of the child with an intellectual disability, and 'quite accepting' of the child with a physical disability. Acceptance was 40% greater for the child with a physical disability than for the child with an intellectual disability.

Biographical Variables for Acceptance

A multivariate analysis of variance was employed to determine whether each of the two dependent variables (acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability, and acceptance of the child with a physical disability), were differentially associated in terms of five independent biographical variables of school (regular, ESC), gender

(male, female), experience (1-5yrs, 6-10yrs, 11+yrs), teacher status (principal, teacher), and inclusion (integrating, not integrating).

To overcome a problem of unequal cell sizes a sequential sums-of-squares analysis of variance procedure was used. Using this method in SPSSx meant that each term was adjusted only for the terms that proceeded it in the DESIGN statement. Significant multivariate F's were obtained for acceptance for the main effects of school ($L = .96$, $F(2, 219) = 4.88$, $p = .008$) and experience ($L = .93$, $F(4, 438) = 4.24$, $p = .002$). No interactions or other main effects were significant. For the main effect of school consideration of the univariate analysis determined significant differences for both dependent variables of acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability ($F(1, 220) = 6.68$, $p < .01$) and acceptance of the child with a physical disability ($F(1, 220) = 9.24$, $p < .01$). The corresponding means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2. Educators from the ESC's ($X = 10.97$) were more accepting of the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability than were educators from the regular primary schools ($X = 9.12$). A similar result was found for acceptance of the child with a physical disability with educators from the ESC's ($X = 14.98$) being more accepting than those from the regular primary schools ($X = 12.97$). Regardless of the type of disability of the child, educators who were employed in the ESC's specifically to teach children with special needs were more accepting of their placement in regular classrooms than were regular school educators.

Table 2
Means of Acceptance of the Child With an Intellectual or Physical Disability for the Main Effects of School and Experience.

	Intellectual	Physical	
Category	No(X, SUP6(-))	sd0(X, SUP6(-))	sd
School			
ESC	7210.975.3014.995.17	Regular	1889.125.5412.975.32
Experience			
1 - 5 years	5610.275.0014.914.66		
6 - 10 years	6811.065.4914.395.09		
11 + years	1278.595.5012.275.51		

For the main effect of experience, univariate F's were significant for both variables. Analysis of the means (see Table 2) indicated that educators who were the most experienced were also the least accepting of the inclusion of a child with an intellectual ($F(2, 220) = 5.51$, $p < .01$) or physical ($F(2, 220) = 6.73$, $p < .001$) disability. Acceptance of the child with a physical disability was highest by educators with

less than six years teaching ($X = 14.91$) and this declined with experience for those with 6 - 10 years teaching ($X = 14.34$)

and the most experienced with greater than 11 years ($X= 12.27$). Acceptance of the child with an intellectual disability was lowest by those with greater than 11 years teaching ($X = 8.59$), and highest by educators with 6 - 10 years teaching ($X = 11.06$). Educators who were the least experienced ($X = 10.27$) were less accepting than those in the median range but more accepting than the most experienced educators.

Discussion

The move towards greater inclusion of students with a disability in regular classrooms has resulted from a human rights perspective. This is based on a social justice paradigm of equal educational opportunities for all children within the same classroom. The efficacy of this pedagogical change relies upon the underlying assumption that educators will be accepting of all students in their classes and be prepared to be accountable for all students' educational outcomes. A person's beliefs regarding their acceptance of the move towards greater inclusion are likely to be influential in determining the implementation and outcome of inclusive practices. It is generally argued that a person's beliefs transcend situations and rely on relatively static generalised acceptances which influence appraisal of a situation on an unconscious level (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A person's reactions to a situation are therefore based upon their underlying beliefs about it (Cedoline, 1982).

Of major concern regarding inclusion is that educators are not overly accepting of the policy, they do not believe all children with a disability should be integrated, particularly on a full-time basis, and they appear most anxious to avoid upsetting the status quo that already exists in their classrooms. Although greater acceptance was shown for a child with a physical disability than for a child with an intellectual disability, a rapid decline in acceptance occurred for both categories as the degree of disability increased.

In addition, educators' beliefs varied as a function of school attended and teaching experience. Educators from the ESC's were more accepting of including the child with either an intellectual or physical disability than were their regular school peers. As inclusive practices depend upon effective interactions between regular and special educators a significant difference in beliefs regarding the policy between these educators is likely to affect its outcome.

It has been suggested that a person changes commitments over their life-span (Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983). A change in beliefs of acceptance was found to correlate with an increase in teaching experience, however, the outcome was not a positive one. As educators gained in experience their willingness to accept a child with a either a physical or intellectual disability decreased, with the most experienced educators demonstrating the lowest acceptance levels for inclusion. A

move towards inclusion often relies on initial decisions being made at an administrative level. Invariably administrators are the most experienced educators yet it is this group who are apparently the least accepting of including children with a disability into regular classrooms.

A person's beliefs of acceptance of the policy of inclusion are likely to affect their commitment to implementing it. The low levels of acceptance which were given by these educators does not augur well for a strong commitment to inclusion. In particular, regular class

educators will find they are required increasingly to cater for a wider range of students within their classes. Such negativity towards the policy of inclusion requires urgent address if a move towards greater inclusion is to proceed effectively. As was posited by Mittler (1994), inclusive education is not simply integration or mainstreaming but "requires radical school reform, changing the existing system, and rethinking the entire curriculum of the school in order to meet the needs of all children" (p. 2).

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