

The Acceptance of Disabled Children in Regular Schools: An Important Factor in Successful Integration

Anne Hurley
University of Melbourne
Institute of Education

Three hundred and thirty-nine teachers in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne were surveyed to obtain information on factors contributing to the success of an integrated child in their class. A factor analysis of the results shows eight factors, the first of which accounts for almost 20% of the common variance and is defined as Acceptance. The variables loading on this factor, listed in accordance with the strength of their relationship to the factor are: (a) peers choose to play with the child in the playground; (b) peers choose to work with the child in the classroom; (c) the child considers him/herself popular; (d) the child is not rejected by peers; (e) the child exhibits positive social behaviour; (f) the child is satisfied with his/her school performance and (g) the teacher is happy to accept the child into his/her class. A correlation of .65, significant at the .01 level, was found between this factor and successful integration. Peer acceptance, self-acceptance and teacher acceptance, therefore, play an important part in the successful integration of disabled children into regular schools. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations for instructional strategies and classroom management factors which will contribute to the acceptance and therefore more successful integration of these children are made.

The 1984 Ministerial Review dealing with educational services for the disabled in Victoria emphasises "the participation of children with impairments and disabilities in the education programs and social life of regular schools in which their peers without disabilities participate" (p. 6). Such participation and inclusion implies the acceptance of disabled children in these schools as an important aspect of their successful integration. This paper aims to:

1. Examine the acceptance of disabled children in regular schools
2. Consider ways in which such acceptance may be facilitated and the integration of these children enhanced

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 339 disabled children integrated into government primary schools in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. A survey

questionnaire was sent to each of the 415 primary schools in the region and principals were requested to forward it to the classroom teacher of an integrated child for completion. The grade levels of the children are shown in Table 1. The return rate was 96% and all schools were sent a preliminary report two months after participating in the study.

Table 1.

Number and Percent of Children Broken Down by Grade Level

Grade Level	Number of Children	Percent
Infant	99	29.2
Middle Primary	137	40.4
Upper Primary		

100

29.5

Unspecified

3

.9

Totals

339

100.0

The Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire consisted of eight areas containing a total of 34 statements relating to child and the school, a success scale and information regarding the child's major presenting disability, reading, mathematics and actual grade level. The response factors for each variable were assigned values from 1 to 5 in the order in which they are presented in the questionnaire and teachers were requested to

select the most appropriate response and to circle the corresponding number. Teachers were also asked to describe the child's major presenting disability and seven groups emerged; intellectual, physical, emotional, vision, hearing, learning and speech.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from Questions 1 to 6 were analysed to give descriptive information about the children, schools, peers, classes and parents in the form of frequency distributions and mean scores using the SPSS-X command FREQUENCIES. The PEARSON-CORR function was used to determine the strength of the relationship between all variables and FACTOR for a factor analysis using the principal axis factoring technique. Factor scores on each of the factors were correlated with teachers' responses to the success scale. The probability level used was .05.

RESULTS

A factor analysis of the data showed eight factors, the first of which accounted for almost 20% of the common variance and was labelled Acceptance. Seven items relating to peer interaction, child self-esteem and behaviour and teacher attitude loaded on this factor. The reliability of scores on this factor was .78 and the areas loading on this factor are seen in Table 2. A correlation between the factors and the 10-item success scale showed this factor to correlate most highly with integration success ($r=.65$, $p<.01$) and to account for approximately 42% of the variance. Correlations between individual variables and integration success, listed in accordance with their loading on the factor were .45, .43, .43, .24, .43, .50 and .60 respectively. All correlation results reported are significant at the .01 level.

Table 2.

Loadings on Factor 1 -	
Acceptance	Item
Loading	
.76	Peers choose to play with child
.73	Peers choose to work with child
.63	Social self-esteem
	Child not rejected by peers

.44

Child has positive social behaviour

.42

Academic self-esteem

.38

Positive teacher attitude

.35

The numbers and percentage of responses to statements examining the five areas are seen in Table 3 which contains positive and negative responses with neutral responses omitted.

Table 3.

Frequencies of Response to Items on Factor 1

- Acceptance
 StatementDisagreeAgree

Number

Percent

Number

Percent

(a) peers choose to play with the child in the playground

116

34.2

144

42.4

(b) peers choose to work with the child

in the classroom

96

28.3

185

56.6

(c) the child considers him/herself
popular

78

23.0

143

42.2

(d) peers show rejection of the child by
teasing or ignoring him/her

192

56.6

78

23.0

(e) the child exhibits positive social
behaviour such as being happy, polite,
helpful and friendly

63

18.6

Acceptance

Peer Acceptance

Peer acceptance of disabled children has been described by Johnson (1981) as "not a superficial luxury [but] probably an absolute necessity for maximal achievement, socialization and healthy development" of the child (p. 5). Peer acceptance in the playground and classroom were the two highest loading variables on the factor. Forty-two percent of the disabled children were chosen as playmates by their peers and 57% were chosen as work partners, these two variables being: peers choose to play with the child in the playground and peers choose to work with the child in the classroom.

There is some evidence that this "relatively low peer acceptance of mainstreamed students is determined not by their handicapped status but rather by their low achieving status" (Larrivee & Horne, 1991, p.97). Roberts, Pratt and Leach (1991) observed mildly disabled children to "engage in less on-task behaviour and more quiet, off-task behaviour than...their peers" which, if noticed by the other children, could lead them to perceive that the disabled children were "unable to meet the cognitive demands of the games

played in the playground" (p. 223).

The present study showed a small but definite relationship between the childrens' thinking and their acceptance by peers. The children's receptive and expressive language, problem solving, conceptualising and motivation showed correlations ranging from .21 to .31 with peer acceptance in the playground and correlations ranging from .21 to .32 with peer acceptance in the classroom. These correlations were all at the .01 level of significance and lend some support to the hypothesis of Gottlieb, Semmel and Veldman (1978) that "Perceptions of academic competence are associated with

social acceptance"
of disabled children (p. 403).

The third peer related statement peers show rejection of the child by teasing or ignoring him/her was included in the study because several writers have drawn the distinction between the acceptance and rejection of children by their peers. Sabornie (1987) proposes that "the two concepts are not extremities of the same continuum" and that there is little correlation between these two aspects of social status (p. 46). Asher and Hymel (1981) suggest that such differentiation between acceptance and rejection enables the identification of two different types of children experiencing low amounts of interaction with peers - children who are neglected and children who are rejected.

The rejection of children appears to be occasioned by their inappropriate behaviour. Dodge, Coie and Brakke (1982) found rejected children to initiate about twice as many aggressive behaviours as their peers "probably a major factor in these children being disliked by their peers" (p. 406). Correlations of .24 and .22 were found between the children's negative and hyperactive behaviour and their rejection by peers again lending some support for the Gottlieb, Semmel and Veldman hypothesis that "perceptions of [child] misbehaviour are associated with social rejection" of these children (p. 403).

As the question regarding rejection was reverse scored it loaded on the factor as lack of rejection of the child by peers. Fifty-seven percent or 192 children were not considered by their teachers to experience rejection by their peers while 78 or 23% were considered to do so. It would appear then, that children who are not rejected are more likely to exhibit appropriate behaviour than children who are neglected and a correlation of .27 between lack of rejection and positive child behaviour was found.

Self-Acceptance

The area of self-acceptance was assessed through two statements relating to self-esteem and one statement relating to the child's social behaviour. The self-esteem statements were the child appears to consider him/herself popular which looked at social self-esteem and the child appears to be satisfied with his/her school performance which examined academic self-esteem.

The two statements were written to correspond with the two factors found by Silon and Harter (1985) when they attempted to devise a downward extension of their self-concept measure the Perceived Competence Scale for Children for use with children aged four to seven. The two factors were competence and popularity and these writers concluded that "It appears that retarded children do not make distinctions about specific competence domains but rather simply make judgements about one's competence at activities in general...Thus they think one is either competent or not" (p. 223).

Forty-two percent of children were viewed by their teachers as considering themselves popular with their peers and 52% appeared satisfied with their school performance, supporting results from other studies showing lower social self-concepts (Coleman, 1983; Kelly & Colangelo, 1984) and lower academic self-concepts (Burka, 1983; Farrugia & Austin, 1980; Renick & Harter, 1989; Richardson, Hastorf & Dornbusch, 1984) for disabled children.

The study also showed a substantial relationship of .50 between the children's social self-esteem and peer acceptance, findings shared by Center and Ward (1984) and a small but definite relationship ranging from .18 to .41 between various aspects of children's thinking and academic self-esteem, findings noted by Renick and Harter (1989). With respect to the latter, Willoughby and Siller (1981) state that "One is not just being "nice" to the child to consider his or her feelings of self - the child's very ability to deal with the school material is involved" (p. 365). The child's self-esteem therefore, both academic

and social, plays an important role in the acceptance of disabled children in regular schools.

The third area included under self acceptance, the social behaviour of the child was assessed by the statement the child exhibits positive social behaviour such as being happy, polite, helpful and friendly. The association of such behaviour with successful

integration was noted by O'Keefe et al., (1991) who conducted sociometric surveys in 51 primary classrooms containing integrated children and found that those children who were trustworthy, friendly, fair, helpful, polite, popular, happy and with a good sense of humour were all accepted by their peers. Bishop (1986) collected opinions from teachers, principals, parents and children regarding factors associated with successful integration. She states that "One of the top-ranked variables for visually handicapped pupils was social skills, especially as they related to social interaction with peers" (p.944). A correlation of .33 between peer acceptance and the positive social behaviour of the disabled child was found.

Sixty-three percent or 214 children were seen to exhibit positive social behaviour and correlations of .38 and .37 were found between this variable and the children's academic and social self-esteem. Conversely, Asher & Hymel (1981) propose that a child's lack of such positive behaviour "is not necessarily an indication of his or her competence" (p. 149). These writers suggest that a child's social skills may be hampered by anxiety or lack of confidence even when appropriate behaviour is known. In addition, Ross (1978) feels that lack of social skills in hearing impaired children "becomes more understandable when we consider the experiential deprivation engendered by distorted or reduced auditory/verbal skills" (p. 26) and Bishop (1986) considers that the tendency of visually impaired children "to initiate interactions with their peers less often than most

students...may be a disability specific factor that is largely unavoidable" (p. 945).

Teacher acceptance.

The final item to load on the factor, teacher acceptance of the disabled child was assessed by the statement you are very happy to accept this child into your class. Such acceptance on the part of the classroom teacher who has been variously described as "the independent professional who will carry the primary responsibility for mainstreaming" (Larrivee, 1981, p. 34), the "front-line practitioner" (Schultz, 1982, p. 366) and the "first line of support for the integration student" (Gow, Ward, Balla & Snow, 1988, p. 13) has been considered by many writers to be crucial for the successful integration of disabled children.

Seventy-eight percent or 265 teachers reported that they were happy to accept the child into their class while only 29 or 8.6% reported that they were not.

Such acceptance has been associated with many predictor variables. Some of these include training and inservice in integration (Center & Ward, 1987), experience with disabled children (Harvey & Green, 1984), teacher confidence in instructing these children (Larrivee & Cook, 1979), selection of effective instructional strategies (Bender & Ukeje, 1989) and the resources and support provided to the teacher (Curtain & Phemister, 1985).

Correlations between teacher acceptance of .37 for children's positive social behaviour and .39 and .30 for peer acceptance in the classroom and playground were found, suggesting that teacher acceptance may be "the result rather than the cause of effective integration [because] teachers who had little experience of integration tended to base their attitudes towards mainstreaming on the outcome of the current situation. Thus if the child were perceived as successful, attitudes became correspondingly

positive" (Center et al., 1988, p. 50). Thomas (1988) refers to this as the "What-Happened-Yesterday Factor" which influences teacher attitude towards integrated children. Although he found it "impossible to say whether [a particular] event had produced a permanent attitude change or merely a short lived response to the notion of integration...[such] events could tip the balance in teachers' acceptance of these children" (p. 14). Teacher acceptance of disabled children, therefore, as Center, Ward and Ferguson (1991) suggest "has both proactive and reactive effects (reciprocal causation)" (p. 93) and is an important factor in the integration success of these children.

Facilitating the Acceptance of Disabled Children

The acceptance of disabled children in regular schools, "the ultimate expression of social integration [is an area which] needs considerable attention from educators" (Antia, 1985, p. 284-85). This section outlines some instructional strategies and classroom management factors which will facilitate the acceptance of these children.

1. Promote self-esteem and self-acceptance by assisting the disabled child to develop positive self-referent statements "to shape self-reinforcing behaviour on the part of the pupil" (p. 86) and acceptance of the disability (Saur, Layne, Hurley & Opton, 1986) or "an internal locus of self-esteem" (Bernard, 1990, p. 85).
2. Develop competent thinking through the teaching of learning strategies which teach children "how to learn rather than only what to learn" (Wong, 1985, p. 230) through cognitive behavioural instruction which comprises "a set of steps the student used to talk his or her way through a problem" (Ellis, Lenz & Sabornie, 1987, p. 7) and cognitive instruction which assists children to "develop plans in their own language and have solutions tested by their peers"

(Ashman & Conway,
1989, p. 187).

3. Promote motivation through the use of appropriate attributions (Archer, 1994), praise in the form of genuine academic feedback (Ames, 1990), the provision of success experiences (Gresham, Evans & Elliott, 1988) where failure is minimised (Hansen, 1977) in the context of a cooperative classroom (Archer, 1994).

4. Teach social skills such as joining a group activity, expressing affection, anger, sharing laughter and jokes (Fad & Ryser, 1993), interpersonal problem solving skills (Schmidt & Friedman, 1991) with peers who are trained "in how to respond to less socially adept mainstreamed children" (Hollinger, 1987, p. 24).

5. Educate nondisabled children about disability through class discussions which encourage these children "to talk about the probable feelings" of disabled children and classroom visits with disabled children and adults (Jaussi, 1991) and information about the lives of persons with disabilities (Westling, 1989) to counteract negative attitudes and stereotyped images of disability (Johnson & Johnson, 1980).

6. Foster peer-peer interactions to develop the communicative competence (Guralnick, 1981) and positive social behaviour (Strain & Odom, 1986) of disabled children through structured games and activities (Antia, 1985).

7. Attend to teacher attitude by providing teachers with formal training and inservice in integration (Roberts & Pratt, 1987), experience with disabled children (Hayes & Gunn, 1988) and resources and support services (Center & Ward, 1987) in order to increase teacher confidence in instructing these children (Larrivee & Cook, 1979).

8. Utilise peer tutoring which increases the child's "opportunity to respond" in key academic areas such as maths and reading by "allowing peers to supervise [and reward] their classmates responding" (Delquadri, Greenwood, Wharton, Carta & Hall, 1986, p. 536-37).
9. Utilise cooperative learning wherein "true friendships and positive relationships will develop between handicapped and nonhandicapped students" (Johnson & Johnson, 1986, p. 553) as children work together in small groups to accomplish shared goals and come to understand "the lesser known but positive features of disabled persons [because they] see at first hand what handicapped children and adults are really like and what they are capable of doing" (Thomas, 1987, p. 12).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined aspects of the acceptance of disabled children in regular schools under the areas of peer acceptance, self-acceptance and teacher acceptance. Instructional strategies and classroom management factors which will facilitate the self-esteem, positive social behaviour and competent thinking of disabled children have been identified. In particular, strategies which foster acceptance by the other children and self-acceptance on the part of the disabled child will do much to enhance the successful integration of these children into regular schools.

REFERENCES

- Ames, C.A. (1990). Motivation: what teachers need to know. *Teachers College Record*, 91 (3), 409-421.
- Antia, S. (1985). Social integration of hearing-impaired children: fact or fiction? *The Volta Review*. October/November 1985.
- Archer, J. (1994). Increasing students' motivation to learn. *SET*, (1).

Hawthorn: ACER.

Asher, S.R. & Hymel, S. (1981). Children's social competence in peer relationships: sociometric and behavioral assessment. In D.J. Wine and M.D. Syme (Eds.) Social Competence. New York: Guilford Press.

Ashman, A.F. & Conway, R.N.F. (1989). Cognitive Strategies for Special Education. London: Routledge.

Bender, W.N. & Ukeje, I.C. (1989). Instructional strategies in mainstream classrooms: predictions of the strategies teachers select. Remedial and Special Education 10 (2), 23-30.

Bernard, M.E. (1990). Taking the Stress Out of Teaching. Melbourne: Collins Dove.

Bishop, V.E. (1986). Identifying the components of success in mainstreaming. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, November 1986.

Burka, A.A. (1983). The emotional reality of a learning disability. Annals of Dyslexia, 33, 289-301.

Center Y. & Ward, J. (1987). Teachers' attitudes towards the integration of disabled children into regular schools. The Exceptional Child, 34 (1), 41-56.

Center, Y. and Others. (1988). The Integration of Children With Disabilities into Regular Classes (Mainstreaming): A Naturalistic Study. Stage 1 report. Sydney: N.S.W. Department of Education. Eric Document 308 676.

Center, Y. & Ward, J. (1984). Integration of mildly handicapped cerebral palsied children into regular schools. The Exceptional Child, 31 (2), 104-113.

Coleman, J.M. (1983). Handicapped labels and instructional segregation: influences on children's self-concepts versus the perception of others. Learning Disability Quarterly, 6. Winter 1983.

Curtain, M.E. & Phemister, J. (1988). Integrating Downs syndrome children in Victoria: the teacher's view. Australian Journal of Remedial Education, 17 (3), 15-19.

Delquadri, J., Greenwood, C.R. Whorton, D., Carta, J.J. & Hall, R.V. (1986). Classwide peer tutoring. *Exceptional Children*, 52 (6), 535-542.

Dodge, K.A., Coie, J.D. & Brakke, M.P. (1982). Behaviour patterns of socially rejected and neglected preadolescents: the roles of social approach and aggression. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 10 389-410.

Ellis, E.S., Lenz, B.K. & Sabornie, E.J. (1987). Generalization and adaption of learning strategies to natural environments: Part 1: Critical agents. *Remedial and Special Education*, 6 (1), 6-20.

Fad, K.S. & Ryser, G.R. (1993). Social/behavioral variables related to success in general education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 14 (1), 25-35.

Farrugia, D. & Austin, G.F. (1980). A study of social-emotional adjustment patterns of hearing-impaired students in different educational settings. *American Annals of the Deaf*. August 1980.

Gottlieb, J., Semmel, M.I. & Veldman, D.J. (1978). Correlates of social status among mainstream mentally retarded children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70 (3), 396-405.

Gow, L., Ward, J., Balla, J. & Snow, D. (1988). Directions for integration in Australia: overview of a report to the Commonwealth Schools Commission. Part 11. *The Exceptional Child*, 35 (1), 5-22.

Gresham, F.M., Evans, S. & Elliott, S.N. (1988). Self-efficacy differences among mildly handicapped, gifted, and nonhandicapped students. *The Journal of Special Education*, 22 (2), 231-240.

Guralnick, M.J. (1981). Peer influences on the development of communicative competence. In P. Strain (Ed.) *The Utilization of Classroom Peers as Behavior Change Agents*. New York: Plenum.

Gurney, P.W. *Self-Esteem in Children With Special Educational Needs*. London: Routledge.

Hansen, R.A. (1977). Anxiety. In S. Ball (Ed.) *Motivation in Education*. New York: Academic.

Harvey, D. & Green, C. (1984). Attitudes of New Zealand teachers, teachers in training and non-teachers towards mainstreaming. *The New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 19 (1), 34-44.

Hayes, K. & Gunn, P. (1988). Attitudes of parents and teachers toward mainstreaming. *The Exceptional Child*, 35 (1), 31-8.

Hollinger, J.D. (1987). Social skills for behaviorally disordered children as preparation for mainstreaming: theory, practice and new directions. *Remedial and Special Education*, 8 (4), 17-27.

Jaussi, K.R. (1991). Drawing the outsiders in: deaf students in the mainstream. *Perspectives*, 9 (5), 12-15.

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (1986). Mainstreaming and cooperative learning strategies. *Exceptional Children*, 52 (6), 553-561.

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (1980). Integrating handicapped students into the mainstream. *Exceptional Children*, 47 (2), 90-98.

Johnson, D.W. (1981). Student-student interaction: the neglected variable in education. *Educational Researcher*. January 1981.

Kelly, K.R. & Colangelo, N. (1984). Academic and social self-concepts of gifted, general and special students. *Exceptional Children*, 50 (6), 551-4.

Larrivee, B. & Horne, M.D. (1991). Social status: a comparison of mainstreamed students with peers of different ability levels. *Journal of Special Education*, 25 (1), 90-101.

Larrivee, B. (1981). Effect of inservice training intensity on teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Exceptional Children, 48 (1), 34-39.

Larrivee, B. & Cook, L. (1979). Mainstreaming: a study of the variables affecting teacher attitude. *The Journal of Special Education*, 13 (3), 315-24.

O'Keefe, P.F. and Others. Relationship Between Social Status and Peer

Assessment of Social Behavior

Among Mentally Retarded and Nonretarded Children. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Seattle, WA, April, 1991). Eric Document 340 500.

Renick, M.J. & Harter, S. (1989). Impact of social comparisons on the developing self-perceptions of learning disabled students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81 (4), 631-638.

Richardson, S.A., Hastorf, A.H. & Dornbusch, S.M. (1964). Effect of physical disability on a child's description of himself. *Child Development*, 35, 893-907.

Roberts, C. & Pratt, C. (1987). The attitude of primary school staff toward the integration of mildly handicapped children. In Bartnick, E.A., Lewis, G.M. & O'Connor, P.A. *Technology, Resources and Consumer Outcomes: Proceeding of the Twenty-Third National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability*. Eric Document 303 240.

Roberts, C., Pratt, C. & Leach, D. (1991). Classroom and playground interaction of students with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 57 (3) 212-224.

Ross, M. (1978). Mainstreaming: some social conditions. *The Volta Review*, January 1978.

Sabornie, E.J. (1987). Bi-directional social status of behaviorally disordered and nonhandicapped elementary school pupils. *Behavioral Disorders*. November 1987.

Saur, R.E., Layne, C.A., Hurley, E.A. & Opton, K. (1986). Dimensions of mainstreaming. *American Annals of the Deaf*. December, 1986.

Schmidt, F. & Friedman, A. (1991). *Creative Conflict Solving for Kids*. Miami: Peaceworks.

Schultz, L.R. (1982). Educating the special needs students in the regular classrooms. *Exceptional Children*, 48 (4), 366-68.

Silon, E.J. & Harter, S. (1985). Assessment of perceived competence, motivational orientation, and anxiety in segregated and mainstream educable mentally retarded children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77

(2), 217-230.

Strain, P.S. & Odom, S.L. (1986). Peer social initiations: effective intervention for social skills development of exceptional children. *Exceptional Children*, 52 (6), 543-551.

Thomas, D. (1987). Integration: what do we mean? *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 11 (1), 10-14.

Thomas, D. (1988). A model of the determinants of teachers' attitudes to integrating the intellectually handicapped. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 12 (2), 12-18.

Westling, D. (1989). Leadership for education of the mentally handicapped. *Educational Leadership*. March 1989.

Willoughby, S.S. & Siller, J. Teaching mathematics to children and youth with physical and health impairments. In V.J. Glennon (Ed.) *The Mathematical Education of Exceptional Children and Youth*. Virginia: National Council for Teachers of Mathematics.

Wong, B.Y.L. (1986). Metacognition and special education: a review of a review. *Review of Educational Research*, 55 (2), 227-268.