



Inclusion in Schools: Teacher Attitudes and Expert Opinions

- Sources: Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority. *Educational Psychology*, 20(2), 191-211.
- Jackson, L., Ryndak, D.L., & Billingsley, F. (2000). Useful practices in inclusive education: A preliminary view of what experts in moderate to severe disabilities are saying. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 25(3), 129-141.
- Jordan, A., & Stanovich, P. (2001). Patterns of teacher-student interaction in inclusive elementary classrooms and correlates with student self-concept. *International Journal of Disability*, 48(1), 33-52.
- Van Reusen, A.K., Shoho, A.R., & Barker, K.S. (2000). High school teacher attitudes toward inclusion. *High School Journal*, 84(2), 7-20.

Providing equal educational opportunities for children with special needs has been strongly endorsed in recent years, gradually leading to accommodations in mainstream classrooms for children with a range of disabilities. This philosophy of inclusion contrasts with traditional practices, in which students with disabilities were segregated into special education classrooms.

The extensive research on inclusion focuses on the impact of a variety of interrelated elements, including type of disability (e.g. emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, mental retardation), age of children, classroom size, impact on students without disabilities, and academic and social outcomes. This Data Trends covers one article about useful practices in the implementation of successful inclusion programs and three others about teacher attitudes toward inclusion. These articles show the large impact of teacher attitudes on inclusion and demonstrate that teachers with more special education training feel more confident about accommodating youth with disabilities and more positive about inclusion.

Jackson and colleagues:

This article presents the results from a questionnaire completed by experts in school inclusion. These individuals' expert status was based on authorship of journal articles and/or authorship or editing of professional books related to inclusive education for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The questionnaire, developed by the researchers, identified nine categories that "seemed to best capture the full repertoire of practices that can make inclusive education viable and productive" (p. 131). Respondents were asked to choose at least three of these categories, describe useful practices within each category, and identify their source of knowledge about these practices. The nine categories and the number of responses in each were: Choosing and Planning What to Teach (30), Promoting Inclusive Values (27), Collaboration Between General/Special Educators (26), Supporting Students with Challenging Behavior (19), Collaboration Between Educators and Related Service Providers (15), Instructional Strategies (14), Assessing/Reporting Student Progress on an Ongoing Basis (11), Family Involvement (11), and Scheduling, Coordinating, and Delivering Inclusive Services Within the School (11). Source of knowledge about these topics varied by category, but most reported personal knowledge (83%), with 52% indicating empirical research.

Overall themes from this largely academic sample revealed the importance of collaboration and active promotion of inclusive values, as well as the need for broad changes in service delivery. Although family involvement was a less frequently chosen category, participants identified six family-related themes related to inclusion: (a) create broad roles for parent participation and control, (b) gather information from families when creating the educational plan, (c) ensure two-way communication, (d) assist families in making informed choices about placement, (e) make the inclusion



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happen, and (f) broaden our understanding of families. Additional research is needed that includes the perspectives of family members as well as other, non-academic stakeholders.

Avramidis and colleagues:

This article reports on research about teacher attitudes toward inclusion in a British school district and provides an informative discussion on both the complexity of attitude measurement and the background of inclusion from an international perspective. The authors used an assessment of teachers' attitudes they developed for a previous study, which assesses cognitive, affective, and conative (a measurement of intentions) elements of teacher attitude. Assessments were also made of teachers' perceptions of the skills they possessed and their confidence in meeting the needs of students' IEPs. Questionnaires were given to one group of teachers from schools that were predetermined to be inclusive and to another group from randomly selected schools, making a total sample of 81 (75% female) teachers, the majority of whom were older than 31 and had been teaching more than 14 years. Particularly salient findings included: (a) Teachers expressed greater stress and concern about the inclusion of youth with emotional and behavioral disorders than of youth with other disabilities, and (b) teachers who had experience with inclusion and who had higher levels of professional development, particularly training in a university setting, had more positive attitudes toward inclusion and greater confidence in meeting students' IEPs.

Van Reusen and colleagues:

Most inclusion research tends to focus on early childhood. This article examines attitudes toward inclusion among high school teachers, a population that is sometimes considered resistant to accommodating students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The authors investigated the relationship of a variety of factors (e.g. teacher experience level, amount of special education training) on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in four domains: preparation in serving special populations, academic climate (i.e. how students with special needs affect classroom learning environments), academic content/teacher effectiveness (i.e. teachers' beliefs about content delivery in inclusive classrooms), and social adjustment (i.e. teachers' beliefs about the social impact on special needs children in an inclusive environment). The author-designed questionnaire was administered to 125 teachers in a metropolitan school where 10% of students had a mild to moderate disability that included behavioral and learning disorders as well as physical impairments. Similar to the study reported above, results showed that teachers with a high level of special education training had significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion than those with no or minimal special education training.

Jordan & Stanovich:

This Canadian study used the *Pathognomonic-Interventionist (PATH/INT) Scale* to measure nine teachers' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in working with students with disabilities. This instrument is scored on a continuum ranging from pathognomonic (PATH) beliefs (teachers favor pull-out programs for youth with disabilities because they view learning difficulties as organically-based, permanent characteristics) to interventionist (INT) beliefs (teachers believe that it is the teacher's responsibility to adapt instruction for students with disabilities). Results from this measure were compared to typically achieving (TA) and exceptional or at-risk (EX/AR) student scores on the *Piers Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale*. In addition, PATH/INT scores were compared to measurements of TA and EX/AR teacher-student interactions and coded as to the level of cognitive engagement. Results revealed INT teachers were significantly more likely than PATH teachers to engage in interactions with EX/AR students and to do so at higher levels of cognitive engagement. Interestingly, both TA and EX/AR students in classrooms with INT teachers had significantly higher total scores on the *Piers Harris* scale than those in classrooms with PATH teachers. These findings demonstrate the importance of teacher attitudes in inclusive classrooms and suggest that teaching styles amenable to inclusive settings can positively affect the self-concept of all students.

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