

READING ACHIEVEMENT
OF GENERAL EDUCATION CHILDREN
IN BLENDED CLASSES

THESIS

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Abstract

Using 64, sixth grade students from a rural Western New York school district, the examiner attempted to determine if the current practice of integrating special needs students into the regular classroom has any effect on the reading achievement of the general education student. To accomplish this, the examiner found two comparable groups from the current sixth grade class. Group A was the integrated students and Group B was the traditional students. The total reading scores from annual standardized reading tests were compared.

Using a calculated t test, the data showed no statistically significant difference in achievement between the two test groups. It was concluded that the practice of integrating special needs students into the regular classroom has no effect on the general education student.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

Many school districts are implementing the integrated classroom, where students who have been identified as having a handicapping condition by the Committee on Special Education are placed with regular students in an attempt to create a truly heterogeneous classroom. One way to organize this mainstreaming is to have a regular classroom teacher team-teach this group with a special education teacher. Other ways to organize the mainstreaming is to have one consultant special education teacher advise several regular classroom teachers, or to include pull aside times for the special education students in areas of difficulty. Many parents are concerned that their average child will not be getting the same quality of education as those who are not in an integrated class.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in reading achievement between general education students who have been in an integrated classroom and students who have not been in an integrated classroom.

Question

Is there a statistically significant difference in reading achievement as measured by scores on the fifth grade Degree of Reading Power test (DRP) between general education students who have been through an integrated classroom setting and a comparable group who have been through a traditional classroom setting?

Need for the Study

Much research has been conducted on the applications of P.L. 94.142 (Crisci, 1981; Hersh & Walker, 1983; Lynn, 1983; Mori, 1979), attitudes of students and teachers toward the mainstream approach (Crisci, 1981; Miles & Simpson, 1989; Noar & Simpson, 1989), and achievement of handicapped students in various settings (Knapczyk, 1989; Macchiarola & Bailey, 1983; Will, 1986). The research shows that parents who have children with special needs now know and apply their rights to due process using an outline of P.L. 94-142 and the Regular Education Initiative. Research also shows that there has been a change in teachers' and students' attitudes toward special needs individuals. Teachers still have reservations about having special needs students in the classroom. Trends in teacher education programs have helped alleviate some of the reservations by training new teachers in ways to deal with the special needs student. Students'

attitudes tend to reflect their parents' and their teachers'. Research has failed to show that the achievement of special needs students is affected by the integrated classroom either way. This is an area of much ongoing current research. Very little research, however has been conducted on the achievement of the general education student in these various mainstreamed or integrated settings.

With many school districts in Western New York leaning toward the integrated approach to teaching handicapped children, professionals need to assess the effect this would have on the general education students in these classrooms. Should the results of this study be positive, it would assure parents, teachers, and administrators that the integrated approach would be the proper way to go in educating the special needs child. Negative results would lead us to believe that the regular child in this type of situation is not getting the education he/she deserves. Further research could be conducted to specify the reason.

Definitions

P.L. 94.142 Public law created to articulate a handicapped child's right to free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment and of procedural due process in decisions related to classification and placement (Lynn, 1983).

Integrated classroom Also referred to as the blended or cluster classroom. A regular heterogeneous classroom with a percentage of special needs students, usually team taught by a regular education teacher and a special education teacher.

Mainstream or integration A special needs student is placed into a regular classroom (mainstreamed) for specific subjects the teacher and the Committee on Special Education feel are appropriate.

Handicapping condition Includes learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, physically disabled or any disability which interferes with a students ability to learn. In this study learning disabled will be students with a 50% discrepancy between aptitude and achievement.

General Education For the purpose of this study, general education students are students who have not been formally identified by the Committee on Special Education as having a handicapping condition.

Regular Education Initiative (REI) Place children with learning disabilities in a regular education classroom to address their learning problems in a way that least removes them from their peers: promotes social and academic growth.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Definitions and Implication of P.L. 94-142

In the past, once children were identified as having a handicapping condition, they were placed in a special classroom and stayed there until the age of 21 or until they dropped out. This caused many problems with the identified students. A study conducted by Mori(1989) showed students' self esteem would drop, thus causing a high drop out rate. The conscious raising in the 60's and 70's made the public reevaluate this system. It was during this time that Public Law 94.142 was passed. The purpose of this law was to ensure that each child with a handicapping condition had an equal opportunity to benefit from free public education in the least restrictive environment and the right to equal access and due process (State Education Department, 1992). Mori states about P.L. 94.142:

The passage of P.L. 94.142 has made it strikingly clear that every handicapped child has a constitutional right to an appropriate education and that it is the corollary obligation of the local school district to provide that education in the least restrictive environment. (p.243)

This means that depending on the severity of the

disability, children are to be placed in the least restrictive (most normal) environment available to them as much of the time as possible. Sindelar (1981) indicated that a student should be reintegrated into the regular classroom when the student's academic, social, and management goals can be adequately met. Junkala and Mooney (1986) expressed the opinion that the least restrictive environment is the setting in which all services are provided in the regular classroom. There has been a focus on the merger of elementary and special education services through the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Schloss, 1992). Through this initiative, more students would be served in the least restrictive environment. The academic needs of all students would be met within the regular classroom setting since remedial and support services would be delivered in that setting.

Public Law 94.142 states that children have a right to due process. Due process includes the evaluation process of each child as well as the notification of the parents or guardian. There are specific time limits on each element of due process which schools must legally follow. Each state was to

establish the specifics of due process. States with larger populations had a more difficult time establishing these specifics due to the extreme numbers of children involved. Will (1986) states that:

Of the more than 39 million young people enrolled in public schools, over 10% or 4,373,000 are eligible for special education services under federal and/or state law. (p. 413)

Beyond these numbers, there is an additional 20 to 30% of the students who fall into the category of slow learners, or students who have difficulty passing in today's traditional school settings (Will, 1986). These students also need various teaching methods but do not fit the legal definition of having a handicapping condition.

Teacher Attitude

Even with the consciousness raising and the passing of P.L. 94.142, there still is much negativity towards mainstreaming or integrating special needs students. Crisci (1981) noted that much of the negativity toward integration comes from regular classroom teachers' fears and concerns. Many of these veteran teachers have never been trained in dealing with learning disabled children or behavior disorders. Crisci goes on to say, the three areas the veteran

teachers feel they need the most re-education are diagnostic, remediation and behavioral management techniques. Many of these teachers may actually have the skills necessary to work well with handicapped individuals, they just need to see some application to their personal theories. There is also a legitimate concern over the "lack of clarification of responsibility for the special needs student's education" (p. 177). The decision as to who is responsible for a special needs child's education should be specifically written out in the child's Individual Education Program (IEP). With the emphasis now being on accountability, it grows increasingly more difficult to convince veteran teachers that there will be no punitive action for the "failure" or lowered scores in their classrooms.

Teachers' attitudes have also concerned the special educators who are to service these students in the regular classroom. Classroom teachers seem more willing to accept learning disabled children in their classrooms before children with other disabilities (e.g.: emotionally disturbed, multiply handicapped, mentally retarded). It is felt that the other

disabilities would take too much time away from the regular children in the class. There is also the concern that the needs of the more severely disabled student cannot be met in the regular classroom (Myles & Simpson, 1989, p. 480).

In a study conducted by Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias (1985) teachers specified the social and academic skills they thought necessary for a handicapped child to be mainstreamed into their classrooms. The priorities focused on task-related and academic skills. The ability to follow directions was rated first on their scale followed closely by completing tasks. Even though most of these teachers felt the classroom is a social learning place as well as academic, interpersonal social skills ranked last on their list of necessary mainstreaming skills.

Before deciding to mainstream a child, many things have to be considered. According to an investigation of mainstreaming conducted by Wang, Peverly, and Randolph (1984), the level of mainstreaming is the first area to be addressed. Depending on the severity of the child's disability, most children will automatically be mainstreamed for special classes such

as art, gym, and music. This is now expanding into technology and computers. The area of disability also has to be addressed. If the child's disability is in mathematics only, then the child may be mainstreamed in reading, language arts, social studies and science. If the disability is in reading, the problem of content area reading has to be addressed before the child can be mainstreamed into science or social studies. The role of the special education teacher is to plan a program in which the child will be successful and that is manageable for both the classroom teacher and all of the professionals involved with that student.

Teacher Training Program Responsibilities

Teachers also need to be trained in how to deal with these transitions. In a study conducted by Naor and Milgram (1980), student teachers, encouraged to take a preservice course in Exceptional Children, found the class to be extremely useful both in theory and practice. They felt the information was helpful in dealing with the regular classroom population as well as the exceptional population.

Safer (1979) conducted a study that showed the special educators in the integrated classroom also need

specific training that is not included in their classroom training. The demands on the special educator in the integrated classroom are different from those in a self contained classroom. Theoretically there is less time in direct instruction and a greater proportion of time involved with non-instructional activities, such as planning time with the classroom teacher, scheduling, and adapting curriculum materials for the special needs students. Bean and Eichelberger (1985) surveyed 74 specialists and 411 classroom teachers about the changing roles and activities of specialists in in-class programs. Their results indicated that specialists felt there was less emphasis on diagnosis, individual and group remediation, and the teaching of specific skills in in-class programs. In the in-class programs, more emphasis seemed to be placed on working with the content teacher and on giving feedback to the content teacher.

In an integrated classroom there needs to be constant communication and cooperation between the regular classroom teacher and the special educator. To do this, special educators need to relinquish the total control they had of the self contained classroom. At

the same time, the regular classroom teachers need to accept some responsibility for the education of the special needs children in their classrooms as well as allowing new ideas into their classrooms. In a study conducted by Meyers, Geizheiser and Yelich (1991) both the classroom teacher and the special education teacher felt that an integrated classroom demanded more teacher collaboration than a resource or self-contained program. The teachers spent more time on planning new and different ways to present material to all children rather than focusing on problem behaviors of identified children. Meyers et al. (1991) state:

The most important finding of this study is that pull-in approaches foster collaboration focused on instructional planning. The pull-in teacher pairs met in order to jointly plan instruction that addressed students needs, while pull-out teachers met to share insights about student needs so that each teacher could plan instruction. (p. 13)

It should not be surprising that the pull-in teachers felt their collaborative meetings improved their own teaching skills by using the cooperating teacher to compare ideas.

Affleck, Madge, Adams, and Lowenbraun (1988) feel communication is necessary to establish common expectations and teacher behaviors in the classroom.

The classroom teacher needs to treat all students equally, regardless of their disabilities. There should be the same behavioral, social expectations and the same classroom responsibilities. The only exception should be specifically written out in the children's Individual Education Program (IEP). Bryan, Bay, and Donahue (1988) state that:

Given the myriad interacting and changing variables that comprise the classroom environment, we suggest that the needs of the children who fulfill the intent of the learning disabilities definition are not likely to be entirely met even by the most skilled classroom teacher alone. (p. 27)

The special educator has many responsibilities when it comes to mainstreaming or integrating a special needs child into a regular classroom. The opinion of Carlberg and Kavale (1980) is that the main responsibility of the special educator is to remain available to the parents, the classroom teacher and the child as a resource for solving problems or voicing concerns. The special educator should be in close contact with all personnel involved with the child (e.g.: physical therapy, speech, counseling) and inform parents and teachers of progress in all areas. The special educator may have to help the classroom teacher

set up specific behavior modification programs or help adapt traditional classroom materials to meet the child's specific needs. In some instances, lower reading level materials may have to be ordered for a student to participate in an integrated class. That does not mean the level of the material is lower, just the reading level so the student can function independently. Above all, the special educator must reassure the classroom teacher that he or she will not have to ignore the needs of the regular students in the class to meet the needs of the mainstreamed child in the room (Ottman, 1981, p. 42). The process is continuous as long as the special-needs child is mainstreamed.

Student Attitude

Research shows that the idea of self-fulfilling prophecy is prevalent in self-contained special education classrooms (Schanzer, 1981, p. 32). That factor, however is not eliminated simply by removing the child from the situation. It actually could get worse if the child is placed in a different situation without transition. Schanzer (1981) states that if children are mainstreamed without self esteem

counseling, the children may see themselves as in an uncontrollable situation where they will completely give up trying academically. This feeling of helplessness could also lead to behavioral outbursts. Therefore, children's self esteem needs to be watched constantly through the transition. It also needs to be expressed to these children that mainstreaming them allows for a smoother return to the normal classroom setting. There is more flexibility in the programs with mainstreaming than previously.

In a survey given to one fourth grade and one fifth grade class by Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias (1985), the students rated two different boys as seen on video tape. The students rated the boys on their desire to be friends with them. One of the boys portrayed was learning disabled. The students ranked play behavior first on their scale. Academic behaviors ranked last. This shows that peers prioritized behaviors differently than teachers would. In most cases, the learning disabled boy was not discriminated against by the general education population. The cases where discrimination occurred were in the play behavior and communication areas.

Summary

Is there a solution to the problems P.L. 94.142 brings about? Not a simple one. The answer seems to lie in several areas. The first area would be to change teacher and student attitudes toward mainstreaming. To do this, teachers and students must be educated in ways to deal with people with disabilities through inservice and out-of-school experience.

Another area to change would be teacher training programs. Since the classroom trend seems to be leaning toward integration, teacher training programs should include working with special needs children of all types. Programs should include diagnostic and adaptive strategies as well as behavior modification strategies.

The third area to change would be school structure. In the past, schools have been structured to exclude the special needs children. Schools need to be restructured for inclusion. Inclusion, not just in special areas such as music and art class, but also in academic and social areas. As Crisci quotes Cochrane and Westling (1977):

The school administrator is the key to success in mainstreaming as he or she can provide support and encouragement instead of stumbling blocks and indecision. (p. 180)

An additional area of concern is the effect the integration has on the regular students in the classroom. Although several researchers state there is no effect on the classroom atmosphere or classroom learning, there is no statistical data present to support their claim.

Chapter III

Design of the study

Null Hypothesis

There is no statistically significant difference in reading achievement, as measured by a standardized reading achievement test, between general education students who have been through an integrated classroom setting and a comparable group who have been through a traditional classroom setting.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects (N=60) for this study were current sixth graders from a rural Western New York school district. Approximately 30 of these students were general education students who have been in an integrated classroom in grades K-5 for a minimum of 4 years. The other 30 students were general education students who have never been in an integrated classroom in grades K-5.

Materials

Total reading scores from an annual basic achievement test given in school were used as the comparison.

Procedure

The researcher examined current school records to find students in grade 6 who had been through an integrated classroom and those who have never been in an integrated classroom. The first grade California Achievement Test scores were analyzed using a calculated t test to determine equivalency of the two groups. The students' fifth grade Degrees of Reading Power test scores were analyzed for comparison between the two groups.

Analysis

A comparison was made between the stanine scores of each test group. Group A were students in an integrated classroom; group B were students in a traditional classroom. A calculated t test was conducted to determine equivalency of the two groups at the first grade level. When equivalency was determined, a calculated t test was conducted on the stanine scores of the fifth grade Degrees of Reading

Power test.

Summary

The researcher found two equal groups fitting the necessary profiles of either having gone through an integrated classroom setting or through a traditional classroom setting. A comparison was made to determine equivalency at a first and fifth grade level.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the reading achievement of general education students who have gone through an integrated classroom and students who have never been in an integrated classroom.

Pretest Findings

A pretest was conducted at the first grade level of each group to determine equivalency. Group A was comprised of 30 general education students who were placed in an integrated classroom. Group B was comprised of 34 general education students who were not placed in an integrated classroom. The stanine scores of the California Achievement Test were used for the comparison.

Table 1

Pretest Scores on California Achievement Test

	<u>(A) Pretest</u>	<u>(B) Pretest</u>
Mean	5.63	5.26
S.D.	1.59	1.46
Calculated t	0.97	

Crit. t (62 d.f.), p .05 = +/- 1.99

The calculated t shows there is no significant difference between these two groups, thus establishing equality.

Posttest Findings

A posttest was conducted with the same students at the end of fifth grade to determine if the groups were still equivalent. Group A was still comprised of 30 general education students who have now been in an integrated classroom for at least 4 uninterrupted years. Group B consisted of 34 general education students who had not been in an integrated classroom for even 1 year. The stanine scores on the fifth grade Degrees of Reading Power test were used for the comparison.

Table 2

Posttest Scores on Degrees of Reading Power Test

	<u>(A) Posttest</u>	<u>(B) Posttest</u>
Mean	57.11	52.83
S.D.	16.32	18.20
Calculated \underline{t}	0.98	

Crit. \underline{t} (62 d.f.), p .05 = +/- 1.99

The calculated \underline{t} shows no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the end of fifth grade.

Analysis and Interpretation

of the Data

In both the pretest and the posttest, a calculated \underline{t} at the .05 level, showed no statistically significant difference. The data fail to reject the null hypothesis, thus saying that there is no statistically significant difference in reading achievement of general education students who have been through an integrated classroom setting and general education students who have never been in an integrated setting.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

Many researchers have tried to show that placing special needs children into an integrated classroom will improve their social behavior as well as improve their academics and study behavior. Although much research has been conducted in this area (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbraun, 1988; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Meyers, Gelzheiser, & Yelich, 1991; Schloss, 1992) most of the research remains inconclusive.

While searching through studies, this researcher found only one study that addressed the needs of all children in the integrated classroom. The study conducted by Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias (1985), claims that all of these needs and more are met in an integrated classroom. The study makes this claim but gives no statistical evidence to prove such.

The purpose of this present study was to determine whether the reading achievement of general education students is affected by being in an integrated

classroom. With all of the data presented, it was concluded that there was no adverse effect being in an integrated classroom. These finding support researchers such as Brady and Taylor (1989), Wang, Peverly, and Randolph (1984), Wang and Birch (1984), and Cartledge, Frew and Zaharias (1985), who all feel that socially and academically, the general education population would not be affected by the integration of special needs children in the regular classroom. These researchers have made this claim but have no statistical data to reinforce their ideas.

The finding of this study have high value for parents and teachers who either work in or have children in the integrated classroom. The results should provide some relief for the skeptical parent or teacher in that the general education children were not affected academically by the special needs children. All of the children were exposed to the same materials and a variety of learning techniques. These children were provided the opportunity to learn in a truly heterogeneous context.

Implications for Research

The results of this study, although promising, are also very limited. Further research could be conducted to examine the effect of integration in various settings. This study was conducted in a rural school district with a high minority population. Aspects such as type of school, public, private, urban, rural, suburban, make up of population, race, religion, sex, and poverty level of the school should all be looked at in relation to integration. A similar study could be conducted in several schools using an integrated setting.

The level of integration should also be considered. While this researcher used a school with an all day integration policy, many schools limit integration to certain subject areas. A study could be conducted to see if one type of integration produces more positive results than other types.

An interesting study to conduct would be to compare teaching philosophies of teachers in the integrated classroom and those who are not. A comparison could also be made between attitudes of teachers who volunteer to work in an integrated

classroom and attitudes of those who are placed in an integrated classroom.

Research into teacher training programs and the preparedness of teachers in various integrated settings could also be conducted, examining how course offerings and inservices have affected the teachers' ability to deal with the special needs children.

With the Regular Education Initiative and P.L. 94-142 shining in the public eye, researchers have to consider how the integration will affect all types of students. Schools need to consider the financial impact, personnel impact, and the public relation impact a change in program would mean. Studies conducted in these various areas would help build a model program that would be efficient and acceptable to all involved.

Implications for the Schools

A question not uncommon to teachers of integrated classrooms is "Isn't this class slower than a regular class?" The teacher may explain that the classroom is a regular classroom and that all of the materials and the pacing are the same, but there is no proof that can be handed to a parent to confirm this. Parents may

leave feeling unsure of their child's educational setting.

School districts need to explain openly the type of classrooms that are available in their districts. They also need to educate parents on the benefits of each type of classroom. Parents today want to know what type of learning situation their child is in.

The world today is filled with a variety of people and children need to be exposed to as many types of people as possible. Integration in the classroom could expose children to a multitude of handicapping conditions and hopefully make them more aware of others' feelings and more accepting of differences. Not only is prejudice a racial issue, it is evident in the world of the handicapped individual. The government can only pass laws, it can't make people understand the differences these people deal with on a daily basis. Integration at a young age could possibly alleviate problems in the future. We build our knowledge on the knowledge of others, and everyone has something to give no matter their disability.

With all of the negative and partially informed press schools are getting, it would make sense for

schools to research their programs and publicize their results. If for some reason these results are negative, then the program obviously needs some revision. There is a need to emphasize the positive programs school have and encourage teachers and administrators to continue with the programs that work.

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