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A Survey of the Integration of Exceptional Children in Regular Classrooms

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A SURVEY OF THE INTEGRATION OF EXCEPTIONAL
CHILDREN IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Catherine A. Greene
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PROBLEM

Educational practice in the past has been to segregate exceptional children by placing them in self-contained special education classrooms. Recently, however, this method has been questioned by leading special educators.

Proponents of segregation of exceptional children admit to inadequacies in the present situation, but they argue that such inadequacies can be remedied and do not justify placing exceptional children in regular classrooms.

Proponents of integration maintain that exceptional children live in a heterogeneous world and as adults will live and work in a heterogeneous world; therefore, these children should have a school setting that is like the world in which they eventually will work.

The Ellensburg School District, until the 1970-1971 school year, segregated exceptional children. The teachers in the system questioned this arrangement and decided to try integration or regular classroom placement for these exceptional children, with part-time placement in a resource room. With this arrangement in mind, an attempt was made to determine the advantages and disadvantages of integration. Some recommendations for improvement of such a system also were developed. This study is a survey of the Ellensburg

experiment with integrated classroom placement of exceptional children.

All the teachers who have children who use resource centers in the elementary schools were interviewed by means of a questionnaire. The resource teachers, principals, the psychologist, and the special education director also were interviewed.

Terms Used in the Study

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study.

Exceptional children refers to those children who have specific learning disabilities, including those children classified as educable mentally retarded, culturally deprived, emotionally disturbed, behaviorally disordered, educationally handicapped, learning disabled, or brain injured. This scope of study does not include the trainable mentally retarded, severely emotionally disturbed, multiply handicapped, or children so radically deviant that they never have been enrolled in any kind of normal school program.

Segregation is the exclusion of exceptional children from regular classrooms by placing them in self-contained special education classrooms.

Integration is the placing of exceptional children in regular classrooms for the subjects in which they can succeed, academically and socially.

Self-contained special education classrooms are those classes for children who fit the exceptional definition and have been referred from regular education programs because of some sort of teacher-perceived behavioral or learning problem. These children remain in this type of classroom for all social and academic activities.

Regular classes are those classes in which students are enrolled on an unselected basis for typical academic and social development.

Resource rooms are specially designed settings in which children with specific learning disabilities receive additional instruction in the areas of their disabilities. The children remain in resource rooms for only part of the school day.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this section the literature on self-contained special education classrooms versus integration into regular classrooms of special education children with part-time placements in resource rooms was reviewed.

Self-contained Special Education Classrooms

The rationale for the establishment of special classes has been based on the hypothesis that conditions conducive to learning by the educationally handicapped are better controlled in a restricted setting (Brown, 1968; Dunn, 1968; Mackie and Dunn, 1954).

One condition of the self-contained Special Education classroom is that the smaller teacher-pupil ratio attained in the special class makes it possible for the teacher to individualize instruction, thereby more effectively meeting the needs of each child. Special class size usually is limited to a maximum of fifteen pupils. Second, specially trained personnel are hired to teach children who are placed in special classes. A third condition is that the special class arrangement facilitates close supervision by directors of Special Education. Fourth, pupils in special classes are with the same teacher for several years. This condition is thought to enable the teacher to obtain

extensive information about each pupil and consequently a better understanding of the child's particular educational needs. A fifth condition assumes a well-defined curriculum in the special class.

A further argument for special classes is that the group is homogeneous, since all are exceptional. A more general argument is that special classes minimize competition and provide an opportunity for leadership roles for slow learners not possible in the regular classroom.

Other explanations for special rooms include financial considerations, administrative ease, teacher satisfaction, and influence of an individual who has strong views and who is in a leadership position. Another consideration is for severely mentally retarded or trainable youngsters (I.Q.'s below 50), who could not possibly succeed in regular classrooms; regular classrooms teachers are reluctant to have these children in their classes.

The above reasoning is largely assumed. It is important to note the reasoning for the founding of special education rooms. Hollingworth (1923) pointed out that before the appearance of compulsory attendance laws, these children were not educated in schools. After these laws were in effect all these youngsters were put in the grades. Teachers complained about misfits in their classes, so special rooms were created.

Regular Classroom Placement and
Part-time Resource Room

Research results seem to suggest (Brown, 1968) that mentally retarded youngsters remaining in regular classroom environments tend to do better academically than their counterparts placed in special classes. Others show evidence that special class placement is not particularly impressive in facilitating social and personal adjustment.

Diagnostic tests usually are used to identify an exceptional child for placement in special classes. Dunn (1968) asks, "Why label?" He believes children with learning problems should be kept in the mainstream. Dunn also believes in using special educators serving as diagnostic, clinical, remedial, resource room, itinerant, or team teachers, and as consultants and developers of instructional materials for filling prescriptions for effective teaching.

He further proposes that each school district establish a "Special Education Diagnostic and Prescription Generating Center." This type of center would have three purposes. First, it would make a study of the behaviors the child has acquired. Second, samples of a sequential program would be designed to move forward from that point. Third, the method by which the child could best be taught the material would be determined.

Additional reasons are given for placing these children in regular classes. First, it is important to emphasize the child's abilities and likenesses to other children rather than his differences. Placing him in the regular class makes the wealth of resources within the regular school program available to him. Also, the setting in the regular classroom more nearly approximates that which the child will encounter in adult life. Incidentally, transportation costs usually are reduced when exceptional children are placed in regular classrooms.

When exceptional children are placed in regular classrooms several questions arise. First, will the child receive extra help from his regular classroom teacher or peers for his disabilities? Second, will the regular classroom teacher want this type of child in his class?

These problems can be remedied by establishing resource rooms throughout the schools. For example, children with reading disabilities can go to the resource room for individual and concentrated work in reading. This system frees the regular classroom teacher to work with children who we refer to as the typical or average child. The second question, whether the regular classroom teacher would want to deal with these children, should be handled on an individual basis.

A question still to be answered is, "Should mentally retarded youngsters be integrated?" It is the opinion of the writer that integration is not for all exceptional children.

DISCUSSION

Integration of the exceptional child is one of the hottest controversies being studied and talked about in Special Education. In fact, a symposium on this very subject was held at the 1970 International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children. The fact that the Council sponsored such a symposium attests to the significance of this professional dispute. One can find article after article on the subject in education journals. Many authorities in Special Education tend to lean toward integration but state over and over that not enough supporting evidence is available to justify an immediate changeover (Lilly, 1970).

The most commonly stated goal of Special Education programs is to meet the needs of exceptional children whose needs cannot be met adequately in regular programs (Baker, 1959; Cruickshank and Johnson, 1958; Dunn, 1963; Jordan, 1962). The current proliferation of Special Education programs, however, cannot be explained on the basis of supporting evidence indicating progress toward such a goal.

Once a particular way of dealing with exceptional students is decided upon the method possibly could become institutionalized, and then it is difficult to change. This

is exactly what has happened with segregation of exceptional children. The writer believes that we must look at integration or other approaches, but also that our approach must be supported by research before wide implementation or dissemination is initiated.

PROCEDURES AND LIMITATIONS

Regular classroom teachers who have children in their classrooms who use the resource rooms at Mt. Stuart, Washington, and Lincoln Elementary Schools in the Ellensburg School District were interviewed. Resource teachers at the three elementary schools, and the principals of these schools were interviewed. The Special Education director and school psychologist of the district also were interviewed. Only teachers in the elementary schools were interviewed, because the Special Education facilities at the Junior High and High School do not operate on the philosophy of resource rooms.

Personnel interviewed were given a sample of the questionnaire three days in advance of their interview. A letter accompanied the questionnaire advising the personnel to be interviewed that they did not need to write the answers to the questions on the questionnaires, that they would be interviewed personally. All interviews were taped for ease of recording information. Regular classroom teachers were interviewed individually initially; after four such interviews, the balance were grouped according to grade level for interviews.

Seven regular classroom teachers whose children use the resource rooms were not available for interview. Three teachers preferred that their interviews not be taped; their interviews were written.

Several questions were dropped from the questionnaire (see Appendix).

RESULTS

Regular Classroom Teachers

Teachers in the regular classrooms in the Ellensburg School District have twenty-six to thirty-three children in their classes. Twenty-six was the average number of students in the first grade classes. Fifth grade classrooms have thirty-three students. Teachers interviewed had anywhere from one child to six who use the resource rooms for reading, arithmetic, spelling, or language development.

For the most part the exceptional children who use the resource rooms are at age level for the grade in which they are placed; those who are not are only one year older. The children have lived in the Ellensburg area for the greatest portion of their lives.

Regular classroom teachers are unaware of the children's I.Q.'s. There seemed to be an even sampling of exceptional children from low and average economic backgrounds. Three children were considered to be from high average economic backgrounds.

The children who use the resource center are accepted readily by the other youngsters. Teachers interviewed reported that of the one-hundred twelve children who use the resource centers, only four are not accepted readily; the

reasons stated related to aggressive behavior on the part of the children not accepted. Not all the children who use the resource centers are exceptional; the average or typical children also are allowed to use the facilities. For example, at one school these children use the resource center for creative opportunities. In some cases these average children are used as aides. This arrangement helps alleviate the stigma that might be attached to such resource rooms.

Children who remain in the regular classrooms help the exceptional youngsters by explaining assignments that they might have missed when they were out of the regular classroom. They include the exceptional children in games and help involve them in groups. One teacher said that her exceptional children do not want help from the other children; they want to do it on their own.

The resource room teachers do not spend time in the regular classrooms because of their heavy schedules. However, one resource teacher does take lunch periods with children in regular classrooms. The resource room teachers do keep in close contact with the regular classroom teachers by reporting the children's progress from day to day. They also provide materials to regular classroom teachers upon request.

The greatest percentage of teachers were not aware of a Special Education director in the district. Teachers felt

that they received the psychological services they needed. However, they felt that the psychologist should have some help because they felt it was too big a job for one person. Only two teachers expressed concern over the psychological services available and said they refused to avail themselves of the psychologist's services.

Regular classroom teachers who have children who have been integrated for the most part do not spend extra time planning for these exceptional youngsters. They do spend more time in some cases giving instructions. One teacher uses a different spelling list for her integrated youngsters. Another teacher said that she was told she should not spend any extra time with these children.

The teachers did not receive any in-service training; all but two said they felt it would be beneficial. They wanted to know more about the Distar Reading Program. Also, they would like to be able to use some of the motivational techniques that the resource room teachers use. Some of the teachers had participated in a reading workshop that was held in the district during the summer of 1970. Only five of the teachers had had any college preparation courses in dealing with children who have learning disabilities.

The reading consultants in the district tested the children who are considered exceptional, but their testing program has no pattern or plan. Some children were tested

in the Spring of 1970 and again will be tested in the Spring of 1971. Others were tested in the Fall of 1970 and will be tested in the Spring of 1971. Teachers are not aware of test results.

Teachers reported parents of children who have been integrated are enthusiastic about the new system. Those parents of children who were in self-contained classes say that their child is so proud that he now can say he is in a particular grade. Parents feel that their children have a whole new outlook on school; this applies for all the integrated children. Parents also are asking, "Will my child be in the resource room next year? I certainly want him to be there. He has done wonders this year!"

First and second grade teachers in one school feel a need for a self-contained special education room in the district for primary aged children considered mentally retarded. They feel that they have children now in their classes who are suffering from the integration procedure. The children need the security and concentrated structure that a self-contained room provides. They feel that if the child has this type of school setting for one to three years, then possibly he could be integrated.

Resource Room Teachers

Two of the four resource room teachers have college degrees and training in working with exceptional children.

One teacher had one previous year experience with these children. The fourth teacher had teaching experience but no training for operating a resource room. They received no in-service training. They all felt that such training would be beneficial. One of the teachers felt that released time to attend conferences and visit other school districts would be better than having in-service training in the district.

The resource teachers each service from twenty-seven to thirty-three exceptional youngsters daily. A total of one-hundred twelve exceptional children are serviced. One teacher deals with eight regular students daily in creative activities. Eleven exceptional children spend at least half of their school day in resource rooms. At one school regular classroom students can earn time to be spent in the resource room home economics facilities.

The resource room teachers confer with the parents of children who spend most of their day in the resource centers. They also sit in on conferences with the regular classroom teachers and parents. They do not give grades to the youngsters they deal with, but usually make a conference report to help the regular classroom teachers confer with parents of children who are exceptional.

These teachers have given all the youngsters that they work with a battery of tests to determine where the youngsters

were in the Fall and to help them plan programs for the individual youngsters. They chart the youngsters' progress daily. These teachers are aware of the children's I.Q.'s. They range from 70-110.

The resource room teachers receive a considerable amount of help from their principals. They felt that psychological services were available but that the one psychologist was overworked. They felt they would like to have more contact with the Special Education director, and thought the entire resource room staff should meet weekly with the director and psychologist. As it stands all recommendations for individual students are made by the resource room teachers and they feel some decisions need to be made by a number of people. They feel too much responsibility is left on their shoulders for major decisions concerning individual students.

The writer feels that the resource room teachers have been very creative in developing and using motivational techniques for students. These teachers use praise, point systems for free time, tangible rewards, physical activities, or for membership in clubs such as the 100 Point Club or the Perfect Club. The 100 Point Club is for students who read 100 words per minute or better. The Perfect Club is for students who read a whole page without making a mistake. Regular classroom students are aware of the reward system

used in the resource rooms and want also to be a part of the activities.

All kinds of materials are used by these teachers. Three of the rooms use Distar Reading and Math Programs. They use many of the same materials that are used in regular classrooms. Tape recorders and Language Masters play a major part in these classrooms. The teachers all felt that they could order what they needed for their classes; they have received any equipment they have requested.

Principals

The principals of the three elementary schools felt that the principal advantage of exceptional children being in the regular classrooms was that the stigma related to Special Education self-contained classrooms had been eliminated. The children now are not referred to as retards, dummies, or spastics. Another advantage seen by principals was the number of children serviced. Last year only 30 youngsters were serviced in the elementary schools as compared to this year's 112. This type of arrangement allows exceptional children to relate with all types of children. They now see themselves in a different light. They associate with children with whom they will associate later in life. Principals also felt that the resource center teachers were better able to zero in on the children's learning disabilities.

One principal said that a disadvantage might occur in placing a child with an unusual impairment with a teacher who could not handle his disabilities. Another principal noted that the resource teachers do not have adequate time to communicate with other teachers. A possibly temporary disadvantage is that integration is a new school program; teachers have not entirely accepted the philosophy behind the program.

All parents with whom the principals had been in contact were greatly in favor of integration. One principal felt that perhaps feedback from parents was not entirely valid, since he himself had "sold" the program to parents.

Special Education Director

The Special Education director felt that the most important advantage of integration was that the resource teachers can get at the specific learning disabilities of the children with whom they work. He feels, however, that the resource teachers have to make some sacrifices because they are limited to teaching the basics throughout the entire school day.

He felt that disadvantages at this point are unidentifiable. The district has no data with which to compare the gains made in the resource rooms. He does feel, however, that the positive psychological factor of the

program is so great that it would compensate for any disadvantages with the system. He feels that to go back to self-contained classrooms would be a regression. He stated that the trend in the coming year is to use the resource room approach state-wide.

Some parents and members of the community were concerned when the program was initiated, but the director now feels that all persons involved are enthusiastic about the program. He feels that the concerns arose from misunderstanding.

The director feels that a system of integration is a never ending process involving all classrooms. He anticipates an in-service program for the coming year with heavy emphasis on techniques in individualization of instruction. He feels that a great deal more could be done for the child who is classified as highly emotional.

School Psychologist

The greatest advantage of the program, as seen by the school psychologist, is that the children involved now can see themselves as like other children. Their motivation is much higher, simply because they now can say they are in a grade.

The psychologist feels that the personalities of the resource teachers have been a major factor in the success of the program.

He feels that there is a great deal more work involved with such a system because of the orientation necessary for principals and regular classroom teachers.

He believes that parents have received the change enthusiastically. They have seen the rate of growth in their children increase rapidly. Growth has been most noticeable in social adaptation. Parents' attitudes toward their children have changed appreciably; they have begun to expect normal behaviors rather than to say, "My child is handicapped; therefore, I can not expect normal behavior." The psychologist feels that to place these children in self-contained rooms again with parental approval would be a near impossible task.

SUMMARY

This survey was designed to determine the advantages and disadvantages of placing exceptional children in regular classrooms with part-time placement in resource rooms.

As far as can be determined, based on opinion, not data, the advantages of integration far outweigh the disadvantages. These children now can associate with children with whom they eventually will live and work. They no longer are segregated from other children because of their differences, but rather placed in regular classrooms because of their likenesses to others.

Special Education, whether through learning centers, resource rooms, speech therapy, or whatever, no longer should be considered a terminal branch of the school program but only one more step to self-fulfillment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made after reviewing the results of the survey:

1. That an in-service program be offered in the Fall for all teachers who will have exceptional youngsters in their classrooms. The resource teachers would demonstrate the Distar Reading Program and various teaching techniques that they employ in their classrooms.

2. That in-service training be provided for the resource teachers in the district.

3. That this integration philosophy for children with learning problems be implemented in the Junior High and High School in the Ellensburg School District.

4. That the testing program be better planned and regular classroom resource teachers be made aware of tests results and trained in their interpretation.

5. That a self-contained special education room be provided for primary mentally retarded youngsters.

6. That since this thesis is premised on opinions that a study be done to obtain data to determine whether exceptional children should be integrated in regular classrooms.

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APPENDIX

Questions found not to be productive in early interviews, and subsequently deleted, are preceded by an asterisk.

April 12, 1971

Dear teacher,

I am doing a questionnaire on the advantages and disadvantages of integrating Special Education youngsters into regular classrooms. This questionnaire is for you to read over and think about before I come and interview you. This questionnaire is to serve as a guideline for the interview. I will appreciate your cooperation. I hope that the results of this survey will benefit the Ellensburg School District in the coming year.

Cathy Greene

I would like to interview you: DATE _____.

If you are not available please leave word with your school's secretary.

Available _____

Not available _____

Teacher's name

Questionnaire to classroom teachers

How many total children in your classroom?

How many children in your classroom use the learning center facility?

*Could other children also use it?

For what and how many subjects do these children use the learning center?

What exceptional behaviors do these children who use the learning center possess?

Age related to grade level

Educational background

I.Q.

Social-economic background

Are these types of children accepted immediately by the other children?

How do the children who have always been in the regular classroom help these exceptional children?

How much time does the resource teacher spend in your classroom?

How often does the Special Education director visit your classroom?

Are psychological services readily available? What kinds of services would you like to have?

Do you feel you spend more time planning for these youngsters who are exceptional? *Does the learning center help you by taking children like slow learners, etc., and does this help you as far as time spent.

Did you participate in any in-service training before you received these children in your classroom? If not, would one be beneficial?

Do you feel any teacher prep courses prepared you for handling these youngsters? What courses would you like to take now after having these youngsters in your classroom?

Questionnaire to classroom teachers (continued)

Do the learning center specialists help you with the children in your specific classroom--providing materials--reporting to you as to how you could help the child?

Do you have any test scores to show the growth rate of these children who have been integrated?

How have the parents of these exceptional children reacted to their children in regular classrooms?

Questionnaire to learning center specialists

What special training do you have to operate such a classroom? Do you receive any in-service training? If not do you feel that it would be beneficial?

How many children do you service daily? How long are these children in your room? In what areas do you service them?

Are you responsible for giving the children you help a grade? How are these children evaluated?

Do you have any test scores to show the growth rate of these children who have been integrated? Do you chart the youngster's rate?

What exceptional behaviors do these children who use the learning center possess?

Age related to grade level
Educational background
I.Q.
Social-economic background

What contact do you have with parents of these children? Favorable--unfavorable?

Do you feel that the psychological services are readily available?

Do you receive the needed support from principals?

How often does the Special Education director visit your classroom?

What reinforcement procedures do you use in your classroom? How would you describe the structure of your classroom?

What kinds of materials do you use in your classroom and are you able to order more materials when you feel that you need them?

Questionnaire to school principals

What advantages do you see in the learning center as compared to the Special Education self-contained classroom?

What disadvantages do you see in the learning center as compared to the Special Education self-contained classroom?

What contact do you have with parents of the integrated students? Would you say these parents are in favor of their children being in regular classes?

Do you have any students who remain solely in the learning center and are not integrated?

Questionnaire to Special Education director

What advantages do you see in integrating exceptional children into the regular classroom?

What disadvantages do you see in integrating exceptional children into the regular classroom?

Does this approach require more or less staff?

How is this integration approach financed?

Do you feel that these children will be integrated in the coming school year?

What comments from parents and community citizens have been voiced to you as an administrator?

What are some things that you feel could be changed to improve the integration of children into the regular classrooms?

Questionnaire to school psychologist

What advantages do you see in integrating the exceptional student into the regular classroom?

What disadvantages do you see in integrating the exceptional child into the regular classroom?

Are more students serviced by this type of approach? How many more?

How have the parents of these exceptional children reacted to their being in regular classrooms? If unfavorable, what are their reasons for not wanting their children integrated?

Do you see an attitude change in the children who have been integrated?

How are these exceptional children placed in regular classes?

Will any changes be made next year in the integration procedure?