Inclusion a luxury or necessity

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Introduction
The simple truth that all men are created equal is a principal that our nation has been based on, however as the population of disabled students continues to rise, a controversy has risen. Many are finding themselves wondering if inclusion programs are something that is really worth the funding and man power.

Definition
According the National Center when discussion Educational Restructuring and Inclusion developed the following working definition of inclusive education:

“Providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society.” Simply put, the purpose of inclusion is to provide an education for students with different learning styles and disabilities an opportunity to learn. To do so this may include aids for students, interventions, and I.E.P’s.

Mainstreaming vs. inclusion
Inclusion should not be confused with mainstreaming in which students are put into the “regular education” classroom in which it is the teacher’s responsibility to educate all the students with or without disabilities. However, as previously stated inclusion, as supported by I.D.E.A (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), believes

Pros of issue

Financial benefit
One motivation for many schools to attain an inclusion program would be additional state funding. (IDEA 2004)” Part B of IDEA grants to state FY2002 was $7.5 billion or roughly 16.5 of APPE in
FY2002.” (Kafer, Kristina, “Special education 101”) The following year an additional billion dollars were added to those grants making it approximately $8,528,533,000 in state grants for schools with inclusion programs.

**Allows all students an equal opportunity**

Another plus of inclusion is offering all students an equal opportunity to learn the content.

Research has proven at each school there are about 12% of children with learning disabilities. In k-5 alone, a recent study has shown that a school with a total of 1,141,136 (Data from the Florida Department of Education, Education Information & Accountability Services, Fall 2001) school aged students 178,894 (Data from the Florida Department of Education, Florida School Indicators Report, Year 2000-2001) of those students had special needs. I.D.E.A serves over six million students and numbers are growing. Though 12% to some could be a small enough number to provide justification for relying on mainstreaming, when put in real numbers and real students, many opinions change.

**Fewer distractions in the class room**

The average elementary student has an average attention span of 15-20 minutes. It is difficult enough for a teacher to keep the attention of their class normally. But when there is a child with severe ASD (Autism spectrum disorder) who is extremely frustrated and is expressing it with throwing a tantrum and gets up in the middle of class and screams, it can a) easily distract the students, b) take time out of an already highly academic and crammed curriculum if it is a frequent occurrence, C) escalate over time if the teacher is not trained in special education methods that would create a barrier between the student and teacher. Now, if that same scenario where to take place with inclusion in place, there would be a special education aid already in the class room that would then result with either; a) the aid calming down the child with methods such as having a student read a card with their responsibilities, b) the aid taking the student either into the hallway or into a resource room in which the student can unwind and confront what is stressing them and resolve it in a non-threatening environment. This example alone can be a valid argument for why inclusion benefits students with and without disabilities.
Encourage social behavior and acceptance

Though inclusion can enhance the learning environment for both regular education students and disabled student, there is another clear benefit that many overlook, the social aspect. One of the best ways to diminish the chances of a child to develop a prejudice is to expose them to a diverse society at a young age. Therefore, having a diverse classroom can benefit students on both sides. Also, it can encourage challenged students by providing them with a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Transition

Though there are multiple benefits for inclusion, there are multiple downsides to establishing an inclusion program at public schools. Among these would be, funding, determining what special needs are and who qualifies, communication between teachers, students manipulating teachers.

Cons of issue

Funding

It is no secret that public schools in the United States are generally underfunded and have been forced to make multiple cuts in faculty. However in order for inclusion to work, the I.D.E.A, Section 118 STAT. 2686 D states, “A state shall adopt a policy that includes a requirement that local educational agencies in the State take measurable steps to recruit, hire, train, and retain highly qualified personnel to provide special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities.” However, that then means additional staff, especially highly qualified special education teachers, can be extremely expensive. And even with grants given by section B in IDEA schools still struggle with funding inclusion programs.

Who qualifies? Teacher’s responsibility is to teach.

A common question that arises is what defines special needs. In addition, what about this label justifies special instruction for specific students. Many people believe that is a teacher’s responsibility to teach all their student’s and convey their curriculum to all of their students. Many believe if a teacher can’t effectively reach all of their students, despite their learning style or disabilities they should not be teaching.
Public schools should offer one method private offers another

A common opinion of many people, especially tax payers who are assisting in the funding of these programs, is that only regular instruction should be offered at public schools and if parents of special need students desire special instruction they should spend their own money on a private education.

Students manipulating teachers/communication deficit between colleagues

A common problem that arises in areas of special education inclusion is students who spend their time going between specialists, interventionist and special education classrooms is they begin to rely on having things done for them. Though it is an unforeseen consequence, this is a factor that can greatly affect how the student will do as they further their education and can hurt them greatly as their work ethic is not quite as well developed as their fellow classmates. A reason this depends develops is because of a failure of communication between colleagues. By not conveying that a student should not receive assistance on a particular assignment, it can be easy for a student to pawn it off on an interventionist. In addition it is difficult for teachers to accurately gauge a student’s performance level as they do not see them as much as a regular classroom teacher would see a regular education student. Therefor it is difficult for a teacher to then challenge the student to rise out of their comfort zone and reach their full potential.

Personal position

I personally am very pro inclusion. Though there are many valid reasons against it, many of them can be dismissed to ignorance. Though funding can be an issue, it is not as high of a concern as specific groups portray it to be. In a recent internet poll taken by average Americans when asked if as a country we were spending too much on special education only 11 percent said yes and 89 percent said no. One member of the 11 percent defended their vote by saying that handicap individuals are less likely to contribute to society and are therefore not worth the funding. However that single comment was small in comparison to individuals who supported special education funding. Many of the common points in these comments included; special education students shouldn’t have to suffer for a poor education
budget implemented by the state for regular education students, others claimed morality and equal opportunity or all. A handful of participants actually took the position that special education programs deserve more money. Therefore to those who believe society doesn’t want this program, this is just a minority of the population. And though it would eliminate communication problems and cut funds if public schools only taught regular education and if a special education student requires special education they should go to a special education private school it is just not an option that could be implemented. People in all social classes have children and become parents. Parents don’t choose for their child to have special needs, and many people are in a financial situation in which a private school education is just not a viable option as a high number of special need students would still attend public schools, but would not have aids in the classroom to help avoid distractions which would hurt both the special needs student but also the regular education students. Even if we lived in a perfect world in which all students with special needs went to a private special education school, is exposure to diversity for “normal” students something society is willing to eliminate. Being able to accept, understand and interact with classmates who have disabilities help grow character in students as well as establish an open mind and more empathetic view. But more important than anything in my opinion is that our nation is founded on the principal that all men are created equally and all men should have equal opportunity for success. With that said, who can then say that providing special education for students who need additional instruction is something as a country we shouldn’t support.
References


