

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Georgia Association for Positive Behavior
Support Conference

Creating an Inclusive Climate for Students with Developmental Disabilities (AS/ASD)

Stephanie C. Holmes

Autism Spectrum Resources for Marriage & Family. LLC, holmes.sc74@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gapbs>

Recommended Citation

Holmes, Stephanie C., "Creating an Inclusive Climate for Students with Developmental Disabilities (AS/ASD)" (2017). *Georgia Association for Positive Behavior Support Conference*. 5.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gapbs/2017/2017/5>

This event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences & Events at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Association for Positive Behavior Support Conference by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Literature Review: What Administrators Need to Know for Proper Inclusion Practices

Stephanie Holmes

Abilene Christian University

Literature Review: What Administrators Need to Know for Proper Inclusion Practices

Background of Inclusion in Public Schools

Before 1975, students with various disabilities, formerly called handicaps, were not given the same access to public education as their able-bodied or neuro-typical developing peers. In 1975 Congress, passed public law 94-142 referred to as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which stated all schools that received federal funds must provide equal access to education as a right to students with any physical or mental handicap. The language of the law was strengthened when Congress changed the federal mandate called EAHCA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA states that all students with disabilities would be entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and were to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to receive an education plan that is more individualized (IEP) to the students' needs. The change from EAHCA to IDEA also switched the focus from the student's disability to a focus on the individual student and his or her needs.

In 2004, Congress further strengthened IDEA and changed the name to Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) stating that public schools that receive public funding will be responsible for providing an equal education to all students with increased standards of excellence. Inclusion was broadened to include academic and social inclusion, but the term inclusion remains vague. The National Health Statistics Report of 2015 stated that over 6.7 million students with disabilities are enrolled in the public school system with an estimated 1,008,000 students who have been diagnosed on the autism spectrum (ASD) were enrolled in the 2014-2015 school year (Zablotsky et al., 2015).

Problem of Practice to Contributions to the Field of Education

According to the Center for Disease Control's (2014) various studies, autism is a disorder that is equally prevalent in race, culture, and socioeconomic status and autism is the fastest growing developmental disorder. Therefore, the problem of practice to be studied for future dissertation research is the gap that exists in the federal mandate to educate children with disabilities (such as ASD) in the least restrictive environment and the act of inclusion of such students with disabilities (such as ASD) both academically and socially. Since the time of the original 1975 EAHCA, the rate of autism has risen, but the training for mainstream teachers on *how* to include students on the autism spectrum (ASD) has not kept up with the rising rates. From a rate of 1 in 10,000 in the 1980s to the current statistic of 1 in 68 students in the public school system diagnosed with ASD shows a significant rise in rates with no decline in the near future as the exact causes of autism are still to be determined (CDC, 2016). How can teachers properly include students with autism? Who is responsible for providing inclusion training to teachers? Although there are federal laws that guarantee the right of students with disabilities, such as ASD, free and appropriate education, many barriers still prohibit students on the spectrum from achieving their full potential.

Who is Responsible for Inclusive Education Environments?

Having researched several articles, it appears to be an established known over the two decades of research that teacher attitude concerning inclusion is one of the highest contributing factors to how successful inclusion will be (Coleman & Gilliam, 1983; Cook, 2001; Cook & Cameron, 2010; Daane, 2000; Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2004; Fakolade, Adeniyu & Tella, 2009; Jones, 1984). What is less known is what contributes to teacher attitude but cited as contributors in these above studies include themes such as lack of understanding of autism among teachers, lack of teacher training, and lack of resources and support of administrators to the teachers

providing inclusion of students on the autism spectrum. Why would teacher attitude be an asset or barrier to inclusion? Staats (2016) indicates that teachers choose the field of education with best intentions to educate children and help them reach their potentials; however, everyone has implicit biases. “Implicit biases are pervasive, and they can challenge even the most well-intentioned and egalitarian-minded individuals resulting in actions and outcomes that do not necessarily align with explicit intention “(p.29). What can influence implicit bias? Staats (2016) list ambiguous or incomplete information, time restraints or pressure, fatigue, and situations where cognitive control may be compromised. All of these factors may be at play for the general education teacher trying to include a student with autism among the overcrowded class of students with a lack of training or understanding about autism and the challenging behaviors that come with autism spectrum disorder.

In a previous class, this researcher was focusing on evidence-based training and solutions for teachers to successfully include students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the classroom both socially and academically. A cohort made the statement that teachers do not get to design education curriculum nor do they get to choose what training or pre-service workshop are offered to them. This statement changed the focus of teacher training to what do administrators know or need to know so that they will allocate funding and resources to their teachers. What implicit biases may administrators have? Lack of support from administration and lack of resources are two factors that influence teacher attitude about proper inclusion thus creating a leadership and diversity question on the gap that exists from the federal mandate to the administrator’s understanding of autism, inclusion, and what training would best support the teachers who are responsible for the inclusion.

Conceptual Statements: A Review of the Literature

Leadership is a shared responsibility among stakeholders wherein a collaboration of family, school community, and administration must provide the inclusive education environment. According to Staats (2016), an educator's implicit bias may influence expectations for student achievement and may shape discipline approaches for ambiguous infractions such as "disruptive behavior," "disrespect," or "excessive noise" which often this author adds are often part of the autistic student's existence in the classroom (p.30-31). Shogren et al. (2015) stated that inclusion is a top-down matter where administrators must lead. In studies of successful inclusion, administration role, leadership, and support are listed among factors for leadership in the area of inclusion (Casale-Giannola, 2012; Gavalda & Qinyi, 2012; Segall & Campbell, 2012 & Shogren et al., 2015).

Administrators Carry the Responsibility to Promote Inclusion

Although the articles reviewed had different approaches to leadership attitude and definition of proper inclusion, a prevailing theme of the studies stated that responsibility for student placement rests with the administrator of the school (Bai & Martin, 2017; Ball & Green, 2014; Harding, 2009; Harpell & Andrews, 2010; Horrocks et al., 2008; Pazey et al., 2014; Praisner, 2003, & Weber & Young, 2017). Although a collaboration of stakeholders is the best equation for successful inclusion, the one responsible for planting, cultivating, and harvesting the seeds of an inclusive educational setting rests with the one who carries the weight of placement, allocating resources, and interpreting education policy for the school (Bai & Martin, 2017; Harding, 2009; Horrocks et al., 2008; Weber & Young, 2017). Agreeing with Praisner's (2003) ground-breaking research indicating the role of administrators has changed since the IDEA legislation, Ball and Green (2014) state, "With increased focus on providing high-quality

education for students with disabilities, the role of the school leaders has changed immensely” (p. 58).

Least Restrictive Environment is Mandated yet Inclusion is not Defined

Carson (2015) states that LRE can have a loose interpretation by the administrator, which may be based on available resources he or she feels the school has for the student or based on actual needs of the students. Administrator’s biases can influence placement factors for students with autism and other disabilities. Praisner’s (2003) study over a decade ago with his *Principals and Inclusion Survey* (PIS) survey indicated only 21.1% of principals were favorable to the idea of including students with disabilities in the LRE defined as the mainstream classroom.

Bai and Martin’s (2017) research found that administrators in their study showed significant deficits on ten factors of knowledge for inclusive practices, but the majority stated administrators recognize they need more training on matters of inclusion. Several of these articles included questions or follow-up concerning whether or not administrators understood the legal language of the federal mandates and asked about attitudes of inclusion (Ball & Green, 2014; Pazey et al., 2014; Praisner, 2003; Weber & Young, 2017). Pazey et al. (2014) specifically surveyed administrators on their knowledge of the autism spectrum and evidence-based practices that would aid inclusion in the mainstream classroom. Administrators rated themselves more highly knowledgeable than they actually were, but clear indications of deficits of practical knowledge and application were evident (Pazey et al., 2014). Horrocks et al. (2008) indicate that the principal’s attitude about including of children with autism sway recommendation of placement. Harding (2009) concluded that the administrator must first have working knowledge of what inclusion and LRE mean and is responsible for making sure all teachers and education professionals are knowledgeable and trained in inclusion practices as

well. Staats (2016) would argue that lack of information or ambiguous information would be a step toward bias.

Ball & Green (2014) also used the PIS to survey administrator attitudes about inclusion, and a significant number of administrators did not believe that LRE specified inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream settings. Although if administrators had read Yell's (1995) legal description and application of LRE, it would be clear that students should not be segregated based on ability and the school's aim should be inclusive practices. Understanding that a student's placement is decided by an IEP team, Praisner (2003) explained the principal's attitude about inclusion and definition of LRE would be the deciding factor of placing students. Citing the research of Russell and Brag (2013), Chandler (2015) indicated that principals who hold a more favorable view of inclusion are more likely to define LRE as an inclusive setting for 75% or more of the student's academic day. Summed up by Staats (2016), "In education, real life implications of implicit biases can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievements for some students" (p.33).

Factors that Affect Administrative Attitude Toward Inclusion

Knowledge of disabilities, interventions, or instructional methods. Praisner's (2003) study was one of the ground-breaking studies to examine administrator attitude, and his PIS has been used in several studies. Praisner (2003) found significant evidence that administrator attitude was largely affected by his or her knowledge or training concerning various disabilities and interventions or methods on how to promote successful inclusion. This was supported by Ball and Green's (2014) more recent study that found administrators with knowledge and understanding had better ideas and strategies of how to guide the school toward an inclusive environment. Pazey et al. (2014) in their study of inclusion of students with autism also found

where the administration has experience in special education, practical knowledge about autism and experience with autism in the classroom the more prepared and favorable their attitudes toward inclusion of ASD students into the mainstream classroom. Harding (2009) suggested that where administrators had knowledge concerning Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and other behavior management techniques, principals were more comfortable with inclusive practices.

Horrocks et al. (2008) reported that often professional development is focused on teachers, but their study indicated that principals require additional training concerning autism, other special needs, and what adequate inclusion practices would be for the school environment (Harding, 2009). Both teacher and administrators are subject to implicit bias; therefore, knowledge and understanding of disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder would help combat bias through gather data, skills, information, or evidence-based practices.

Administrative attitudes and impact on teacher's attitude toward inclusion.

Educational leaders who were proponents of inclusion had the attitude that all students both abled and disabled benefitted from inclusion. Administrators who were favorable were more prone to resource professional development for teachers (Ball & Green, 2014; Harding, 2009; Horrocks et al., 2008). Feeling supported and trained were indicators in the previous section of a more favorable attitude of inclusion by teachers. Praisner (2003) hypothesized that principals who are more favorable toward inclusion will lead the way to school climate change to foster an environment for all staff, especially those who would be teaching. Bai and Martin (2017) indicated that those principals with more favorable attitudes were more likely to place students with disabilities in the LRE and provide professional development for teachers who would be teaching these students affecting a more positive teacher attitude, which is supported by studies of Harding (2009) and Horrocks et al (2008). Educators who opposed inclusion believed special

education services should be specialized and kept separate from the mainstream classroom for the benefit of the overall student population may have less placement of students with disabilities, such as autism, in the LRE (Carson, 2015; Ball & Green, 2014; Harding, 2009).

Concluding statements of Harpell and Andrews (2010) indicate that the best educational leader is one who is humanitarian, knowledgeable, trained, and able to empower staff and impact teacher attitude to foster co-taught or cooperative inclusion based strategies. By empowering teachers, Harpell and Andrews (2015) add that this will also empower the students.

Conclusion

Lack of support from administration and lack of resources and information are two factors that influence teacher attitude about proper inclusion thus creating a leadership and diversity question on the gap that exists from the federal mandate to the administrators understanding of autism, inclusion, and what training would best support the teachers who are responsible for the inclusion.

Therefore, a research question that needs more investigation is what do administrators know about the needs and resources of students on the autism spectrum for both academic and social inclusions? If administration attitude toward inclusion is a top-down issue that affects teacher attitude, how is a more positive attitude cultivated in administration? Two instruments were mentioned, but the Principal's Attitude toward Inclusion Scale may be better tweaked to change toward inclusion of students on the autism spectrum specifically. Much of the research has had larger numbers of participants through survey response, but to add depth and specific knowledge in addition to the survey, the research design could include follow-up interviews of those who are most favorable toward inclusion and those who are most unfavorable to inclusion to study the differences in these two groups to study bias and its impact on placement and choice

of professional development for teachers. The proposed dissertation topic is to study the gaps from the federal mandate to implementation in the classroom. The first gap appears to be from administration to the school environment. A study on what factors promote or hinder inclusive attitudes of administrators could be a step of study in that gap.

References

- Bai, H., & Martin, S. (2017). Assessing the needs of training on inclusive education for public school administrators. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(12), 1229-1243.
- Ball, K., & Green, R. (2014). An investigation of the attitudes of school leaders toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal*, 27(1 & 2), 57-76.
- Chandler, T. (2015). *School principal attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from:
<http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1176&context=dissertations>
- Carson, C. (2015). Rethinking special education's least restrictive environment requirement. *Michigan Law Review*, 113(8), 1397-1426.
- Casale-Giannola, D. (2012). Comparing inclusion in the secondary vocational and academic classroom: Strength, needs, and recommendations. *American Secondary Education*, 40(2), 26-42.
- Center for Disease Control (2016). CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0331-children-autism.html>
- Coleman, M.C., & Gilliam, J.E. (1983). Disturbing behavior in the classroom. A survey of teacher attitude. *Journal of Special Education*, 17(2), 121-129.
- Cook, B.G. (2001). A comparison of teachers' attitudes toward their included students with mild and severe disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, 34(4), 203-214.

- Cook, B.G., & Cameron, D.L. (2010). Inclusive teachers' concern and rejection toward their students. *Remedial & Special Education, 40*(A), 230-238.
- Daane, C.J., Beirne, M., & Lathan, D. (2000). Administrators' and teachers' of perceptions of collaborative efforts of inclusion in the elementary grades. *Education, 121*(2), 331.
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, U.S.C. §§ 94-142.
- Elhoweris, H., & Alsheikh, N. (2004). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. *International Journal of Special Education, 21*(1), 115-118.
- Fakolade, O.A., Adeniyi, S.O., & Tella, A. (2009). Attitude of teachers toward inclusion of special needs children in general education classroom: The case of teachers in some selected schools in Nigeria. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 1*(3), 155-169.
- Gavalda, J., & Qinyi, T. (2012). Improving the process of inclusive education in children with ASD in mainstream schools. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Science, 46*, 4072-4076.
- Harding, S. (2009). Successful inclusion models for students with disabilities require strong site leadership: Autism and behavioral disorders create many challenges for the learning environment. *International Journal of Learning, 16*(3), 91-103.
- Harpell, J., & Andrews, J. (2010). Administrative leadership in the age of inclusion: Promoting best practices and teacher empowerment. *Journal of Educational Thought, 44*(2), 189-210.

- Horrocks, J., White., G., & Roberts, L. (2008). Principal's attitudes regarding inclusion of children with autism in Pennsylvania public schools. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders*, 38, 1462-1473.
- Jones, R.L. (1984). Attitudes and attitude change in special education: Theory and practice. Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, U.S.C. §§ 101-476.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, U.S.C. §§ 108-446.
- Pazey, B. L. , Gevarter, C., Hamrick, J., & Rojeski, L. (2014). Review: Administrator views and knowledge of instructional practices for students with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 81253-1268. Doi:10.1016/j.rasd.2014.06.013
- Praisner, C. (2003). Attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 69 (2), 135-145.
- Segall, M.J. & Campbell, J.M. (2012). Factors related to education professionals' classroom practices for the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6(3), 1156-1167.
- Shogren, K.A., McCart, A.B., Lyon, K.J., & Sailor, W.S. (2015). All means all: Building knowledge for inclusive schoolwide transformation. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40(3), 173-191.
- Staats, C. (2016). Understanding implicit bias: What educators should know. *Education Digest*, 82(1), 29-43.

Weber, L., & Young, G. (2017). High school administrators and inclusion: A review of the literature. *Antistasis*, 7(1), 13-25.

Yell, M. (Winter 1995). Least restrictive environment, inclusion, and students with disabilities: A legal analysis. *Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 389-404. Retrieved from:
<http://sed.sagepub.com/content/28/4/389.abstract>

Zablotsky, B., Black, L., Maenner, M., Schieve, L., & Blumberg, S. (November 2015). Estimated prevalence of autism and other developmental disabilities following questionnaire change in the 2014 national health interview survey. *National Health Statistics Report*, 87, 1-10. Retrieved from:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr087.pdf>