

# Teacher Attitudes About Full Inclusion

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*The number of issues arise from a careful consideration of full inclusion. A total of 139 pre- and in-service elementary teachers responded to a 10-item survey regarding their opinions about full inclusion. No significant difference was found between the two groups on the total survey score, while significant differences between the groups were found for 4 out of the 10 survey items. Both groups did not support including moderately and severely handicapped children in regular classrooms and felt that the full model is not the best academic environment for non-exceptional children. If full inclusion is implemented, both school districts and teacher preparation programs will need to address the concerns teachers have about the issues involved.*

Inclusion is often mistakenly used synonymously for mainstreaming and is just as often mistakenly thought of to be the law of the land. "Some lump inclusion with mainstreaming.... Others believe that full inclusion means keeping all special needs children in the regular classroom... Others see the difference between inclusion and full inclusion as simply a difference in number: inclusion means some children; full inclusion means all children" (Smelter, Rasch, and Yudewitz, 1994,36). Full inclusion means that all children including the moderately and severely handicapped will be educated in the neighborhood school and in classes with non-exceptional children. It includes the abolishment of the concepts of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and continuum of services which are now required by law. Simply, it means there are no other options than the neighborhood school and the regular classroom for moderately and severely handicapped children. Because of its popularity, inclusion is a term used by parents, educators, and others to indicate a belief that handicapped children should be included to the degree possible in all aspects of society, especially in schools. The mildly handicapped and, in some cases, the moderately handicapped, are sometimes included in regular classrooms. However, in the majority of cases, moderately and severely handicapped children are educated in other settings.

The fundamental issue is really the concept of full inclusion. If the argument isn't to eliminate the continuum of services and include every handicapped child, regardless of the severity of the handicap, in the regular classroom, the argument could be essentially dismissed because mildly handicapped children are currently mainstreamed to the degree possible in regular education. Supporters of full inclusion tend to maintain moderately and severely

handicapped children can be educated as effectively in a regular classroom as they can in more restrictive environments. They also maintain that to exclude them from the regular class is a violation of their civil rights (Stainback, Stainback, & Stefanich, 1996; Snell, 1991). Greer and Greer (1995) characterize the position of those opposed to full inclusion by pointing out that the instructional needs of moderately and severely handicapped children are very different from those of the average child. Kauffman et.al. (1995) suggests that significant changes in teacher preparation are required before most regular classroom teachers can be minimally successful with children with emotional or behavioral problems, and simultaneously provide appropriate educational programs for nondisabled children. Opposition to full inclusion may have been most emphatically summarized by Smelter et.al. (1994) when they state, "Full inclusion, in which the regular education teacher must learn a monumental number of additional skills in order to deal with special and regular education students, may be the state-of-the-art education for the Nineties-That is the 1890's" (p. 38).

Many important issues emerge from a careful consideration of the realities of full inclusion including teacher preparation, the best school environment for non-disabled children, and the type of school environment that would be best for moderately and severely handicapped children. Full inclusion is being implemented in many school districts throughout the country. It appears incumbent on school districts and teacher preparation programs to sufficiently address the host of legitimate concerns teachers may have about full inclusion.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the opinions of pre-service and in-service elementary school teach-

ers regarding these issues. The teachers in the sample were provided with specific definitions of full inclusion, least restrictive environment (LRE), and continuum of services.

### Method

The study evaluated the opinions of 139 pre- and in-service elementary teachers on the issues of full inclusion. Descriptive statistics were calculated on the composite scores and the response values for each item in the questionnaire. The composite scores of the pre-service teachers were compared with these of the in-service teachers to determine if a difference existed between the two groups in the sample. Similarly appropriate analysis were employed to determine if there was a difference between the two groups on each of the 10 items evaluating teacher attitudes about full inclusion.

### Instrument

The instrument used in this study was developed by the investigator for the purpose of this study. It was a 10-item Likert format questionnaire which asked about the inclusion of moderately and severely handicapped children in regular elementary classes (i.e., Full Inclusion). They were also asked about the best learning environment for moderately and severely handicapped children, the impact of full inclusion on non-handicapped children, and the regular elementary teacher's ability to teach moderately and severely handicapped children (see Figure 1).

### Subjects

The subjects consisted of two samples identified as pre-service teachers ( $n = 72$ ) and in-service teachers ( $n = 67$ ). Pre-service teachers were in the final stages of teacher preparation programs. In-service teachers were in the final stages

Figure 1  
*Questionnaire Items*

1. Full inclusion is the best strategy for educating Moderately/Severely Handicapped children.
2. In the full inclusion model, non-exceptional children will learn as well as they would without Moderately/Severely Handicapped children in their regular classrooms.
3. In the full inclusion model, elementary teachers will be as successful educating non-exceptional children as they would be if Moderately/Severely Handicapped children were not in their classrooms.
4. In the full inclusion model, elementary teachers will be as successful educating non-exceptional children as they would be if Moderately/Severely Handicapped children were not included in their classrooms.
5. In the full inclusion model, Moderately/Severely Handicapped children will not unduly disrupt the learning of non-exceptional children with episodes of acting out or tantrums.
6. In the full inclusion model, Moderate/Severely Handicapped children will develop genuine friendships and non-school social relationships with non-exceptional children.
7. The continuum of services and the concept of the least restrictive environment should be done away with.
8. Moderately and severely handicapped children will learn as much and perhaps more in the regular classroom than they would in an alternate placement on the continuum of services.
9. Self-contained classes and special schools are not the best environment for facilitating learning of Moderately/Severely Handicapped children.
10. Self-contained classes and special schools are not the best environments for Moderate/Severely Handicapped children to develop appropriate social skills.

Table 1  
*Description of Combined Samples*

Gender	
Male	Female
11% of samples	89% of samples
Years of Teaching Experience	
Less than 1	52% of the samples
1-14 years	26% of in-service teachers
More than 14	22% of in-service teachers
Age	
Under 25	48% of the samples
35 and over	37% of the samples
Degrees Earned	
More than B.S.	38% of the samples
Less than B. S.	52% of the samples

Table 2  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Individual Items*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	1.906	.833
2	2.504	1.099
3	.900	.900
4	2.460	1.037
5	2.079	.893
6	3.525	.854
7	1.612	.665
8	2.446	.949
9	2.899	.980
10	3.417	1.006

of teacher preparation programs. In-service teachers were certified elementary school teachers who were teaching in grades K through 6. They were randomly selected by their school principals. Pre-service teachers were randomly selected by education professors in their colleges and universities. The two samples were selected from pre-service and in-service teachers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Montana, and Wisconsin. The two samples were combined simply for descriptive purposes. A majority (89%) of the two samples were women. The age of the two samples turned out to be bimodal (48% under 25 and 37% 35 and over). In terms of the highest degrees earned, 39% had earned more than a bachelor's degree while 52% had yet to earn the bachelor's degree. The group who had yet to earn a bachelor's degree were the pre-service teachers. The combined samples are described in Table 1.

#### Procedure

Subjects were asked to return the questionnaires by a specific date. For each of the ten items, means and standard deviations were derived for the two combined samples. In addition, frequency and percent data were obtained for each response value for each item. A *t* test was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the pre-service and in-service samples on the composite score, which is the sum of the response values of each subject. (The higher the sum, the more the subject favored full inclusion.) Next, a Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the pre-service sample with the in-service sample on each of the ten items. Finally, any potential differences were explored between the two samples within the variables of age, degree status, and years of teaching experience. The variable of age was regrouped into three groups (24 & under, 25-34, over 34) while teaching experiences was regrouped into

four groups (none, 1-6, 7-14, over 14). The variable of degree status included the four original groups (Pre B.S., B.S., B.S. +, Masters). These variables were examined with a Median Test.

## Results

For the ten items of the instrument, the mean scores of the combined samples ranged from 1.61 to 3.53 (see Table 2). The data show that items one (full inclusion is the best strategy for moderately and severely handicapped children) and seven (eliminate the continuum of services) produced mean scores which were below two, clearly indicating strong disagreement. The highest mean scores occurred on items six (3.53) and ten (3.41) which addressed the moderately and severely handicapped children's ability to develop friendships and their facility in the development of meaningful social skills respectively. The remainder of the mean scores fell between 2.0 and 2.9, placing them on the disagree end of the continuum. The mean score of none of the items reached a response value of 4.0 which would indicate agreement with the statement. On seven of the ten items, the percentage of the combined samples selecting disagree/strongly disagree was 56% or higher (56.1% to 92.8%). An examination of the strongly agree/agree option reveals that only items six (61.9%) and ten (59%) produced percentages in excess of 31% with the other items falling between 1.4% and 30.9% (see Table 3). The composite scores which were the sum of the response values for the ten items of the instrument produced a mean score of 25.04 and a standard deviation of 5.79. The composite scores of the pre-service sample were compared with the composite scores of the in-service sample by employing a *t*

Table 3  
*Percent of Responses with Recombined Response Values*

Item	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Not Sure	Strongly Agree Agree
1	85.6%	8.6%	5.7%
2	56.1%	20.1%	23.8%
3	66.2%	25.2%	8.6%
4	60.4%	20.1%	19.4%
5	74.8%	15.8%	9.4%
6	14.4%	23.7%	61.9%
7	92.8%	5.8%	1.4%
8	57.6%	29.5%	13.0%
9	39.6%	29.5%	30.9%
10	24.5%	16.5%	59.0%

Table 4  
Mann-Whitney U Results of Individual Items

Item	Z	Prob.
1	-.550	.580
2	-1.970	.049
3	-.284	.776
4	-2.410	.016
5	-.346	.729
6	-.743	.458
7	-1.770	.076
8	-.566	.571
9	-.757	.449
10	-2.121	.034

test. No significant differences were found ( $t = .92$ ,  $df = 137$ ) between the samples on this variable. Differences between the pre-service sample and the in-service sample were examined by conducting a Mann-Whitney U test which compared the two samples on the ten individual items of the instrument. Significant differences occurred only on items which addressed the learning of non-exceptional children and the teaching ability of elementary teachers in a full inclusion setting, and on an item which questioned the value of self-contained on the development of social skills in moderately and severely handicapped children. There were no significant differences between the groups on the other seven items (see Table 3). No significant differences were found between the two samples within the variables of age, teaching experience, and degree status.

### Discussion

A majority of the teachers did not believe that full inclusion is the best strategy for educating moderately and severely handicapped children, did not believe that elementary school teachers were currently prepared to teach moderately and severely handicapped children, and did not believe that non-exceptional children will learn as well in classes with moderately and severely handicapped children. They did believe that moderately and severely handicapped children would disrupt their classes and that the concepts of least restrictive environment and continuum of services should be maintained. An examination of the composite scores reinforced this conclusion that the teachers in this study did not support the concept of full inclusion. The mean composite score of 25.04 was clearly on the disagree end of the response value continuum. Only two items, which addressed the moderately and severely handicapped

children's ability to develop friendships and their facility in the development of meaningful social skills respectively, produced mean scores above 3.

Data from the Mann-Whitney U test on the ten items of the instrument showed that pre-service teachers believed more than in-service teachers that non-exceptional children will learn as well as they would if moderately and severely handicapped children were not in their classrooms. Pre-service teachers further believed more strongly than in-service teachers that elementary teachers would be as successful educating non-exceptional children as they would be if moderately and severely handicapped children were not included in their classrooms. Pre-service teachers also believed more strongly than in-service teachers that self-contained classes and special schools are not the best settings for moderately and severely handicapped children to develop appropriate social skills. It is possible that youthful enthusiasm or inexperience explains the pre-service teachers' higher levels of confidence in these areas. Regardless, it is important for teacher education programs to assure that pre-service teachers are exposed to a sufficiently thorough range of field experiences with handicapped children integrated into regular education settings. Concerning issues of inclusion, the real world of the classroom is an invaluable learning laboratory.

Analysis of the variables of age, degree status, and teaching experience, indicated that, for the subjects in the study, age, level of education, and years of teaching experience did not influence their attitudes about full inclusion.

Pre-service and in-service teachers did not support the concept of including moderately and severely handicapped children in regular classrooms. They also felt that the full model is not the best academic environment for non-exceptional children. The two samples appeared to be neu-

tral when asked to consider whether moderately and severely handicapped children would develop genuine friendships with non-exceptional peers in a fully included setting and whether a fully included setting is best for the development of social skills for moderately and severely handicapped children.

To the degree that full inclusion is implemented, it appears incumbent on school districts and teacher preparation programs to sufficiently address the host of legitimate concerns teachers have about full inclusion. If school districts move in the direction of full inclusion, it also seems critical that classroom teachers participate in the planning process and that they receive appropriate in-service training on this topic. Classroom teachers need to be participants in the planning process for including moderately and severely handicapped children in regular classrooms. If they are not provided a full range of in-service training when the decision has been made to include these children in the regular classroom, the strategy of full inclusion will be doomed to failure. The success of any inclusionary model will inevitably depend on the competence of the classroom teacher and that teacher's competence in managing the learning environment of all children in the class.

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