Chapter 2

Theory and Implementation of Inclusion: Barriers and Resources

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of students with special needs in general education settings has become an essential component of education. Including all students in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible is the law and an innate human right. However, research reveals that some teachers do not have positive attitudes toward including students with disabilities. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss findings from a study that uncovered factors behind teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion. The general findings and themes are discussed. The chapter concludes with a list of resources teachers can access without payment to help them better understand students with disabilities and ways in which the teacher can more easily develop an inclusive, inviting environment for all.

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INTRODUCTION

There are several federal laws, past and present, mandating the process of inclusion in public school settings, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 2015). These laws aim to prepare and provide opportunities for young people with disabilities to fulfill careers, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the American economy. In January of 2015 addressing the reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA, the then Education Secretary Arne Duncan asserted that not including all students in general education would “be accepting the morally and economically unsupportable notion that we have some kids to spare. We don’t.” Segregating some students “isn’t an option, [but] a civil right, a moral imperative” (Brenchley, 2015).

This “civil right” was first exhibited in the 1954 court case, Brown versus the Board of Education, which determined segregated classrooms were fundamentally unjust. Even though this U.S. Supreme Court decision was based on the segregation of race, this ruling applies to all educational practices including special education because segregation for any reason does not comply with the law establishing equal rights (Smith & Kozlesky, 2005). The process of desegregation was the first and most prominent step in an effort to ensure equality for all, and ultimately helped usher inclusion into the educational setting. Parallel to the African-Americans seeking more understanding, acceptance, and support from others to be included, students with disabilities need the same from their communities (Brandes & Crowson, 2008). Communities must increase understanding by providing awareness of inclusion programs and the inclusion process (Fletcher, Denton, & Francis, 2005). Parents need to be informed and trained on best practices to support their child’s development and growth at home and at school (Brandes & Crowson, 2008).

Legislation

Laws have aided the process of desegregation and are based on the principle that inclusion will be effectively implemented. The first federal law regarding education was the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA: United States, 1965). According to then President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, ESEA was founded as a civil rights’ law with “full educational opportunity” as “our first national goal” (United States, 1965). This law provided federal grants for supplies, education, and scholarships for low-income students. ESEA, which was reauthorized in 2015 under the name of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replacing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) title and revising content, continues the mandate of inclusion and builds upon it by guaranteeing that students will be successful in college and careers. ESSA protects students classified as disadvantaged and/or high-need, requires all students