A Three Dimensional Model for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

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Abstract:

The main thrust of preparation for inclusion has been to prepare the general education teacher as well as the student with exceptionalities for this educational initiative. Students without disabilities are often not the prevailing focus in these efforts. This model is an archetype that enables peers to understand, accept, and care for their classmates with exceptionalities. Students acquire knowledge about disabilities, skills are developed that help them interact appropriately, and activities are provided that influence more positive thoughts and behaviors among all students. A circle is used as a metaphor to explain the relationship of individuals in the class. The success of this model is that it ultimately enables students with disabilities to become an intricate part of the circle instead of its centerpiece.

Introduction

A Model for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

The move toward inclusion, mandated by legislation (Zirkel, 2002) as well as promoted by professionals and parents, is destined to be deficient in fulfilling its intended mission if peers are not prepared to understand, accept, and show respect and concern for their schoolmates with disabilities. Although many students may support inclusion, they are often ill prepared for the changes that are associated with this educational initiative (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2001). Inclusion of students with disabilities especially those considered to be severe, remains one of our most controversial practices in today's educational settings (Kluth, P., Villa, R. A. & Thousand, J. S., 2002; Heflin, L. J. & Bullock, L. M., 1999; Simpson, 1995). This debate continues despite research that corroborates inclusion's benefit for students with and without disabilities (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Nuff, and Caughney, 1992; Sharpe, York, and Dowdy, 1998; Staub and Peck, 1995). A number of inclusion efforts have focused on students with disabilities by preparing them for the environment in which inclusion is to be implemented. However, Katz and McClellan (1997) suggest that students with disabilities have had little experience in developing dyadic relationships with their general classroom classmates. Further, limited efforts have been made to prepare the inclusion environment for their non-disabled peers (Hilton and Ringlaben, 1998; Ringlaben and Dahmen-Jones, 1998). The fact that many students with and without disabilities are ill prepared for successful inclusion necessitates the development of a comprehensive model designed for the effective integration of students (Cooper, M. and Ringlaben, R., 1998; Campbell, C.R., Campbell, P. and Brady, M.P., 1998).

Educators are struggling to identify the necessary components that will enable their schools to have a smooth transition from segregating students with disabilities to serving them appropriately in the general educational program. One such program is entitled MAPS: A Plan for Including All Children in Schools. The Kansas State Board of Education designed this program to encourage family members, general and special educators, the student with disabilities and friends of the students to lay the foundation for a spirit of cooperation necessary for true inclusion. The program allows participants to learn from a variety of viewpoints through an information sharing time. The MAPS team raises questions about the student with disabilities' friends, the history; the aspirations of parents, educators, the relationship among students with and without disabilities; their needs; and descriptions of an ideal day

at school. Another such program with similar qualities is called Circle of Friends. This program is also about the development of people with disabilities and their friends who learn to enrich the lives of one another.

The programs, MAPS and Circle of Friends, are excellent examples of strategies designed to increase understanding and empower support groups to more effectively include those with disabilities. Such programs are necessary, but not sufficient. A more comprehensive model designed not only to increase knowledge, but also to affect dispositions (attitudes) and foster positive feelings must be employed to ensure the success of inclusion.

Components Of Learning

Lilian Katz (1989) described four components of learning about how children learn and develop. The four components include knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings. The same components are the basis for the model for the inclusion of students with disabilities described on the following pages. Too often, a model of inclusion is more focused on increasing knowledge and developing skills without the emphasis on student dispositions and feelings. A more holistic and comprehensive approach is needed to replace an over dependence on incidental learning, thus the use of the four components.

Knowledge.
Knowledge includes facts, information, and concepts that teach students what to do. With the Three Dimensional Model, students learn information about the student with disabilities. Students attending a general classroom need to prepare for the inclusion of a student with a disability by obtaining more knowledge about the disability. For instance, students' may learn that a classmate with Asperger's syndrome has difficulty socializing, dominates discussion, continues to adhere to the same topic during discussions, and in general, communicates poorly. The students' may learn that a classmate with an attention deficit hyperactive disorder has difficulty being still, makes decisions without regard to consequences, and becomes easily distracted.

Skills.
Skills are small units of action or specific behaviors that can be fairly easily observed and that occur in a relatively short period of time. While the increase in knowledge teaches students about the characteristics of classmates with disabilities, the development of skills teaches students how to communicate and interact more successfully with their peers with disabilities. In the case of the classmate with Asperger's syndrome, the students will need to develop skills designed to facilitate a two-way discussion. Students' knowledge of the characteristics is necessary, but not sufficient. Students may understand that a classmate with Asperger's syndrome struggles with effective communication without knowing how to interact successfully in spite of the understanding. Likewise, students without disabilities may become aware that a classmate with Down syndrome may need assistance in completing work through brief sequential steps. The small units of action or skills learned by the students are an integral part of the model.

Dispositions.
Dispositions are different from skills and knowledge. Katz (1989) suggests that dispositions can be thought of as habits of mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways. While knowledge is about understanding the characteristics of a disability and skills are about how to communicate and interact successfully regardless of the disability, the development of dispositions is more about the explanations for student behaviors based on their "belief systems. Curiosity, friendliness, being bossy,

bullying, and creativity are examples of dispositions. There is a difference, for instance, in having reading skills and having the desire or disposition to read. There is also a difference in classmates having the skill to communicate with a student with disabilities and having the will or disposition to communicate with the classmate. For example, students may develop the skills to communicate with a classmate who processes information very slowly or who stutters badly without demonstrating a desire or disposition to include the classmate during social activities or cooperative learning activities. A question such as, "What are your thoughts about peers being separated from the group?" is designed to encourage students to think more seriously about the inclusion of classmates alienated because of their differences and/or lack of abilities.

Feelings.

Feelings are subjective emotional states that can be considered both innate and learned but are based upon an individual's thoughts or dispositions. Student's self-oriented feelings may include feeling confident, secure, lonely, competent, inferior, and connected. Student's other-oriented feelings may include the feeling of concern, compassion, and empathy toward another classmate or classmates. They may feel uneasy near a classmate with a particular physical disability, especially where there may be a loss of limb. However, an emphasis on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the student with the physical disability can more easily result in a replacement of the uneasiness with more positive feelings. The students will be more inclined to demonstrate friendship and caring once the uneasiness diminishes. In this model, feelings are an integral part of the preparation of students for inclusion. The positive feelings resulting from the increase in understanding, the development of skills, and the development of dispositions contribute to the students' propensity to show caring, especially to classmates' whose disabilities may alienate and separate them from peers. Through this emphasis on knowledge building, skill enhancement, and fostering positive dispositions, students' without disabilities learn more positive thoughts and feelings about students' with disabilities and become more inclined to take more positive action.

Katz (1989) gives further insight into how children learn by outlining ways children acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions. According to Katz, knowledge can be acquired from explanations, study, and repetition. Skills can be learned from instruction, direction, coaching, practice, and drill. Strategies for teaching dispositions such as curiosity, empathy, cooperation, risk-taking, friendliness, persistence, and helpfulness are quite different from increasing knowledge and teaching skills. Katz suggests that dispositions cannot be learned through instruction, drill, lectures, or workbooks. She recommends that people learn dispositions from being around individuals demonstrating the dispositions, the reinforcement of dispositions once demonstrated, and the exhortation by others to demonstrate the dispositions.

A '3-D' Model for Preparing Children for Inclusion

The major focus of this model is to create an environment within the classroom in which students show caring to those classmates often alienated and separated from the group. A primary outcome is the successful inclusion of students' with disabilities who may be alienated or separated because of their differences or lack of abilities. Other outcomes include the improvement of the relationship among all students as well as the realization that regardless of ability status or personal characteristics students can contribute to the health and welfare of one another. Attention to the four components of learning, knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings, are essential to the implementation of this model. The components are incorporated into a three-phase instructional sequence of activities beginning with the

development of a disposition for caring. Following this instructional sequence on dispositions, discussions focus on students' understanding of a particular disability, especially when the disability contributes to the alienation and separation among classmates. Students are taught skills for better communicating and interacting with classmates alienated because of their differences or lack of abilities. More positive feelings are expected to emerge among students with and without disabilities following the implementation of the model activities.

Phase 1-D.
The objective of phase one is to encourage students' dispositions of friendliness and caring. The development of the disposition toward friendliness and caring is the cornerstone of the implementation process. Of course, addressing positive feelings during this instructional sequence is an integral part of fostering empathic dispositions. Students can learn knowledge and develop skills more effectively with feelings of concern and dispositions of caring toward students with disabilities. Again, consider the example about reading. Students are more prone to read material that they care about just as they are more prone to communicate with classmates they care about.

Phase 2-D.
Following the instructional sequence of activities about students' dispositions and feelings, the students are exposed to activities designed to help them better understand those differences that tend to alienate and separate classmates from one another. Salend (1994) found that attitudes relate to what students' know and have experienced. Even though it may not always be the case, students with particular social, mental, and/or physical differences are at risk for alienation. An increase in knowledge about some classmates' likelihood of alienation can help alleviate some of this disconnection among peers, especially when students' have the disposition to care about those who are alienated.

Phase 3-D.
Skill development becomes the final phase of intervention. It is likely that many students' lack the skill to interact or communicate effectively with the classmates who have particular disabilities prone to alienate or separate them from their peers. Students may have the disposition to care for classmates alienated and separated from the group. They may understand the reasons for the alienation and separation. However, this caring and understanding may not naturally translate into their ability to effectively communicate and interact. For instance, many students with particular differences like Aspergers' syndrome display behaviors that tend to strain relationships and inhibit effective dialogue. Consequently, students need to learn skills that facilitate communication.

A Reciprocal Relationship.
During the implementation of the inclusion model, the major thrust of conversation is often about the support and benefit directed from students and adults without disabilities to the students with disabilities. This circle of friends' mentality tends to signify that students with disabilities are recipients of support and benefit without reciprocating support and benefit to those without disabilities. If a circle is used as a metaphor to explain the relational ties among students with and without disabilities, the students' with disabilities should be considered as part of the circle rather than the centerpiece. This reciprocity is an important part of the model for inclusion since all students are given credit for enriching the lives of one another.

The Application of the 3-D Model

The model developer was requested to prepare students attending a southeastern Texas school district for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom. School administrators and teachers found many of those students were alienated and separated from the group. The students had very little sense of belonging. Over a period of several weeks, group discussions were conducted with the students, classroom teachers, the school principal, teacher assistants, and parents. Students were encouraged to embrace and demonstrate a disposition to care about others, with or without disabilities. The emphasis on the disposition to care was far better than telling students to care. By imposing a policy to include all students in the group, the students would become technicians of friendship rather than real friends. Once students began developing their dispositions for caring, their desire to include students with disabilities would become increasingly evident. Given that peer influence is a factor in student behaviors, an emphasis was placed on the disposition of caring among all students. Consequently, the program prepared the entire class to be more caring and then introduce the idea about the caring for students alienated, separated, and isolated from the group. During Phase 1-D, four activities were presented to affect the students' dispositions. The activities included discussions about the connection between caring and heroism, positive and negative peer pressure, a student's need to belong, and the demonstration of good and bad deeds. Following the four activities, students began to identify and discuss particular peers who were alienated and separated from their classroom and from their school group. This initiated the Phase 2-D of the model in which students were provided knowledge about other peers with particular disabilities that tended to alienate and separate them. Once they better understood the students at risk for alienation, Phase 3-D commenced with the students being taught skills designed to develop more effective interactions and communication. It was during the third phase that the students with and without disabilities began supporting and benefiting one another more directly.

Phase 1-D/Activity One: Encouraging Heroism Through Caring

The primary focus of this activity was to create the disposition to care. This was done by introducing the concept, hero, as a stimulus for the demonstration of caring. Too often, students limit the term heroes to movie stars, great athletes, and those who save others' life. While most students dream of being a hero, very few expect themselves to reach such lofty heights, especially at such an early age. This activity broadened students' definition of heroes, and increased the desire among students to demonstrate heroic acts through caring for one another regardless of differences that often alienate, separate, and isolate.

At the beginning of the activity, students were asked to define hero. Typically, students defined hero according to the aforementioned limitations. When it was suggested that one of the attributes of a hero is someone who shows caring, students began to express with enthusiasm examples of heroic demonstrations. Thus, the disposition to demonstrate caring was clearly introduced and reinforced. As students began identifying examples of caring, they began to think about those who lacked the proper care among the student body. The students began to recognize those schoolmates who needed heroes. Once this realization emerged, the students' sensitivity for those alienated and separated from the group became more evident.

Phase 1-D/Activity Two: Encouraging Leadership and Risk-Taking Through Positive Peer Influence

The primary focus of this activity was to encourage leadership and risk-taking. Often, students refuse to

care because of negative peer pressure. Many students would exhibit caring more often if it were not for other classmates who tease, harass, and ridicule. Weisman (1986) suggested that students would be more inclined to communicate with students with disabilities except for negative peer influence. Gleason (1991) concurred by stating that prejudice, discrimination, and lowered expectations occur when other students adversely affect their classmates who communicate with students with disabilities. Subsequently, an activity designed to promote positive peer pressure and anticipate the negative peer pressure became important.

At the beginning of this activity, students reviewed and discussed ways they could demonstrate heroic behavior. They were asked to identify examples of caring based on their learning from Activity One. Students were encouraged to imagine and discuss the thoughts and feelings associated with acts of caring directed toward others and selves. A discussion followed about the results of such caring acts. In some instances, students described positive consequences. In other instances, the students described negative consequences. For instance, students explained that the demonstration of caring toward peers have resulted in ridicule and alienation. The students were encouraged to discuss their thoughts and feelings about this consequence. Students were encouraged to accept the challenge to demonstrate caring regardless of being criticized by others. The disposition of leadership and risk-taking were associated with this action. This discussion became preparation for future expectations - to care about others regardless of differences and/or inabilities. By the conclusion of the second activity, students begin to express greater concern for classmates and express a greater propensity to resist those who ridiculed them for caring.

Phase 1-D/Activity Three: Encouraging a Sense of Belonging Among All Classmates

The primary focus of this activity was to teach the students about the sense of belonging. The sense of belonging has long been considered an important and basic need of students (Glasser, 1990; Dreikurs, 1968; and Albert, 1996). Students are more prone to include others when they recognize belonging as a basic need. They become more empathic to others once they identify and assume the role of those being excluded. This identification was encouraged through discussions and role-play.
At the beginning of the activity, students discussed their needs. They began with basic needs, such as food, shelter, the sun, air, and parents. The need to belong or to have friends was not something considered as a basic need. Once the need to belong was introduced, the students discussed thoughts and feelings associated with personal separation, isolation, and alienation from their peer group. The students also discussed reasons for the separation, alienation, and lack of belonging. The students explained that the lack of belonging often occurred as a result of their classmates' differences and lack of abilities. Following the discussion on the explanations of alienation and separation among peers, the students discussed strategies for including classmates. Rather than limiting their friendship connections, students began to demonstrate new ways to include those who normally did not belong. This was more easily accomplished as students learned to resist negative peer pressure, promote positive peer pressure, and caring as an act of heroism, discussed in Activities One and Two.

Phase 1-D/ Activity Four: Encouraging Good Deeds

The primary focus of this activity was to encourage students to demonstrate good deeds and discriminate between good and bad deeds observed within the school environment. Too often, educators become preoccupied with antisocial behaviors or bad deeds rather than focusing more on pro-social behaviors. This is usually because the bad deeds create the most disruption and gain the most attention. Consequently, it is the bad deeds that become reinforced while the pro-social behaviors or

good deeds go unnoticed. This particular activity encouraged students to exercise the dispositions of leadership, risk-taking, and caring. Teachers were instructed to label the demonstrations of pro-social behaviors or good deeds and reinforce appropriate actions.

At the beginning of this activity, students made a list of bad and good deeds demonstrated toward others. Discussions ensued about alienating classmates, limiting friendships, excluding classmates because of their differences or lack of abilities and differences, and showing too little caring for others. Students were encouraged to document times when caring occurred among students with and without disabilities. This documentation reinforced the attention paid to more appropriate behaviors.

Phase 2-D/Activity Five: Encouraging Understanding of Specific Differences Among Students

The fifth activity was designed to increase students' understanding of particular students with disabilities whose differences alienate and separate them from the group. The discussion revolved around those schoolmates who lacked a sense of belonging. Once students develop the disposition to care, they more quickly identify schoolmates who appear alienated and separated. Typically, the students find that differences and inabilities tend to alienate and separate them from their schoolmates. This understanding increases acceptances among students toward their schoolmates. Examples of differences that may alienate and separate students include a variety of physical, social, mental, and emotional disabilities as well as characteristics such as body type, facial appearance, gait, voice quality, and the like. Students may have previously questioned the unique physical characteristics of a child with Down syndrome, the social interactions of a peer with autism, or the communication skills of an individual with a hearing impairment. They learn that differences and abilities do not have to interfere with the development of healthy relationships.

Phase 3-D/Activity Six: Encouraging the Enhancement of Skills Designed to Increase Effective Relating/Communicating

The sixth activity was designed to develop skills necessary for successful communication and interaction. Students with and without disabilities were taught how to relate and communicate effectively toward one another. There were cases where students with and without disabilities developed good relationships once the disposition to care emerged and an understanding about differences and abilities that alienate and separate students became more apparent. In other instances, the development of dispositions and the acquisition of understanding was not enough. In those cases, the students were taught how to relate and communicative more effectively. For example, the student with Asperger's syndrome was taught how to stop and listen by watching for visual cues presented by students without Asperger's syndrome. The latter students learned a variety of techniques necessary to foster communication. Likewise, students who processed information more rapidly learn to slow their pace for classmates who processed information more slowly. Those techniques did much to enrich the communication among all students and thus facilitate acceptance and a sense of belonging.

Conclusions

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom will continue to be controversial and debatable. This is especially true for those who treat inclusion as a product or outcome rather than a process. The "Three Dimensional" model of inclusion, with it's focus on preparing

the students without disabilities to include their peers with disabilities, provides a framework designed to give each a better opportunity to understand and accept one another.

A model for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom should be deliberate and comprehensive. Time must be spent in preparing students to understand and accept others through knowledge of differences and similarities, developing skills needed for caring, and providing activities that aid in the formation of positive dispositions. We cannot always expect students to care without guidance. We cannot always expect students to take the initiative to befriend those alienated and separated from the group (Hemmeter, M. L., 2000).

However, we can expect students with and without disabilities to relate and communicate more effectively once they are taught the disposition to care for those who lack a sense of belonging among the peer group. This way, students learn to go through the motion with emotion. The disposition of caring becomes the catalyst for all students to "reach out" and feel the fact that some students within the school environment are alienated, separated, and isolated from the group and that the elimination of alienation become a most important superordinate goal within the school environment.

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