INCLUSIVE vs. PULLOUT PROGRAMS

Inclusion vs. Pullout Programs—Which Method is More Effective?

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November 21, 2002
The topic of inclusion classrooms versus pullout programs has been one of the most controversial topics that educators and administrators alike have been struggling to answer for the past decade. Professionals exude great effort in performing multiple case studies as well as writing countless journal articles that try to get to the bottom of this highly debated issue. This paper has been written in hope of shedding some light on the differences between inclusion and pullout programs in the eyes of teachers and students alike. While the results of the journal articles and case studies that have been reviewed may be different, the question, Inclusion or Pullout-Which method is more effective?, is always the same.

The purpose of the first journal article that I found, *Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom: Research-Based Practices*, "was to review the literature to identify pedagogically sound and empirically grounded reading approaches that can be used with general and special education students to meet the diverse needs of students in an inclusive classroom setting" (Schmidt, pg. 130).

This article related to inclusion classrooms and the previous articles read in that it focused on strategies for reading instruction in the inclusion classroom. This article also related back to the previous articles that I had read because it gave examples of how students with documented learning disabilities were successful in an inclusion classroom environment. *Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom* can also be related to the second article that I read, *Inclusion by Design*, because they both speak of teacher beliefs as well as collaboration as being an important aspect to the success rate of students and by meeting students’ needs, especially those with learning disabilities, the rate of school failure decreased dramatically.

This article was a review of several case studies in which the intent was to determine the effectiveness of an inclusion classroom setting and its impact on a student’s reading ability. Schmidt et al found, “a strong correlation between poor reading
ability and school failure” (Schmidt, pg. 130) in which students that were struggling in the area of reading were the students with learning disabilities. For purposes of this case study Schmidt et al began to search about reading strategies in an inclusive setting that concentrated on students with high-incidence disabilities, but they determined that since this was a very broad topic, they narrowed the range of students to those with learning disabilities.

It has been specifically identified according to Schmidt et al and by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that was reauthorized in 1997 that the most appropriate placement for students, with and without disabilities, is in the general education classroom setting. Also, it has been noted that almost half the students that participate full time in a general education classroom have been diagnosed as having a learning disability. Studies show that students with learning disabilities struggle in the areas of “acquiring the developmental skills related to reading, including orthographic and phonological awareness” (Schmidt, pg. 131) as well as development of their metacognitive skills. Also, students with learning disabilities are deficient in reading strategies such as, “understanding how and when to use strategies to facilitate comprehension and learning” (Schmidt, pg. 131). Once however, students are taught certain strategies that coincide with metacognitive strategies and facets of what it means to be a good reader, their performance improves extensively.

One of the main points that Schmidt et al are trying to raise in this case review is that perhaps the fault in which students with learning disabilities are failing in a general education classroom are not the fault of the students, but rather the way that the reading strategies are implemented in the classroom based on two important contextual factors. These factors include teacher beliefs and collaboration between teachers and as well as between teachers and students. The beliefs of the teacher regarding the use of reading strategies greatly influence their students with learning disabilities in how they are
supported in the general education classroom. It is believed that if teachers are willing to
modify their lesson content to meet the needs of all of their students, then students with
and without learning disabilities will be more likely to be successful in the area of reading
and in the future, be more successful in school. As it stands today, it is not that all
teachers are unwilling to modify the content of their lessons, but rather, some teachers
feel that, “they lack the specific knowledge, skills and continuing support to ensure its
effectiveness [of their students’ success in reading and in school in general]” (Schmidt,
pg. 136). Schmidt et al feel that, “teachers today need a continuum of teaching
interventions and specialized strategies, as well as support to effectively implement them
[(the strategies)] in their classroom” (pg. 136). Also, teachers that are enthusiastic about
reading and take their students needs into consideration will have a higher success rate
of improving the reading ability of their students with learning disabilities.

The second contextual factor that plays an important role in the success rate of
students with learning disabilities and reading instruction in an inclusion setting is
collaboration between teachers and students. Because of the increasing number of
students as classified with learning disabilities goes up each year, teachers are faced
with an enormous responsibility for the “education and remediation for a variety of
learner needs on a daily basis” (Schmidt, pg. 136) and are often overwhelmed and have
feelings of helplessness. In order to combat these feelings of inability to meet all of their
students’ needs, teachers and students alike would greatly benefit if their teachers
received collaboration training. The training consists of “teachers [being] engage[d] in a
methodical and collaboratively reflective process for designing and adapting lessons to
meet the needs of special education students” (Schmidt, pg. 137). Teachers that are
given time, that is used effectively, to meet with colleagues can then “design lessons that
accommodate a wide range of students an improve student participation and
performance” (Schmidt, pg. 137). Teachers not only need support from each other but
also they need support from the administration to be given sufficient time to meet and
design these lessons. Another important aspect to collaboration is between teachers and
students. Teachers that include their students in all areas of the classroom content can
“effectively increase quality and quantity of academic success for students with
disabilities” (Schmidt, pg. 137). Student collaboration has two forms that yield the
highest success rates, cooperative learning and peer tutoring. Both of these include
students helping other students in order to learn and retain the necessary material.

As a result of this review study, it has been determined that students with
disabilities perform better and are most successful when they are presented with
metacognitive strategy training using collaborative instructional practices. Also, when the
reading curricula/instruction is multifaceted rather than concentrating on single strategies
students with learning disabilities are more successful. Further, studies have concluded
that “teaching students to become active strategic readers can help remediate the
learning difficulties experienced by struggling readers. As well as collaborative contexts
for teachers and students appear to support improved academic outcomes for all
students” (Schmidt, pg. 138). In addition to these conclusions, Schmidt et al questions if
whether student failure is not a result of where students with disabilities are taught, but
rather how. They believe that if students are aware of the standards they are to be held
to and focus on teaching techniques that help these students stay on pace with the
demands of a general education curriculum the success rate will increase (Schmidt, pg.
138).

The second article I read, *Are Pullout Programs Sabotaging Classroom Community in our Elementary Schools*, voiced a teacher’s concern for whether or not pullout programs are as beneficial as previously thought. This article can be related to
the first article I read that compared statistical data between students with learning
disabilities in inclusion classrooms and in pullout programs. Although this article does
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not give numerical data, it shows that the guidelines for pullout programs should be reevaluated and these programs should be examined thoroughly as to whether they are effective to students with learning disabilities. This article also goes on to show that students with learning disabilities perform better in an inclusion classroom environment not only in the areas they are deficient in, but also in classroom camaraderie.

It has been noted that there has been an increasing number of students “assessed, labeled, and declared eligible for pullout programs which require them to leave the home classroom and travel to a smaller room to receive specialized training” (Brandts, pg. 9). Pullout programs are often assumed to be completely effective for the student however they are seldom subjected to scrutiny that will determine ultimate effectiveness.

Many teachers that have students in their classroom that require pullout programs are finding it increasingly difficult to find times for the students to leave so that they do not miss important events in the classroom. Brandts was becoming gradually more concerned with the fact that many of her students “were being deprived of marked periods of time to practice ways to be members of a learning community” (Brandts, pg. 9). It was easier to coordinate times for students to leave for their pullout programs ten years ago because then reading instruction had scheduled beginning and ending times. However, it is more difficult now because reading is integrated throughout the curriculum, all day, and in all content areas. Subjects often overlap to create a seamless learning environment.

In addition to students missing crucial lessons while they are pulled out, they also miss planned and unplanned events that take place in the classroom community that help shape their think about learning and provide connections to the outside world. Also, by having students continually leave and return to class, “the rhythm of the classroom culture becomes fragmented” (Brandts, pg 10) and teachers struggle to maintain a
sense of classroom community that promotes learning for all students. Brandts also believes that a student’s continuity of thought becomes disrupted when constantly moving between classrooms as well as the instruction styles and strategies that are being implemented. In addition to the rhythm of the classroom being disrupted, the interactions students in the pullout programs have with other students in the class begin to break down if the purpose behind pullout programs is not explained. For example, Brandts admits this as the reason why the athletes of the class refused to play with some of the pullout students, as well as some students referring to the pullout students as “the dumb guys” (Brandts, pg. 12). Brandts realizes now that an explanation needs to be given to all the students as to why some students have to participate in pullout programs.

Brandts has documented that students that participate in pullout programs lose about 15 minutes for each individual program that are scheduled for. This time includes the student preparing to leave, leaving, and returning to the classroom. Also, upon returning to the classroom, students are often met with frustration because they do not know what is going on and even if they are told what assignment the rest of the class is working on, they do not understand what to do. Students often show a sense of insecurity when returning to the classroom when a lesson is in progress and they often exhibit physical signs when insecure. For example, Brandts noticed that students most often “position themselves on the outside of the group” (Brandts, pg. 11) and the students often sat together either in the back row if the class had gathered on the rug, or they sat at back or side tables if the class was still at their desks (Brandts, pg. 12). After talking with two of her students that were pulled out for reading, she realized that the students did not understand why they were being pulled out. They were struggling to make connections between what they did in the reading pullout class and “real reading” (Brandts, pg. 12).
Brandts is fully advocating that rather than having pullout programs in which the students leave their home classroom, have the specialized teachers come and participate in a pull-aside program in which the student is given specialized help in the back of the classroom. By implementing this program into her classroom, one of her students has increased his reading level growth by two years in a matter of months.

“Gathered evidence has suggested to [Brandts] that children progress just as rapidly, and far more comfortably, when they remain in the classroom, so long as they need and the teacher are given the support they need from the principal, specialists, fellow teachers, and parents” (Brandts, pgs. 13 & 15).

Brandts also believes that if pull-aside programs are not possible, there are several options that need to be taken into consideration. First, according to the article, it is believed that “remedial instruction time can and should be reconfigured so that the learner remains with the community of the classroom. Second, specialists and teachers must align their approach to teaching reading based on assessment of the child’ needs “(Brandts, pg. 15).

The third article I read, *Inclusion or Pull Out: Which Do Students Prefer?*, was a case study that was designed to determine which setting students preferred. This study tested a sample of students both with and without learning disabilities between fourth grade and sixth grade who had spent at least one year “participating in pull-out and inclusion special education service delivery models” (Klingner, pg. 149). Included in this sample were a student who was considered to be limited English proficiency and one student that was visually impaired. The students were selected based on two criteria:

“Was this student representative of other students in the same over category? Did this student provide “rich” explanations for responding a particular way, thus Contributing to a descriptive and revealing portrayal?” (Klingner, pg. 150).

The students were then asked a series of questions, 12 in total. The questions served as the instrument used to assess the students’ preference for either pullout programs or inclusion programs. Questions one through four are used to note the
students’ perceptions as to why the LD teacher was in the classroom (none of the students were told that the LD teacher was a special education teacher). Questions five through seven inquired that the students choose between inclusion and pullout models considering various factors. Questions eight and nine were general indicators of students’ feelings to their current placement. Finally, questions ten through twelve questions grouping configurations and interaction patterns in the classroom (Klingner, pg. 151). Two of the most interesting and thought provocative questions were five and six. These questions asked “Which way do you like best, when kids who need extra help leave the classroom to get special help (pull-out), or when they stay and get extra help in your classroom (inclusion)?” and “Which way helps kids learn better?”

The results of this particular study show that the majority of the students tested, with and without LD, preferred pullouts over inclusion. The students said that more help was available, the work they were given was easier, and the classroom was quieter once the students with LD left and this enabled the students who did not leave to concentrate better. The students that preferred inclusion classrooms over pullouts however said that in some cases they were able to get enough help in the general education classroom, they do not miss anything, no time is wasted, the research teacher may not know what area a particular student needs help in, all of the students are together, the students learn more because of the harder work that is given to them and also because higher expectations are set, the rest of the class is there to help, and there are two teachers present. “Students [also] believed that learning was stressed in their inclusion classrooms, and that plenty of help was available from teachers and peers to support them” (Klingner, pg. 155). Also, a student mentioned that the work was harder in a general education classroom, and this can be interpreted that students who participate in pullouts are not being challenged enough and are possibly not working up to their ability.
Finally, according to Klingner et al, even though the majority of the sample of students tested preferred pullouts to inclusion, Klingner et al believes that students should be placed individually according to their own unique needs and that educators must remember that “time and time again, the integration of students with LD into regular education classrooms has worked for some, but not for others” (Klingner, pg. 156).

In relation to the articles read for step one and step two of the Inquiry project, I felt that these three articles were relevant because they all raised similar concerns as to whether inclusion classrooms were better than pullout programs and vice versa. Also, all three articles included ideas that were consistent and dominant in regards to the previous three articles I had read. For example, the first article related to inclusion classrooms and the previous articles read in that it focused on strategies for reading instruction in the inclusion classroom. This article also related back to the previous articles that I had read because it gave examples of how students with documented learning disabilities were successful in an inclusion classroom environment. Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom can also be related to the second article that I read, Inclusion by Design, because they both speak of teacher beliefs as well as collaboration as being an important aspect to the success rate of students and by meeting students’ needs, especially those with learning disabilities, the rate of school failure decreased dramatically. The second article can be related to the first article that I read, Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive and Pullout Programs, in that it compared statistical data between students with learning disabilities in inclusion classrooms and in pullout programs. Although this article does not give numerical data, it shows that the guidelines for pullout programs should be reevaluated and these programs should be examined thoroughly as to whether they are effective to students with learning disabilities. This article also goes on to show that students with learning disabilities perform better in an inclusion classroom environment not only in the
areas they are deficient in, but also in classroom camaraderie. The third article I read, *Inclusion or Pullout: Which Do Students Prefer?*, can be related to *Are Pullout Programs Sabotaging Classroom Community in our Elementary Schools* as well as *Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive and Pullout Programs* because all three articles raised concerns regarding pullout programs. *Inclusion or Pullout* and *Outcomes* however gave more statistical and numerical data that contributed to the results of the study. The results were different for each of the case studies because there were two different age groups/grade levels tested and as well as the content areas that the case studies looked. One further difference was that *Inclusion or Pullout* directly asked the students being tested, ‘which do you like best? Inclusion or pullout?’ and the students answered accordingly to their own feelings and did not necessarily take into account which setting would be most appropriate for their needs. Despite these differences, both case studies provided excellent data that supported both sides of the ongoing argument: Inclusion or Pullout-Which method is more effective?

There were many aspects in all six articles that coincide with topics in *Educational Psychology* by Anita Woolfolk. For example, in Woolfolk, it was concluded that it is a “combination of good teach practices and sensitivity to all your students” (Woolfolk, pg. 502) that enables teachers to be effective when working with students with learning disabilities. Also, Woolfolk goes on to say that “students with disabilities need to learn the academic material, and they need to be full participants in the day-to-day life of the classroom” (Woolfolk, pg. 502). She then goes on to give several guidelines that will help teachers be effective in both of these areas. For example, it is suggested that teachers use time efficiently, avoid discipline problems, and plan carefully; ask questions at the right level of difficulty; as well as give supportive, positive feedback to the students. Also, in order to accomplish the second goal, it is suggested that teachers avoid resegregating the students into groups according to who has
disabilities and who does not; advocate for pull-aside programs, rather than pullout programs in order to try to reintegrate the students with special needs; display good behavior and language toward students with special needs; teach about differences in learning abilities; and have students work together in cooperative groups (Woolfolk, pgs. 502-503).

In relation to the second goal in particular, several of the articles were similar to what Woolfolk suggests especially *Are Pullout Programs Sabotaging Classrooms* and *Inclusion or Pull Out*. In the first article mentioned, Brandts is also an advocate of pull-aside programs because not only does it keep the students in the classroom so they are not missing any of the content being taught while they are getting individualized help, but it will eventually help to reintegrate the students back into the general education classroom setting. Also, this article and the book coincide with the thought of explaining to the entire class about learning differences so that the students with learning disabilities will not feel isolated or get made fun of. The book also explains what resource rooms are and the purpose of them, what collaborative consultation is, as well as cooperative teaching. All of these topics are synonymous with *Inclusion or Pullout* as well as *Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom* because resource rooms are discussed and how they are utilized. Also, collaboration and cooperative learning/teaching are part of the contextual factors that Schmidt et al determined to be in school success for students with learning disabilities.

Further, in *Reading Instruction in the Inclusion Classroom*, Schmidt et al claim that Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism is consistent with cooperative learning. Vygotsky claims that students are able to learn and internalize new information “by participating in a broad range of activities with others [in which] the outcomes [are] produced by working together” (Woolfolk, pg. 330). This is very similar to cooperative learning in that in this situation, students with and without learning disabilities are in
groups, there is student-student interaction over the lesson content material, and the reward for this is knowing that all of the students have learned the material (Schmidt, pg. 137). This theory can also be related to *Are Pullout Programs Sabotaging Classroom Community in our Elementary Schools?* in that if students are constantly leaving the classroom in order to receive individualized help, they will be missing out on many of the important events that take place which help to shape their knowledge of the world and culture as well as acquiring new strategies for implementing this knowledge.
WORKS CITED


