

The Philosophy of Inclusion: Roadblocks and Remedies for the Teacher and the Teacher Educator

CONNIE TITONE
Villanova University

ABSTRACT: This article reports the conclusions of a study that examined the knowledge teachers need for successful implementation of inclusion in K-12 schools. Focus groups comprised of individuals experienced with inclusion were convened to discuss what prospective teachers need to know or be able to do to be successful in inclusive settings. The data highlight the importance of adequate teacher preparation, effective communication, and collaboration skills among educational professionals and parents. The recommendations that emerge from the study provide suggestions for enhancing adaptations to curriculum and pedagogy, as well as changes in courses and field experiences in preservice teacher education.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article rapporte les conclusions d'une étude menée sur les besoins que les professeurs ressentent pour apprendre à réussir la mise en place d'un système d'intégration dans les classes 12 à l'école. Des groupes témoins constitués d'individus, familiers de l'intégration, ont été réunis pour discuter de ce que les futurs professeurs ont besoin de savoir ou de faire pour réussir une mise en place complète. Les données mettent l'accent sur le fait qu'il est important pour le professeur d'avoir une préparation appropriée, sur l'efficacité de la communication et sur l'échange de compétences à l'intérieur du corps enseignant aussi bien que chez les parents. Les recommandations qui en ressortent offrent des suggestions au programme d'enseignement et à la pédagogie afin de renforcer l'adaptation, aussi bien que de renforcer les changements qui peuvent survenir dans les cours et de renforcer l'expérience sur le terrain qui a été enseignée précédemment au professeur.

Inclusion is a philosophy that is meant to produce settings in which all students in a K-12 school or classroom, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, are a full part of the learning community and progress together in their academic endeavors. Inclusion has been a global trend

for several decades, and has strongly influenced the direction of special education in countries as diverse as Canada, India, South Africa, Ireland, and New Zealand (Timmons, 2002), where new initiatives and laws have had a far-reaching impact. In North America, an innovative regular education initiative that advocated bringing special and general education students together for academic instruction (Edmunds, 2003) restructured the way students were taught in both Canada and the United States. With the passage of the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States, the mandate for serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings became clearer than ever. In inclusive settings, a teacher's responsibility not only includes demonstrating respect for the diversity of every member of the human family, but also involves working continually to improve his or her own professional abilities in order to succeed at teaching all students. Although the laws define the schools' duty to provide an effective inclusive environment, many questions remain about how best to implement it in all schools.

For almost a decade, a major barrier to successful inclusion has been reported in the research literature, that is, the lack of effective preparation for both general education and special education teachers (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Edmunds, 2003; Hinders, 1995; Mercer, Lane, Jordan, Allsopp, & Eisele, 1996; Pugach & Warger, 1996; Reber, Marshak, & Glor-Scheib, 1995; Shade & Stewart, 2001; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995; Timmons, 2002; Welch, 1996). One recent Canadian study notes that additional research is needed to further define the characteristics of successful inclusion and to inform changes in teacher education (Edmunds, 2003). With this problem in mind, a qualitative study was conducted to further our knowledge about the specifics of how teacher education might be transformed in order to reduce the impediments to inclusion. This paper will primarily offer a discussion on the specific knowledge and skills that general education teachers need in order to improve their chances of making inclusion efficacious. It will also synthesize the results of the study and make specific recommendations to create more consistently useful program reforms for preservice teacher education. To put the results in the context of previous research and expert opinion, a brief review of the literature on the topics of roadblocks to inclusion, remedies to the roadblocks, and teacher education reform that will encourage successfully inclusive teaching is warranted.

Literature Review

Roadblocks to Inclusion

It is clear from the literature that many roadblocks to inclusion stubbornly persist, and these inhibit the realization of effective inclusion in all classrooms today. For example, prior to the passage of the IDEA amendments, it had been reported that general education teachers held misconceptions about students with disabilities that were often based on fears and misunderstandings stemming from a lack of knowledge and prior experience working with individuals with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Ferguson & Ginevra, 1996; Hinders, 1995). During that time, many teachers concluded that students placed in special education were so different from regular students that they not only might learn differently or require certain accommodations to assist in their learning, but also that the teacher could not interact with these children in the same ways they did with other children (Hinders, 1995; Mercer et al., 1996; Pugach & Warger, 1996; Taylor, 1994). In fact, Hinders (1995) concluded, with regard to teacher efficacy, that the general education teacher's view of his or her own inexperience with children who have disabilities outweighed the benefits that might accrue from any administrative or curricular supports offered for the teacher's classroom practice.

Repeated studies report that teachers do not believe that their preservice teacher education programs adequately prepared them to teach students with varying abilities. Before the IDEA amendments were passed, Reber, Marshak, and Glor-Sheib (1995) determined that the type of academic and professional preparation a prospective teacher receives can affect his or her attitude and have concrete implications for their practice. Teachers' feelings about a lack of preparation can translate into a lack of confidence. In recent comparisons of two Canadian provinces that employ very different methods of special education, Edmunds (2003) discovered that, despite positive attitudes toward inclusion in both Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia, teachers in both provinces felt unprepared and thus lacked confidence in their abilities to work with students who have special needs.

Since the passage of the IDEA amendments and despite some reform efforts, attempts to transform teacher preparation have not met teachers' needs. In some courses, when general education teachers were introduced to the issues related to the education of students with special

needs, the material they read and the methodology used seem to have contributed to the problem (Arendale, 2001). One of these approaches presented preservice teachers with a model of special needs in which disabilities were conceptualized as specific ailments and thought to be remediable only by a specific curricular and pedagogical treatment. This medical model focuses on the characteristics of individuals' impairments which can reinforce the stereotype that students with varying abilities are members of distinct groups separate from that pool of students typically placed in the general education classroom and unlike them in all ways (Arendale, 2001).

One unfortunate implication of employing the medical model to present information about students with special needs is that general education teachers often learn to focus primarily on the students' deficits. This center of attention tends to enforce a teachers's belief that every student with special needs requires a unique and specific instructional approach, and that the good teaching strategies and skills they learned in their teacher preparation programs are not relevant when working with these students and are not transferable. This belief, for example, has practical implications in the development and implementation process of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Research indicates that, over time, general education teachers have believed that they needed particular and better proficiency in adapting the curriculum to help students meet the goals outlined in the IEP (Hedeen & Ayres, 2002; Lesar, Benner, Habel, & Coleman, 1997; Welch, 1996). They simply do not see the connections between what they are taught and a teaching practice that accommodates the requirements of all learners (Daane et al., 2000; Hinders, 1995; Freytag, 2001; Mercer et al., 1996; Pugach & Warger, 1996; Smith & Smith, 2000; Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995; Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000; Welch, 1996). It seems clear that the type of training many teachers have undergone has not sufficiently reduced their fears or given them the confidence to demonstrate competence by using the professional knowledge they have and making informed judgments about how to meet students' needs on a student-by-student basis.

Unfortunately, the model of teacher preparation that remains in many colleges and universities throughout North America is the dual system model, where teachers become certified as *either* a general education teacher *or* a special education teacher (Edmunds, 2003; Lipsky, 2003). This philosophy of teacher preparation seems to be at

least partly responsible for maintaining a belief among educators that only teachers certified in special education have the appropriate skills and knowledge to teach students with disabilities. The dual system model implicitly perpetuates a passing of responsibility for the education of any student with learning difficulties or other special needs from general education teachers to special education programs and special education teachers (Maas, 2000).

Teacher Education as Remedy

Research has recognized collaboration as a skill that enhances the expertise of all teachers – in fact, it is identified as one of the most important competencies for both teachers and administrators. Collaboration is also specifically acknowledged as one means to remedy teachers' lack of relevant preparation in successful inclusion efforts (Daane et al., 2000; Friend & Bursuck, 2002; MacPherson-Court, McDonald, & Sobsey, 2003, Maich, 2002). While collaboration can be seen as one way to solve some of the innumerable problems in inclusive educational settings, the complexity of the school culture can also inhibit its use and the challenges of collaboration in school settings have been reported in the literature. For instance, collaboration is hindered by the variety of professionals in the school building and the need for teachers to determine precisely where to begin the collaborative process (Kerns, 1996). Even when the collaborative team consisted of only two members, there were disincentives to the team members' perseverance in the collaborative process. Ferguson and Ginevra (1996) found, with regard to the alliance between the general and special education teacher, that the teaching role shifts required for these two teachers jeopardized their personal and professional identities and that issues of professional territoriality impeded their ongoing endeavors. They did not always see a shared goal, nor did they feel that the partnership was grounded between equal team members. These problems of role definition are reported to be particularly acute during the beginning stages of collaboration (Maich, 2002).

In addition to the expectation that teachers will collaborate with their colleagues in the school building, teachers are also encouraged to look beyond the school walls and to communicate with parents, grandparents, or other important people in a student's life (File, 2001). Managing the logistical issues of having a variety of adults moving in and out of the classroom during the day or a variety of sometimes

divergent opinions moving in and out of one's consciousness when constructing a relationship with a student can be extremely distracting to even the most experienced teacher. It tests the teacher's ability to remain focused and maintain equanimity.

Educators are, however, learning ways to manage all of these challenges and to teach the skills needed to collaborate (Stuart, 2002). Teaming up the special and general education teachers and providing structured time for them to work together during the day have been established in the literature as specific dimensions that support a collaborative dynamic (Malone, Gallagher, & Long, 2001). In ideal partnerships, teachers become adept at exchanging ideas, sharing knowledge, and gaining insights from another's perspective. While person-to-person contact is preferable, a variety of modes of communication can be used, including phone calls and e-mails (Amerman & Fleres, 2003). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes concerning teaming have a great impact on the degree to which inclusion is effective. Kamens, Loprete, and Slostad (2000) reported the need for "a spirit of cooperation" between general education and special education teachers. Not only the willingness, but also the capacity, to communicate openly has been described as imperative to successful collaboration and successful inclusion (Maich, 2002; Malone et al., 2001; Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001).

Modeling collaboration between special education faculty and general education faculty in higher education in conjunction with team-teaching experiences has been found to foster an understanding in teacher candidates of the need to develop skills in collaboration and consultation (Amerman & Fleres, 2003; Landers, Dill, & Weaver, 1995; McGinnis, 2002; Pugach & Warger, 1996). The positive outcomes of combining a rich practicum with academic experiences suggest that these are promising methods for preparing educators to work with students with disabilities (Bradley et al., 1993; Daane et al., 2000; Mercer et al., 1996; Reber et al., 1995).

As these studies have revealed, educators continue to struggle with the concept of inclusion, and suggestions to respond to the challenges have been somewhat limited. This project sought to discover practical and effective remedies by interviewing those who have experience working in school settings with students who have special, if distinct, needs.

Project Overview

With these issues and the previous research literature in mind, a qualitative study was conducted in the United States in one northeastern state. The project's aim was to obtain and analyze the viewpoints of several groups associated with the education of students with special needs, and to identify commonalities across the participants' perceptions regarding information and skills that teachers working in inclusive settings should know and be able to use. This information was intended to help improve teacher education programs. Ten focus groups comprised of representatives from nine different stakeholder groups were assembled to glean relevant information and data. The overarching research question that guided the project was, "What do prospective teachers need to know or be able to do to teach effectively in inclusive classrooms?"

Methodology

Ten two-hour, semi-structured focus groups were conducted with the following six-to-eight member groups organized by roles: general education faculty, special education faculty, general education undergraduate teacher candidates, special education undergraduate teacher candidates, general education teachers, special education teachers, parents of included students, school administrators, and staff-development specialists. A total of 53 individuals participated in the study.

Because of very high interest among parents of students with disabilities, enough people volunteered to fill two parent groups. It was anticipated that it would be especially useful to hear the perspectives of multiple constituents in order to collect the widest variety of viewpoints in the effort to reform and expand teacher education, and to identify common viewpoints among these groups. Participants were organized by roles during the focus group meetings in hopes of fostering a discussion environment that would put the participants at ease. Some parents indicated, for example, that they might not be comfortable expressing ideas and concerns in front of administrators or teachers. It was also assumed that administrators and teachers might not be willing to divulge difficulties they experienced within the school system regarding the sensitive topic of inclusion in the presence of parents or higher education faculty members.

Primary data used for our analysis came directly from focus group interviews. Focus group leaders used a semi-structured interview

protocol, and they actively encouraged discussion among participants on specific topics related to the research question (Vaughn, 1994). This type of research approach was ideal for this project, because it allowed an exploration of how and why individuals feel and think as they do about particular educational experiences of students with special needs and those of their teachers, and/or issues that participants have encountered with inclusion (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992).

Procedure

Selection of Participants

Two initial methods were used to identify specific participants for focus groups. First, an announcement seeking participants was published in one issue of a quarterly journal on technology to aid people with disabilities. Many of the schoolteacher and administrator participants volunteered after seeing this announcement. In the second approach, members of the project team made personal contact with faculty from schools of education at colleges and universities throughout the state. These individuals were asked to recommend other people at their institutions whom they thought might have experience and an interest in the question posed by the project. Nominated individuals were directly contacted by telephone and e-mail. After an individual agreed to participate in the group, a follow-up letter was sent describing the project and outlining the purposes of the research study and the responsibilities of focus group members. Participants signed a consent form indicating that they agreed to participate in the project and to have their responses used in written reports and papers, with the understanding that confidentiality was assured.

Training of Group Leaders

Before the focus group meetings began, and in order to ensure the reliability of the focus group data collection, two members of the project team conducted a three-and-one-half hour training session for focus group facilitators. This was a critical part of the study's methodology and served two purposes. First, the group leaders were introduced to the project – its overall purposes and the particular definition of *inclusion* that the project assumed. Second, they were provided with guiding questions directly related to the research question that each focus group was to discuss.

A systematic process was employed during the training session that introduced prospective moderators and note-takers to the critical concepts involved in running focus groups as a method of collecting data. Mock focus group sessions were held at which questioning techniques were practiced and discussed. Moderators were coached on methods to deal with participants who might assume the role of the “self-appointed expert,” the “dominant talker,” the “shy participant,” and the “rambler” in group interactions. Members of the research team were also trained to serve as note-takers to ensure that the information from the focus groups was recorded as completely and accurately as possible. In addition, they learned how to join in the discussion to redirect participants or to ask for clarification as needed.

Equally important to collecting the data, it was determined how the moderator should end the session and debrief with the note-taker. The debriefing was stressed as a method of ensuring the integrity of the data and as the first step of analysis. The group leaders were told to discuss and record the following items as soon as the participants left: a) the most important themes or ideas expressed; b) the most noteworthy quotes; c) any unexpected or unanticipated findings; and 4) a comparison of prior expectations with actual results. For the purposes of data analysis, all sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Four members of the project team were involved in the data analysis. Each studied basic material on analyzing interview data (Seidman, 1991) and read the entire set of transcripts several times to get an overall impression before studying and analyzing the data as a whole. With such small participant groups, the team decided not to compare and contrast responses of specific stakeholder groups; each valued the overall perspective and sought to discover commonalities in participants' opinions. Each researcher marked significant utterances and developed initial ideas about emergent themes. These steps were the first individual attempts to reduce the text to the most important and interesting aspects of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Then the group came together for a one-day, collaborative data analysis workshop where the continuities and discontinuities among our interpretations of the data were discussed. This was an inductive process, and in order to allow the data to speak for itself rather than our unfairly imposing individual interpretations on it, team members returned to the raw data

twice and asked, “What else is significant? What has been missed?” This approach encouraged an open mind-set and allowed a continuing, cooperative process of refining interpretations. Finally, the research team came to a consensus about the most relevant categories of data and the relationships among the various categories. The sorted data was then retyped in category form and sent back to all of the members of the project for their review.

Results

Participants generated many ideas in the focus group discussions about the information that teacher candidates should know and the skills they should possess for use in inclusive classrooms. These concepts also serve as potentially useful ideas for the reform of teacher preparation. They confirm the previous work cited in the literature review and further extend our understanding of the nuances of some of the topics addressed. The following themes emerged during data analysis and have been identified as the most significant: learning to monitor one’s own attitudes, adapting curriculum and pedagogy, and collaborating with others.

Learning to Monitor Attitudes

This category arose as the participants asserted that the ways teachers think about students with diverse needs is as important as the lessons and activities they use to teach them in the classroom. Above all else, teachers need to begin with the belief that they are capable of teaching all children in order to be able to do so effectively. Participants referred to this philosophy as the “I can teach all children” approach. According to participants, certain personal characteristics are required for this belief to take shape and remain present in the consciousness of the general educator. In the participants’ words, these characteristics include receptiveness, love for each child, the desire to open their classroom doors and teach with colleagues, and the drive to take responsibility for the learning of each child. Speaking about teacher candidates, one general education faculty member said:

It does come back to attitudes. Teachers have to believe they can teach in inclusive ways. It’s no different from good teaching, really. The attitude is the more important thing. Once teachers learn that they are truly expected to teach every child in their

class, I think they'll begin to think about how inclusive teaching might be approached.

One staff development specialist concurred:

The how-to's are easy once the door has been opened to accept the responsibility to make learning happen for all students and ask the question, How can I make it happen? Should I? Why should I make it happen?

It is clear that participants viewed the teacher's mind-set as a prerequisite to their ability to implement inclusive teaching strategies. If teachers do not believe in the need to differentiate instruction in order to meet individual students' needs and that it is possible to achieve this goal, they will not be motivated to attempt it. Without the rationale and without having bought into the need for the adaptations, it will be easier for teachers to disengage before the goal is achieved, regardless of how many strategies they learn.

Participants also specifically addressed teachers' feelings of fear, comfort, empathy, and respect toward children with disabilities and how these emotions may contribute to a teacher's lack of engagement with or commitment to the success of the project of inclusive teaching. They suggested that the negative emotions can result from a poor understanding of how to move from a self-contained environment to an inclusive working environment. In these responses, participants talked about the fear and discomfort that general education teachers experience about inclusion. One parent said:

General education teachers first approach the matter of having a child with special needs in their class with fear. Surprisingly, once they realize that there [is] nothing to be afraid of, they are very flexible in coming up with techniques. Once they get over the fear, they are very interested in seeing what they could accomplish. It becomes a pedagogical challenge. Some general education teachers are going to extraordinary lengths to see what will work.

Participants reported that once teachers get past the fear of not knowing exactly what will work for a student with disabilities, and once they approach the task as an experimenter or an inquirer, they can start to view inclusion in this more familiar context of teaching as an intellectual, in vivo activity that requires creativity and resourcefulness. An administrator suggested that one sure way for a general education

teacher to begin to get over his or her fear of students with special needs is:

To fall in love with someone in special education, because once you've got the teacher's heart then they can bring their skills to bear. So long as teachers are saying or thinking "get that kid out of my room," you can't teach them the pedagogical strategies they need.

One way positive attitudes are encouraged is by creating opportunities for teachers and prospective teachers to observe and interact with students who have disabilities. Having any kind of experience with students with disabilities can help a teacher begin to feel comfortable in an inclusive environment which leads to the positive attitude that is so essential to effective teaching in that setting.

Familiarity with children with disabilities not only leads to a reduction in the general education teacher's fear and an increase in his or her professional comfort level, but also to an increase in the teacher's respect and empathy for the child. A staff development specialist offers the view that time spent with a child who has special needs can lead to a teacher's understanding of how the child's disability affects his or her work and life, and how diligently the child often works to learn to negotiate his or her reality. This participant stated:

Teachers don't understand how [the child's disability] affects the child as a whole. Behaviors may not only reflect a writing disability; they are also related to self-concept. The reason he doesn't complete his homework may be because it's torture for him to pick up the pencil. And the teacher's lack of understanding affects his ability to keep trying. And so the teacher blames the child instead of having empathy. They [say], "He's not trying," when they don't fully understand the disability, even though on an intellectual level they may understand. They don't have a deep understanding of how the disability affects the child as a person and so it's hard for them to be empathetic.

According to this participant, it is important for the teacher to think of the child as a whole person whose disability affects him or her in every aspect of life, not just in particular instances in the school setting. Respect for the obstacles a child faces could help the teacher recognize the importance of his or her connection with the child. The teacher can be motivated to help the student understand the importance of persever-

ing and acknowledge even the smallest improvements and advances that the student makes.

Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment

Although the teacher must understand and care for his or her students, more is required. He or she must succeed at teaching the child subject-area content. Curriculum development is an important component in this endeavor because the curriculum is the map that guides the educational process. The participants in the study agreed, however, that it is not sufficient to develop a good curriculum and adhere to it as unthinkable as one would follow a cleanly surfaced roadway. In order to adapt the curriculum effectively, teachers must know how to take the curriculum and change it – to diverge from it when that would help meet the needs of all students in the classroom, or to slow down to let the child catch up and then continue on. This is a concept that can be introduced in preservice education, but making good judgments and developing such skills must be honed in practice. One special education teacher stated:

Student [teachers] need to learn a whole lot more about curriculum adaptations. You are given a curriculum that you have to teach. Now you have all of this diverse population. How do you take that curriculum and be flexible with it and find other textbooks and materials and methodology that you can incorporate? How do you know when to review, break it down, teach it again, or move on?

To productively teach students with disabilities, the teacher must be able to discern the failures of the preplanned curriculum in the very moment of teaching from it. The participants agreed that this skill is often lacking in the general education teacher. One general education teacher stated, *"I think ... that we are so used to teaching what the teacher's manual says, and they don't really teach you when and how to break things down into a lower form, pull it apart."* A special education teacher said, *"General education teachers don't seem to be able to break down the task into smaller pieces and teach a piece at a time, and they don't know how to teach a task ten different ways."* This ability would greatly enhance a teacher's capacity to teach students with disabilities. One valuable aid in adapting the curriculum is for the teacher to observe his or her students very carefully, to study them, and to properly assess them and their learning. One administrator stated:

I think the teacher has to be a keen observer of children and be able to assess in many different ways, not only what the child is learning but also what the child knows. How does the child process information and represent knowledge?

This concept of the teacher being a “keen observer of children” is an overlooked but critical one. As teachers observe and assess what the young person has mastered and which skills need more attention, they gain insights into what further curriculum adaptations the student requires. When the teacher is engaged in a continuing assessment of students, he or she learns to focus the instruction on a particular area of need. This idea confirms the principle that good assessment is embedded in the construction and delivery of beneficial changes in the curriculum.

In addition to observing students and attending to their individual needs, inclusive teachers should employ an array of pedagogical strategies that reflect a flexible and adaptable style. One special education teacher said that teachers need to create “*individualized teaching approaches. They need different ways to get the point across.*” The data reconfirms the notion that it is often a one-to-one process. Individual participants mentioned numerous specific strategies for teachers in inclusive settings. Some of them indicated that instruction should be multimodal and project oriented: teachers must develop complex learning environments, change the learning timeline when needed, work collaboratively with the teacher’s aide and special education teacher, facilitate a circle of supports, and use multiple reading and learning strategies, including cooperative learning.

To foster this flexibility, an administrator suggested that all teachers need “*actual exposure to children with a wide range of possibilities and requirements,*” because with this knowledge teachers learn the range of demands. If student teachers are given this exposure during their teacher education programs, seeing the need to adapt curriculum becomes a more natural, internal response in the teacher’s day-to-day interactions with students. Practice at meeting the needs of a diverse group of students early on has the potential to prevent inclusion from becoming a stumbling block later in a teacher’s professional career.

Collaboration

The last theme that emerged from the data offers suggestions for how to make the proper curricular and pedagogical decisions. Neither the

special education nor the general education teacher can accomplish this in isolation; he or she must be in contact with the other adult members of the student's life circle. In other words, curriculum is most beneficially adapted when it is done so in community.

All of a child's teachers, specialists, and even his or her parents need to be working from the same curriculum and toward the same goal to allow the student to feel like a full member of the academic community and to make good academic progress. A parent participant recommended:

Make specialists of the general education teachers and make special education teachers more aware of the general education curriculum. [Special educators] are trained to do replacement reading and math. They need to do social studies and science material too. They have no clue about the curriculum. We need to cross train. Everyone is working for the same reason ... to help the child learn.

This parent's frustration with the unhelpful division of roles for general educators and special educators was a clear and a recurring theme in the interview data. The suggestion is that special and general education teachers need to have preparation that overlaps so that they learn to work together. Special education teachers must have an understanding of the overall curriculum and general education teachers must know how to take that curriculum and diversify it, differentiate it, and make it more accessible to the student with special needs. Parents, staff development specialists, administrators, and teachers all perceive that special educators, through training and habit, tend to focus on specific techniques to help individual children, while general educators focus on curriculum development and content to teach the class as a whole. Of course, both must remember to attend to each child and also focus on the daily lessons. One parent, in reference to special education teachers said:

I agree that...understanding curriculum and what the learning objectives are and then having a method to assess those learning objectives are really critical. I have also found in my work with teachers that they really don't have a good understanding of the curriculum objectives. A lot of teachers don't seem to know why they're having kids read the story or they don't know why they're doing this experiment with fossils, they don't know, they're just doing the activity because it is prescribed. They're activity focused as opposed to learning objective or child focused, and I heartily

agree that when they're planning their lessons, they need to start with the outcome and the children in mind. Planning with the end in mind ... we need to help all teachers do more of that.

This parent is calling for a more holistic understanding of curriculum and the purposes of teaching and learning. The teacher must demonstrate an engaged intellectualism when planning lessons and creating learning activities and remember that, in the best educational environments, the student and the content are equally important in the teaching-learning dynamic. The good teacher works with individual students but keeps the large purposes of his or her teaching in mind at all times.

Two subcategories necessary for the development of collaborative relationships present themselves in the data. These subcategories were embedded in the participants' concepts of collaboration and illustrate specific and distinct ways to implement it. Participants identified the importance of *teaming* among educational providers and establishing a structure that opens a space for the very practical *time to talk*.

Teaming

Participants often used the term "team" or "teaming" to describe collaboration. Apparently, for these participants teaming involves two teachers (especially the general education teacher and the special education teacher) taking the initiative to plan and work together for the benefit of their students with special needs. The importance of teaming is elucidated by two school administrators, one of whom stated:

You need that team, need them working together and realizing they're sharing everything and that the goal is that child. If all of us pull together and we're all working with each other, we have all these different experts. We're sharing brains.

Another administrator commented:

To do the in-class support, if that's comfortable, helps everything else fall into place. The teachers act like collaborators in the process of teaching. When that's not there, when they don't have that back and forth, give and take, if they don't feel that comfort, they're afraid of giving something up, it's not going to work.

Again, the need for a spirit of cooperation between general education and special education teachers is emphasized. The teachers learn to work together in the process of engaging in a joint project – the child's

academic success. Another school administrator went so far as to describe this teamwork as analogous to a marriage:

I spend a tremendous amount of time in servicing people in what we call "marriages." And it's just like any other relationship so that sometimes two people can get married and live happily ever after and at other times the two people might need counseling, and then unfortunately at other times the relationship may need to be dissolved I'm spending a tremendous amount of my time hearing, 'I went to college to be a special ed teacher, and the teacher in the classroom is perceiving me to be an aide; she wants me on the sidelines.' In other instances the general ed teacher is saying, 'How can [the special education teacher] teach chemistry? She was not trained to do that and she does not have sufficient knowledge. Who's in charge of the disciplining of the student with special needs? Who's in charge of assessment? How do we communicate with each other and where one person is in control and the other becomes a subservient partner?' I spend a lot of my time helping the two teachers to define their roles in ways that really help the students.

This administrator describes a type of professional development that must occur at the school-building level and that counters the kind of preparation the teachers received at university. Separate training, separate disciplines, and separate faculty assignments in higher education do not prepare the teachers to work in teams to create the structures they need and the means for increased collaboration in the classroom. Another way for the administrator to help the teachers prepare to work together is organizing the work day so that time is set aside for the particular purpose of talking to and working with each other.

Time to Talk

Staff development specialists have recommended a variety of ideas for keeping the communication lines open between general education and special education teachers. These suggestions focus on strong time-management skills, including regularly scheduled times for meeting together, more time allotted to such meetings, and better, more focused use of meeting time. The ability and willingness to communicate openly is imperative. One special education teacher participant stated:

What worked between me and a general education teacher I worked with is that we had times so that I could ... sit down and talk with her about the difficulties she was having with particular kids. We trouble shot together during these meetings and I also got an opportunity to learn about her curricular themes and what they were doing in the classroom. I could carry that over with the kids and prepare some of [them] who were having difficulty with the concepts – kind of advance organize them – and it worked very well because the other teacher and I had this one hour of time a week where we could really make sure we were on the same wavelength. I'm not talking about either of us asking for help necessarily, but if we are going to have a seamless thing where we are both working together, then we should know what each other is thinking. If I'm the special education teacher, I should know what your core content is and you should know how that interfaces with the strategies that I'm going to have to put into place in order for this kid to succeed in that setting. People are frustrated that they're not getting that time, and they should be.

This teacher reported a mutually beneficial experience with collaboration in which she and her teammate created a solid professional relationship where at least one hour of time per week to talk was critical.

Participants felt that an important part of successful teaming involved a reclarification and sometimes a re-articulation of professional roles. The inflexible, impermeable boundaries associated with the tasks assigned to the general education versus the special education teacher are often detrimental to the child's progress. To ask "Who is responsible for assessment?" might be more fruitfully considered by asking "How should we assess this child?" One administrator who participated in the study stated:

I think the roles need to be defined differently. I think a lot of the problem is that the special ed teacher gets used as an aide – takes notes on the board, writes the notes down, and deals with those kids later. The general education teacher often has the mind-set that says, 'Don't do anything in my classroom, don't change my tests, don't modify anything substantive, you do what you do, and I do what I do.' I hear about that a lot of the time. The special

education teacher is being used as an aide and not as a professional.

Another participant explained that methods for making collaboration work effectively should focus on the dilemma of building acceptance among teachers for the idea that inclusive teaching is not accomplished in an insular, autonomous environment. The maintenance of strictly defined and possessively guarded roles does not lead to the best setting for learning. One administrator said:

It is about figuring out, "What is my responsibility, what is her responsibility, what do I expect from her, what should she expect from me?" So what I did was meet with the general education teachers first and said, 'What do you think the special ed teacher should be doing when she's in your classroom,' and then I met separately with the special ed teachers and asked, 'What do you think the general education teacher should be doing? What do you need from them? What would you like them to do for you?'

This building administrator, who serves as a counselor and as a staff development specialist for the faculty on his staff, focuses not on teaching strategies but on helping teachers to redefine their roles and their responsibilities, and to reconsider what they learned in either their general or special education preservice programs. He continued:

I got both sides, and then we came together and we discussed what our expectations were from each other. They weren't afraid of each other; their mistrust of each other had been diminished. The general education teacher became less territorial, and the special education teacher wasn't afraid to say anything, to express her opinions. That wasn't easy, but that was the thing that really worked well and it set the stage for more acceptance.

The work that this administrator did not only set the stage for more acceptance, it also prepared the teachers to come together in their one-hour meetings to work well together on the content of curriculum adaptations and strategies. Their professional identity issues had been clarified and at least partly resolved, and this allowed them to concentrate on their common purpose – to assist and support their students' academic achievement.

Effective collaborative teams need not solely include teachers. As a special education teacher suggested:

Ask the parents. Pull them into the process. Actually, the parents are wonderful teachers of their own children and want to help

you out with how their children are and what works. They're really our best friends if we work with them.

Both parents and special education teachers in the focus groups reiterated this idea. Parents are extremely useful resources for general education teachers and are usually willing to participate. They are often deeply invested in their children's progress and can provide teachers with an overall view of the young person's strengths and weaknesses. However, some parents may not have experienced a teacher's willingness to communicate with them. One parent was very direct in her observations:

General education teachers need to communicate with parents and know that this does not have to be threatening. We can tell them a lot about our children. We may be able to offer them valuable techniques that we know work with our children. We want to pull teachers into discussions; we want to be asked about our children. Some teachers don't seem to enjoy this, but if they work with parents, it will be easier for the teacher and better for the parent, as well as the child.

Participants believe that building alliances and holding discussions between parents and general and special education teachers are key to educational success. Releasing and replacing the presumed norm that teachers in isolation should be able to come up with all of the answers to questions about teaching each child is essential to creating inclusive classrooms. One staff development specialist summed it up well:

Teachers should know it is okay to ask for additional help. They're not a failure or a poor teacher because they seek input. They should be open to more ideas. There are things they can ask for to aid them, and many of us want to participate more fully with them.

Asking for help, working collaboratively to put the pieces together – these are steps that foster student success.

Recommendations for Teacher Education

The results from the focus group interviews with multiple constituencies confirm previous research on the need to further our efforts to teach and enact competent inclusive teaching practices. The typical role-specific teacher training models do not adequately prepare all teachers for inclusion; we have to do better. Teacher preparation programs must encourage their graduates to monitor their own attitudes about students

with special needs, and provide them with opportunities to practice and perfect a wide variety of curricular accommodations and instructional strategies. Each should begin his or her career with a philosophy of inclusion that is earned by reflection, by struggling honestly with the basic problems involved. Learning the complexities of teaching people with disabilities cannot be accomplished in a single course; rather, inclusion should be a philosophy that permeates a program and stresses the importance of collaboration, differentiating curriculum and pedagogy, and continuing professional development.

As with preparing teachers to work with students of different races, socioeconomic classes, and genders, preparing them to work with students who have special needs requires that a new kind of culture be established in the teacher education setting. In this culture, prospective educators are working to know themselves – their assumptions and postures toward difference and disability. An environment exists in which prospective teachers become committed to understanding the experiences of the students who are placed in special education classes or programs and can perceive the learning implications that go along with the identification of those students. Finally, in the ideal, a professional learning environment is established in which faculty work with prospective teachers to construct identities and practices that effectively support the learning of every young student they teach. Teacher educators must not be timid when they admonish prospective teachers to work through the turf issues, the nature of trust, and the widening scope of responsibility as they learn to make inclusion successful. Moreover, teacher educators must be extremely patient and supportive as prospective teachers practice making judgments on a case-by-case basis. This kind of culture gives all those in it a greater sense of hope and of social agency because it is a culture in which it is possible to master specific skills.

The first two recommendations given here focus on higher education faculty because these educators create the ethos of the learning environment and it is they who have the primary responsibility for instructing the preservice teacher. The third recommendation suggests particular experiences that should be fashioned for the prospective teacher.

1. In departments and schools of education, initiate a process of working with professors who teach courses on Curriculum, Methods of Teaching, and Supervision of Student Teachers in order to inform

them of the results of this study, to discuss the need to make changes in teacher education, and to create a plan to accomplish them.

2. Establish a team-teaching system so that faculty teaching general education classes will work with special education faculty, either on a full semester or consultative basis, class by class. This will set up opportunities for general education faculty to practice and demonstrate skills in collaboration as they solidify their own knowledge of how to adapt curriculum and pedagogy.
3. Ensure that preservice general and special education teachers have formal opportunities to talk and to work together in courses, in field placements, and/or in virtual settings.

A *spirit of collaboration* must be passed on to preservice teachers, not only by studying and talking about it but also by modeling it. This modeling of teachers working in teams is expected to yield more than the skill of collaboration. Echoing previous research, our participants hoped that this type of partnership would encourage the development of a more sincere respect for the strengths of each other's professional knowledge and provide a way to absorb aspects of this knowledge from each other. As one general education faculty member confesses,

As general educators, we need to start to have a dialogue with those who teach special educators. We have to do it – broaden our own worldviews and then give that broader view to our own students. We really should be modeling collaboration and skill-building.

General educators could become much more adept at judging which teaching technique would fit a specific child. Special educators could develop deeper and more specific content knowledge, as well as a more overarching understanding of the aims of the curriculum.

Rather than the medical or deficit model of teaching, courses in curriculum, pedagogy, and diversity should teach prospective educators to approach their students who have special needs as intact, whole human beings who are progressing toward their own life goals. Personal familiarity with children with disabilities provides baseline knowledge for building appropriate attitudes and skills in prospective teachers. This understanding can lead to greater awareness of the benefits of inclusion and help teachers leave college with the essential outlook that inclusion is not just the law, it really can be beneficial for all students.

No matter what knowledge, skills, and outlook prospective teachers gain at the university level, however, they will need to continue to learn on the job. The most capable inclusive teacher – novice as well as veteran – will always strive to expand and refine his or her ability to work with all students, but especially students with special needs. As one special education teacher who participated in the study so eloquently says:

Inclusion is not something different, it's just adding to the philosophy that we already have and expanding it so that the range of students we deal with is bigger. I think that it is extremely helpful to realize that what is needed is to build on something that already exists as opposed to imposing something from another system. Inclusion really has to be part of our thinking and our philosophy from the beginning if we are committed to teaching all children.

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Connie Titone is Chairperson and Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Human Services at Villanova University. She received her doctorate in the Philosophy of Education from Harvard University and has written two books: *Women's Philosophies of Education* (1999), of which she was a co-author; and *Gender Equality in the Philosophy of Education: Catherine Macaulay's Forgotten Contribution* (2004). In addition, she has published numerous articles on topics related to teacher education.

Author's Address:

Department of Education and Human Services
800 Lancaster Avenue
Villanova, PA 19085-1699
U.S.A.
EMAIL: connie.titone@villanova.edu