

Record

377

File Number

10333

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Title: Integration: Facts and fallacies

Original source: IA-A Newsletter

Resource type: Written

Publication Date: 01/01/90

Publisher Info: IA-A

**Abstract**

This is a report of a presentation by Dick Sobsey. He presented results of a study into integration, part of which involved reviewing over 420 books and articles on the subject. They found that 80% of studies showed favourable results. He argues that such results negate old arguments and the issue is how to integrate rather than whether to integrate.

**Keyword: Education, School age**



# INTEGRATION: FACTS AND FALLACIES

report by Paul Kohl

Several members of IAA had the pleasure of attending Dick Sobsey's presentation at the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention in February. The presentation was entitled "Integration: Facts & Fallacies" and was so well attended that it was literally standing room only and many who wanted to listen could not get into the room.

Dick Sobsey is an Associate Professor in the educational psychology department at the U of A. His presentation was based on an integration study done in conjunction with his graduate student Mike Dreimanis. As part of this study they reviewed more than 420 books and articles on integration. It is hoped that a complete report and annotated bibliography arising from this study will be available in time for the SHAPE conference this May.

We were informed that a lot of literature has been published and much empirical research has been completed on the subject of integration. What was exciting to hear was that 22% of the research studies were neutral on the issue of integration and of the other 80%, 92% reported favourable results. In regards to position papers, 20% were positive neutral and of the remaining 80%, 62% were positive. This was taken to indicate that attitudes were lagging behind what the research was showing.

Dr. Sobsey explained that people in the field of education have been using a circular argument to resist integration. What parents would often be told was that there was no evidence to indicate that integrated education was better than the segregated special education programs being offered. What was wrong with this was that unless children were integrated there was no way of showing that integrated education was as good as or better than existing special education programs. This study shows that the old arguments are no longer valid and the education professionals no longer need to wait for the data supporting integration, we now have that data. The issue now is how to integrate, not should we integrate.

[Kohl's comments: This last point doesn't mean parents can assume this information will be

accepted as gospel by educators. Often those trying to resist change will react by using any study, no matter how questionable or out of date. They typically don't run into parents who can respond to this with objective facts. What parents need to do is remind them that such studies represent a minority viewpoint of the research on the subject and perhaps enlighten them by making them aware of Dr. Sobsey's research.]

The following are positive conclusions from this study:

- Teachers attitudes usually become more positive after integration
- Teachers attitudes are generally positive
- Regular teachers accepted integration as well as special education trained teachers
- Non-disabled students working with disabled students improve social status and self esteem
- Cooperative learning procedures produce better learning than one-to-one
- Inappropriate behaviour decreased spontaneously with improved social interaction skills
- Mutual interest groupings helped increase acceptance of disabled students by peers
- The integrated class model was more cost effective
- Non-disabled students had no academic deficits as a result of integration
- Non-disabled students had no motor skills deficits as a result of integration
- Improved motor skills in students labelled trainable mentally handicapped
- More social interactions for severely disabled children in integrated environments
- More social bids to severely disabled students from non-disabled than disabled classmates
- More IEP [individualized educational plan] objectives attained in integrated settings
- Socially appropriate behaviour learned by autistic children through watching non-disabled peers
- More socially advanced play by preschoolers in integrated settings
- Improved client adaptive behaviour after moving from institutional to community settings
- Effective learning via peer tutoring
- Improved social skills in academic environment

## Other Conclusions from these Studies

- Implementation has been slow and sometimes met with resistance
- Parents are sometimes resistant to integration
- Social interaction often fails to generalize outside of school

- Acceptance by peers is not complete - disabled students often are rated lower status by peers
- Physical integration is often inadequate, continued support is frequently required

### What is The Fallacy of Special Education?

The purpose of special education is to improve the chances of students who are not fully benefiting from regular education to achieve functional and academic competency, and to return to a more integrated role in society. The reality of special education is that once out of the mainstream, few students ever return. Instead the gap is ever widening.

Some other interesting points made by Dr. Sobsey during discussion with the audience included:

- On the issue of disabled students being disruptive to non-disabled classmates, studies show that more disruptions in integrated classes are caused by non-disabled students than disabled students.
- When a non-disabled child does poorly it is often suggested that this is due to their being in an integrated class. There is no objective data to support this as a reason for the child's poor performance
- When parents voice displeasure over their non-disabled child being in an integrated class, it is their children who will often blame class problems on the handicapped child. It may be that these children have learned that their parents will not question this type of excuse as it is what they want to hear.
- Dr. Sobsey cautioned that integration should not become a way for school boards to withdraw special education supports and increase teacher/pupil ratios as a way of cutting budgets.
- In looking at costs of segregated education versus integrated education, one cannot look only at small groups of students or individuals. One needs to look at the whole system as some students may cost more while others will cost less in integrated settings
- One also has to look at the cost benefit to the student as sometimes it may cost more for a student in an integrated class, but he will benefit more than in the segregated setting. Often when we purchase something we don't buy the cheapest item if it is of poor quality, but pay the little extra for a better quality item which will better meet our needs in the long run
- True integration requires special, resources used in a different manner. Unless integration is properly supported it will fail. These failures do not mean the concept is defective, simply that the implementation is inadequate