

>> WHERE WERE WE AND WHERE ARE WE HEADING?¹

Teacher Training in an Inclusive Era

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Introduction

It seems appropriate to open this position paper with a quote from Michael Fullan's classic - *The (New) Meaning of Educational Change*: "Mainstreaming is one of the more complex changes on the current educational scene"². As such it has a bearing on the different aspects of education including the preparation of educators who are expected to carry out their duties in inclusive settings.

Inclusion is not merely an ideology nor can it be narrowed down to organizational changes of various sorts. It refers to the political context as well as to the children, youth and families served, and is widely supported by parents, professionals and other stakeholders. Carrying out inclusionary measures is mandated by legislation: In the U.S. Public Law 98-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, passed by Congress in 1975, guaranteed free public education for children and youth with disabilities. It was followed by a further legislative measure - the Individuals with Disabilities Act, Public Law 101-476 of 1997 which required that students with disabilities be educated in general classrooms. In Great Britain, the initial legislation which mandated the provision of education for special needs was instituted in 1981. As a result of this legislation, the Local Education Authorities extended their special needs support services. The Israeli Law of Special Education (1988) made it mandatory to include children with special educational needs in regular settings, and the recent Amendment (2003) to that law is devoted to the particulars of implementing inclusion in regular settings. However, in the Israeli legislation nothing is mentioned with regard to teacher training be it pre-service or in-service.

This position paper aims at unfolding the dilemmas of Special Education teacher training programs and at sharing some changes and accommodations made at the Special Education Department of the Beit-Berl Teachers' Training College in Israel.

Changes in the special education field

Special Education as a scientific discipline, as well as an educational service delivery system, has changed over the past 30 years. The emphasis has been shifted from providing strategies and skills to children to a questioning of the educational system as a whole. The change stems from seeing people with disabilities as capable of achievement rather than as having a very limited future.

*Special education emerged as a discipline when positivism was the prevailing world view. We used positivism as a way of posing questions and answering them. Many of us were trained in a behavioral approach, which provides a pragmatic, straightforward way to define phenomena..... Through the years, other forms of research have found their way into our field, providing us with a richer contextual understanding of the field and the students we serve.*³

Yet at the same time one needs to be cautious not to lose sight of what is special and different about the children who do not readily perform adequately in the classroom. Special education **is** special and is not just good general education: "Education that is special for everyone is, in the end, special for no one".⁴

Changes in the role of the special education teacher

Placement of children with special needs in the regular classes in general education affected the role of the special education teacher in these inclusive schools. A study by Klinger and Vaughn (2002) illustrates these changes clearly. For a period of six years the researchers followed up a teacher named Joyce who was a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom solely with students with LD and who had to adapt

to teaching in an inclusive setting.

What did we learn? Joyce's role as an inclusion teacher for students with LD was complex and multifaceted and depended largely on her successful interpersonal and communication skills. Much of the knowledge and skills she required was a blend of (a) special education assessment and intervention skills, (b) the ability to creatively adapt and accommodate instructional lessons and assignments to meet the needs of students with LD in a whole-class setting, (c) an understanding of the general education curriculum and its goals, (d) the ability to collaborate and co-plan with GE teachers, and (e) commitment and dedication. (29)

At the same time full inclusion is not a common practice. Children with severe disabilities are served in special educational settings that exist alongside inclusive settings, whether in a segregated facility or in a self contained class within the general school. Teacher education has to play a crucial part in preparing teachers in both general and special educational settings.

The state of affairs in teacher preparation programs

Several trends have influenced teacher training for students with disabilities. Initially the principle of normalization guided the deinstitutionalization movement and resulted in teaching basic skills in self-care, socialization and recreation. The normalization principle heavily influenced the Least Restrictive Environment provision in the United States as well as in other countries. Consequently teachers began instructing students with disabilities based on expectations of age-appropriate activities following national standards and core curriculum demands. They were required to develop competencies in creating adaptations to activities and environments for students with disabilities and to access the general curriculum for these students (Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow 2000, Fisher, Frey and Thousand 2003).

Reviewing the contributions made for the Mittler and Daunt's (1995) description of teacher education for special needs in Europe, one cannot fail to notice the important issues raised in teacher education for inclusive settings: What should be the demands on general teachers in inclusive schools? Is there a role for the special education teacher in inclusive settings? Should they continue with direct teaching in segregated classes or should they focus on supporting teachers in general classes to respond to the individual learning needs of the special needs students?

The first issue to look into has to do with the necessary knowledge base for special educators. In the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (1996), York and Reynolds present the recommendations made by the CEC in 1992 as to the necessary knowledge base for special educators: Philosophical, historical and legal foundations of special education; Characteristics of learners; Assessment, diagnosis and evaluation; Instructional content and practice; Planning and managing the teaching and learning environment; Managing student behavior and social interaction skills; Communication with collaborative partnerships; Professionalism and ethical practices. As can be seen collaboration and learning environments are new topics introduced following implementation of inclusion. The authors also point out the fact that more "mainstreaming" textbooks are written for use in pre-service general education in response to the growing numbers of special needs children included in the general class.

Fisher et al. (2003) reported what teachers in two inclusive

schools (Clark Elementary and Kennedy High School) identified as the skills and knowledge required of all teachers in their schools – Collaborative teaming and teaching; Curricular and instructional modifications and accommodations; Assistive technology, Positive behavioral support, Personal support; Literacy and content instruction.

One can safely conclude that the necessary knowledge base for training special educators has to include curricular adaptations and collaborative measures to be incorporated in theory and in field experiences.

To sum up the dilemmas in teacher training programs, it is worthwhile to quote from York and Reynolds who as early as 1996 explored this issue within the framework of research on teacher education:

What are the competencies for effective teaching of students with disabilities? For special education these competencies included the ability to promote collaboration and inclusive service delivery... but did not include central aspects of knowledge and skill development. For general educators, the competencies for effective mainstreaming did not reflect an assumption that special educators would join in the support of students with disabilities in general education..... Something near consensus has been achieved in the mild disability area, to the extent that distinct categorical teacher preparation in special education is not advised.... There is no compelling reason for general and special education to remain separate, at least in the initial level of teacher education". (826-829)

One of the major challenges of teacher education in the upcoming years will be preparing teachers, both in-service and pre-service, to work in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-needs, diverse society. Similarly it is critical to reorient the thinking of general and special education to include all children in the discussion of diversity (Dieker, Voltz and Epanchin 2002). In the UK, Philip Garner is very concerned about "the conceptual and practical unpreparedness of many newly qualified teachers. They... will be increasingly expected to form the vanguard of inclusion initiatives in education"⁵. Reflecting on twenty years of preparing special educators, faculty members (Bauer, Johnson and Sapona 2004) of the College of Education in the University of Cincinnati conclude: "We continue to grow as a field and teacher education programs are vastly superior to those of 20 years ago. However, we have not come far enough, and it is critical that we go further"⁶.

Reviewing the literature which describes special education teacher training programs (York et al. 1996), three clusters of programs can be detected: (a) Training programs that focus on categories of disabilities (bearing in mind the trend away from discrete categories toward more generic approaches); (b) Training programs that take into consideration the new approaches i.e., organization by chronological age as opposed to disability area and increased collaboration among educators; and (c) Unified programs that aim at merging general and special education training.

Stayton and McCollun (2002) suggest considering three existing models for preparing teachers for inclusive settings: (a) Additional Model: This model is characterized by adding special education courses to general education training programs and adding some field experiences with students with disabilities; (b) Infusion Model: This model is characterized by an infusion of general and special education content in the same courses and set of field experiences. These courses are often team taught by the two disciplines and field experiences are jointly supervised; (c) Unification Model: This model is constructed to unify the higher education general and special education curricula. A unified training program combines all of the recommended personnel standards from the respective

general education and special education program into a newly conceptualized curriculum. The underlying premise is that when comparing the policies, practices and theoretical basis of the two fields, more commonalities than differences could be identified. Indeed, I gathered a random sample of descriptions of thirteen teacher-training programs across the United States⁷ and found they all changed their focus towards collaboration and inclusive schooling. Of these, seven programs were unified offering a dual major in Elementary and Special Education; One program incorporated a series of special education courses into the core courses of all education majors; One put an emphasis on collaborative field experiences; and the rest made necessary accommodations in the traditional Special Education program.

Brownwell, Ross, Colon and McCallun (2005) looked for critical features of Special Education teacher preparation by comparing it with general teacher education. The framework used was based on two studies⁸ across which the following features of effective (general) teacher education programs emerged: (1) A coherent program vision; (2) A conscious blending of theory, disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practice; (3) Carefully crafted field experiences; (4) Standards for quality teaching; (5) Active pedagogy; (6) A focus on diverse student population and (7) Faculty collaboration. Sixty-four publications of program descriptions and evaluation in special education⁹ were reviewed and revealed five major program characteristics as follows: (I) Extensive field experiences; (II) Collaboration; (III) Evaluation of the impact of the training program; (IV) A focus on inclusion and cultural diversity and (V) Maintaining a positive constructivist orientation toward teacher training. The authors concluded that "the special education programs in the literature that we reviewed share features with programs considered exemplary in general education. In both fields teacher education is labor intensive, carefully crafted, focused on connecting theory and practice, collaborative and invested in creating teachers who can respond to the needs of children and youth, particularly those with diverse needs".¹⁰

In summary, teacher training for special educators is as diversified as is the special education scene. Some institutions of higher learning have abolished special education training altogether and offer merged or unified programs, others have kept both general education and special education programs but exert much effort into collaboration of faculty, programs and field experiences. So far there is not enough research evidence as to the advantages of one training model over the other. I am of the opinion that one should be very cautious with regard to unified programs. As mentioned earlier, special education is not just better, more individualized instruction that is good for every child, but it is an area of expertise and professionalism that caters to specific learning difficulties.

Inclusion in Israel

In the State of Israel, mainstreaming of students with disabilities into regular classrooms has been practiced on a voluntary basis for the past four decades. However, Special Education legislation passed in 1988 included as one of its key requirements the mandate to mainstream students with disabilities into regular classrooms to the maximum extent possible. By the school-year 1998-99, it became mandatory for all schools in Israel to practice inclusion. The Ministry of Education devised a "Plan for Inclusion" aimed at reducing the numbers of students in special classes and schools and increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes. The implementation of this plan began in the year 1996 and by the year 2000 it was implemented in schools all over the country, particularly at the primary level. In the school-

year 2002/03 a total of 1,640,000 children, ages 5 – 18, were enrolled in state educational facilities, and 10, 383 children were enrolled in special schools. In the school-year 2003/4, a total of 1,650,805 children were enrolled in general education and 8,308 children were enrolled in special schools. In Israel, it is customary to estimate that about 25% of the total student body are children with special needs who are included in general classes. As a result of the legislation mentioned above, special education (in separate settings) is provided by the state for children ages 3 – 21. The educational system is thus mandated to provide for the very young as well as for young adults. In addition, the emphasis on implementing inclusion has resulted in a decrease in the number of special schools as well as in the number of children they serve.¹¹ It should also be pointed out that the special school serves children with significant and complex disabilities. The demand seems to be for a "Jack of all trades but master of none" type special education teacher. Upon completion of training there are few positions available in special settings whereas there is much demand in general education for teachers in inclusive classrooms. General education requires expertise in subject areas, pedagogy, as well as individualized instruction and remedial teaching.

Beit- Berl College

Beit-Berl College is the largest academic college in Israel and its size is expressed not only in the number of students (currently around 5,000), but also in the tremendous range of programs it offers. The college is comprised of four schools: The School of Education which is home to teacher training programs, The Art School, The Arab Teacher Training Institute, and The School of Multidisciplinary Studies which is home to diploma studies in librarianship, archive and data management, translation, editing and journalism. The teacher training programs are for pre-school, primary and high school, special education and informal education under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

For the past ten years, since the passage of the Law of Special Education, the faculty of the Special Education Department at Beit- Berl College has been debating with regard to the structure and the content of the training program in an effort to keep up with the on-going changes and reforms. The following questions were discussed in a variety of forums and think teams: (a) Should there be separate training programs for special education settings and for inclusive settings? (b) Should training for special settings follow disability categories? (c) Should the training programs be by age (i.e. separate programs for pre-school and for primary, middle and high school)? (d) What should be the connections between the special education training program and the general education training programs? (e) Who has the professional responsibility for teacher training geared for inclusive settings?

We concluded by devising a separate training program that puts much emphasis on the knowledge and skills needed to carry out the specialist role in an inclusive school and at the same time offers an opportunity to specialize in a specific category of disability in order to be able to teach in a special school. In addition, the faculty of the special education training program took it upon itself to offer and teach courses in the general education programs. As a result the pre-school and primary training programs offer, an avenue of study that incorporates general and special education training.

The Structure of the Special Education Training Program

The general structure of the training program is as follows:¹²

- a. Foundations of education including introductory courses, advanced courses and a research seminar.
- b. Disciplinary studies (one or two areas).
- c. Special Education studies including introductory and advanced courses, pedagogy, field experiences and an opportunity to specialize in a particular disability.
- d. General studies that are required by the Ministry of Education.

The enveloping concept of special education training at Beit-Berl College rests on the assumption that only some of the student teachers trained in special education will work in separate settings, whereas the bulk will work in inclusive settings. The result therefore is a focus on the content of the courses in pedagogy so that it included the following components: (a) teaching in inclusive classrooms; (b) teaching individual students or small groups of students in accordance with their IEP and with their class lesson-plan; (c) teaching in collaboration with the homeroom teacher; (d) participating in the school's planning team for students with disabilities, and (e) taking the responsibility to advise the other teachers regarding the students with disabilities. In addition, there are courses in the area of reading strategies, math strategies, learning skills and developing an IEP based on informal assessments in the 3 R's. The part of the training program aimed at developing a specialty in a specific category of disability offers four specialization areas: severe developmental disabilities; hearing and language impairment; learning disabilities, and adaptive behavior difficulties. Most recently, in accordance with demands from the Ministry of Education, the disciplinary studies were strengthened. These changes are geared to respond to the need to train special education teachers for special categorical settings and to adapt to the changes in the role of the special education teacher within a regular school.

The faculty of the Special Education department took it upon themselves to lead the process of adapting existing training programs for general education to suit the reality of inclusive education in the following manner: (a) Establishing a new training program for preschool teachers who were interested in special kindergartens and inclusive kindergartens. This program focuses on developmental issues in the pre-school age; (b) New courses are offered for the middle level school training program aimed at establishing a knowledge base and skills for teaching adolescents with disabilities in inclusive settings; (c) Devising a collaborative training program for primary school teachers since they would encounter students with disabilities in their classes; (d) A collaborative field experience program was introduced as part of the Professional Development School program. Mentoring is carried out collaboratively by two faculty members, one from the special education department and the other from the general education training program.

In conclusion, whereas during the first years of deliberations most of the changes introduced were similar to the addition model – courses were added on to existing programs, in the past three years more programs are collaborative in nature. Even though this model is more expensive to operate, it seems to be better suited to the needs of student teachers in this era of inclusion. Offering unified programs is something that has been discussed at length but is not feasible since the Ministry of Education has very strict requirements for certification.

In conclusion, the mainstreaming of children with disabilities has led the trainers of teachers for special education to collaborate ever more closely with the trainers of teachers

for mainstream schools. How this collaboration will evolve remains an open question.

Notes

- ¹ The first version of this paper has been presented at the International Conference on Inclusive Education held in Hong Kong in December 2003. I am indebted to my colleague Dr. Orit Almog who took part in formulating the original manuscript.
- ² Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991, 41
- ³ Spooner and Johnson 1996, 197
- ⁴ Kauffman 1996, 105
- ⁵ Garner 2000, 111
- ⁶ Bauer et al. 2004, 244
- ⁷ Griffin and Pugach, 1997; Lovingfoss, Molloy, Harris and Graham 2001, Ford, Pugach, Otis and Wilburn, 2001, Lombardi and Hunke, 2001, Ruhl and Hall, 2002.
- ⁸ Darling-Hammond 2000; Koppich 2000, for references see Brownell et al, 2005
- ⁹ Published between 1990-2003
- ¹⁰ Brownwell et al. 2005, 247
- ¹¹ The average student body in a special school in Israel for the past 10 years is 60 children
- ¹² The total number of hours of this four year training program, excluding 18 hours of field experience, has been reduced from 105 in 1988/89 to 90 in 2002/03 following the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

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