Inclusive Education: A Rogerian Argument

Inclusion, a common approach to educating children with learning disabilities and special needs has become a controversial topic for parents of children with and without special needs as well as teachers of inclusive classrooms. For many years, there exists a withstanding debate over whether or not inclusion is an efficient way of teaching students with special needs and the effect it has on students without disabilities in the classroom. Proponents of inclusion support the idea that it will give their children the opportunity to be successful in adult life with a better education. Non-supporters of inclusion stand firmly in their belief that the policy is failing and some teachers are not giving children necessary attention in order for their needs to be addressed. Both parties present logical arguments for their positions.

Reasons Against Inclusion

In her essay discussing special needs teaching, Laura Clark explains that including special needs children among their peers in the classroom began many years ago when Baroness Warnock, a pillar of the liberal education establishment gave her recommendations that formed the groundwork for the 1981 Education Act in which children with special needs are classified as having a “learning difficulty which may be the result of a physical or sensory disability, an emotional or behavioral problem, or developmental delay.” Warnock, now 81, feels the policy has “gone too far” creating “confusion of which children are the casualties” (qtd. In Clark). Parents of children without special needs share concerns of their child getting their educational needs met in an inclusive classroom setting. Including severely disabled children can cause disruption to the learners and raise questions to the true appropriateness of inclusion.

Credible Reasons to Reject Inclusion

Considering that the amount of federal aid provided to schools is based on the number of students classified as learning disabled, non-supporters believe that this funding encourages schools to over-classify students as disabled. In his journal article regarding the problems with inclusion, Glenn Hartz discusses the “one size fits all” theory and how it is an unrealistic expectation of “the world’s most oppressed minority”, handicapped children. Students do not always learn at the same pace and may need to be treated differently from their peers to be given equal opportunity (Hartz). Students who excel in comparison to their peers are sometimes excluded into a “talented and gifted” program and both the regular teacher and teacher for gifted students collaborate on lessons for the student to succeed. Without the option of exclusion, students could be set up for failure. A research study conducted by Caryn Hoerst and Susan Whittington in Ohio uncovered one reason why inclusion might seem unsuccessful to some- not all teachers are properly prepared for the shift into inclusion. Educators staying abreast of the current policies and strategies necessary to effectively teach a disabled student in an inclusive classroom setting is vital. Results of the students success varied based on different teachers. These components raise question to whether or not inclusion is more harmful or beneficial to children.

Reasons For Inclusion

Inclusion exists to give special needs children the same opportunities as their peers in education. According to Kenneth Jost, currently one in five children qualify as learning disabled in the United States. Inclusion has shown help disabled students improve socially, behaviorally, and academically in a regular classroom setting. A research study conducted in 1991 revealed students with disabilities showed regression of social skills in a segregated classroom whereas disabled students showed progress in their own behavioral management in a social setting among their peers performing on grade level (Jost). Tendencies show students can learn effectively from one another. Each student with learning disabilities has an Individualized Education Plan which has shown to be beneficial to special education students because it is customized for their own educational deficits and sets goals for the student to achieve. Parents who have children with special needs argue that their children can be successful adults through inclusion and a mainstream education. The power of inclusion allows success for the child with the appropriate placement and support. The excluded child is the child without a voice.

Credible Reasons to Support Inclusion

According to theorist Alan Harchik, inclusion “gives children with special needs the opportunity to learn in natural, stimulating environment” also making it “possible for friendships to occur” (Harchik). Non-handicapped children can benefit from inclusion as well by learning about differences between each person and assisting one another. Disabled students are more likely to have higher self-esteem and feel accepted when they’re included and have the opportunity to have a voice. Patrick Mweli discusses in his journal article that students with special needs have shown to benefit socially with fewer labels and more positive attitudes, self-reported higher likings of school and teachers with more motivation to learn. Teachers can benefit from inclusion by embracing the newer techniques for instruction and properly preparing for the diverse learners they will have in the classroom. The success of the learning disabled child can be related to the teacher’s competency, attitude, and perception of inclusion (Mweli).

Conclusion

Both sides of this debate share very different views but one aspect is not disputed- every child is entitled to an education. Inclusion may not be the best educational move for every child with special needs but its proven beneficial for a vast amount of students according to many research studies. By preparing educators to run an inclusive classroom properly, inclusion could be much more successful and functional for children with and without disabilities. Students with special needs learn from their peers who are non-disabled and have a feel accepted by being included. Students without disabilities benefit as well by reaching an understanding that everyone is different. Giving assistance to disabled peers can give them a feeling of doing something good for someone in need of help. While there are reasons for excluding children and sometimes even having them in a restricted environment, it is unfair to keep a special needs child away from their peers without an opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive in a general educational environment.

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