



Individualized Education Programs: Finding the Best Option for Learning Disabled Students

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Abstract

Students are entitled to a specialized educational program at the expense of the public, working in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program. The goal is to put the student in the least restrictive environment, ultimately moving them from a specialized classroom to a regular classroom. Services are provided for the students in the Individualized Education Program, but the parents are not always aware of exactly what each service entails and how it will impact their child's learning process. While on the journey to find the most effective intervention plan for the student, they may experience social, academic, and behavioral drawbacks. Educational professionals from the New York City area were asked to participate in a questionnaire regarding their student's school performance: socially, behaviorally, and academically. Based on the answers provided by the professionals and their personal sentiments about education, interventional methods, and inclusivity, the data was analyzed to understand whether the student's designated interventional methods are beneficial to their school lives.

Research Question

Should we be reducing the time that students with learning disabilities are in school interventional programs in order to re-integrate them into a more inclusive classroom setting?

Definitions

Individualized Education Program: A written document is developed for those that are eligible for special education and warrant an IEP meeting. This meeting will include parents, administrators, teachers and specialists working to find the best path for the student. Students with IEPs require related services, which are school-based services that the child with a disability will be receiving that provide[s] support for him or her and enhance[s] educational performance.
"Pull-out": Specialists work closely with students outside of the general education classroom providing instructional support or related services in small groups or one-on-one in a separate setting
"Push-in": Specialists work closely with students in the general education classroom providing instructional support, differentiated instruction or related services
"Co-teaching": Teachers are paired together in a classroom to share the responsibilities of planning, instructing, and assessing students

Introduction

- The transition from home to school can be difficult for a child, and the graduation onto later and more difficult grades, like grades three through five, that demand more from the student can prove trying (Kavale, 1988).
- Parents can be unaware of the importance of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and how it sets the tone for the student's educational success. IEPs are put into place to provide the most educational benefit for the student (Burns, 2006).
- Students are entitled to a specialized educational program at the expense of the public, working in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program.
- The goal is to put the student in the least restrictive environment. The school must protect the confidentiality of the student, and only allow relevant staff to see any information regarding the child. It also must protect the student, as "children should not be punished for a behavior if the behavior is a direct result of the student's disability". ("Individuals with Disabilities...", 2016).

Background and Review of Literature

Push-in

- Many teaching programs are still placing most of the responsibility on the special education teacher for the special education students, rather than encouraging the general education teacher to broaden their role (Sailor and Roger, 2005).
- Students do not want to be excluded or stigmatized based on their placements. Even when a student is receiving services outside of the classroom for their personal benefit, they often do not perform up to the expectation (Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, and Algozine, 2012).

Pull-out

- Children with physical or sensory disabilities, speech difficulties, medical problems, social or behavioral difficulties need the support of professionals other than teachers (Daniels, 2000).
- Students with learning disabilities do no progress academically without individualized attention to their educational needs (SEDL Archives, 2019).

Co-teaching

- The best solution for a student with special needs would a classroom of a smaller size with one general education teacher and one special education teacher, working in conjunction (Barton, 2016).
- Research showed that students with learning disabilities felt confident being educated with their peers however; they may not have received the targeted instruction they needed" (Fernandez, N., & Hynes, J. W., 2016).

Methods

Participants:

- A group of teachers, education professionals, and/or observers was selected from a St. John's University education course in Queens, New York.
- The participants are of various ages, genders, and status. An email was sent to the students written by the researcher.

Data Collection:

- The seven professionals noted the demographics of their individual student, including gender, age, and year in school.
- The questionnaire also asked the professionals to evaluate each student's performance: socially, academically and behaviorally, as well as to outline what their education plan is.
- The end of the questionnaire allowed the subject to explain their personal experience in the area of special education, as well as their personal opinions on interventional methods, how their student responds to their specific method, and how they feel special education could be made more inclusive.

Data Analysis:

- The seven questionnaires were analyzed, making note of which students struggle in their current interventional path and which students excel, with respect to how their disability affects them.
- Most of the questions are qualitative and were grouped thematically, but for those that can be quantified, the mean and range of the answers was calculated.

Results

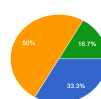
Demographics:

- The seven professionals surveyed noted that their students were in special education programs because of Autism, ESL, speech and language issues, and/or emotional disturbance.
- The students discussed in the questionnaire we primarily male (71.4%), with age ranging from 7-13 years of age.
- The participants' experience ranged from working with ESL and ICT students for less than one year to having several years of self-contained special education students per year.

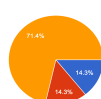
Professional Understanding:

- Most of the participants feel that co-teaching is the best interventional method for students, while noting that their student responded well to their current method (42.9% of students had A's and B's)
- Many suggested that the learning-disabled students be included in the general classroom, while still having their small group learning sessions.
- Overall, the idea of inclusion was stressed by the participants. They stated that students in a pull out setting often felt left out or secluded.

Current Interventional Method
6 responses



In your opinion, which method of intervention is most impactful?
7 responses



Discussion

The anticipated Capstone Project to be completed from this research and data collection is an online educational module surrounding the topics of learning disabilities, Individualized Education Plans, and interventional methods. This pamphlet will also include tips for parents working with education professionals to select the correct learning path for their learning-disabled student. Teachers will be able to use the modules to understand which students respond best to which type of student.

References & Acknowledgements

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