



Full Length Article

Four profiles of inclusive supportive teachers perceptions of their status and role in implementing inclusion of students with special needs in general classrooms



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H I G H L I G H T S

- IST placed themselves along two axes linked to responsibilities and status.
- Along these axes we found four profiles representing four different perceptions.
- The profiles represent stages of evolution in implementation of inclusion.
- The fourth profile represents the inclusionary model that should be aspired to.
- There is much uncertainty in Israel regarding inclusion and how it should be implemented.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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The research examines the perceptions of inclusive support teachers (IST) in Israel regarding their status and the role they play in implementing inclusion of children with disabilities. Four perceptions were found to lie on a continuum from not finding their proper “place” to playing a central role in implementing inclusion in collaboration with the entire faculty and a sense of shared responsibility for the education of all students in the school. The findings show that the latter perception may attest to authentic inclusion already existing on the ground and the possibility that proper leadership could lead to its implementation.

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1. Introduction

The concept of *inclusion* of students with disabilities in general education and its practical ramifications have brought about changes in the Israeli education system – changes in structure, in pedagogy and teaching, and in the roles of teachers and other educational professionals (Leizer, 2007). The role played by special education teachers in particular has changed – making it more complex than ever before (Avissar, 2012).

Special education teachers in Israel fill two types of positions: Some are teachers in self-contained classrooms or in special-education schools specializing in specific student populations. Others are inclusive support teachers (IST). Their job is to work with

students with disabilities attending general education classes. Among their tasks is conducting individual or group instruction inside or segregated from general classrooms, planning IEPs, preparing adapted teaching materials for the use of general education teachers, advising general education teachers vis-à-vis inclusion, and advising parents (Avissar, 2012; Avissar, Moshe, & Licht, 2013).

Special education teachers in Israel receive their formal training either in education colleges or university departments of education. They receive B. Ed. or B. A. degrees and can continue studying for advanced degrees. Their training, which is separate from general education teachers' training, usually includes specialization in teaching students with specific disabilities, multidisciplinary team work, working with families of children with special needs, inclusion of students with special needs, assistive technology, assessment of students with disabilities, classroom management, and curriculum planning. (Avissar, 2012; Israeli Ministry of Education,

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2015).

IST come to their schools equipped with knowledge and skills acquired during their training and must adapt them and themselves to the organizational structure of their particular school. In this way they both carve out their place and fashion the roles they will assume in the school. How they do so is critical to the implementation of inclusion practice and the capacity of their schools to address students' disabilities. Furthermore, their perception of their work as IST may serve as a case study for implementation of inclusion in schools in Israel. The research presented in this article deals with these topics.

The aim of the research is to examine the perceptions of inclusive support teachers regarding their role in inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms in Israel.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Providing education to students with disabilities: segregation, integration and inclusion*

Legislation, ideas, and practices in the US have influenced how students with disabilities are educated in Israel and are indeed the criteria against which Israeli policies and practice are measured. The early twentieth century saw the beginning of organized special education in the US, which developed as a response to the needs of students with special needs who had been excluded from general education schools (Winzer, 2007). This was carried out by creating "self-contained classrooms". Students with similar disabilities studied together in classrooms segregated from "regular school classes" and "mainstream school programs" (Dixon, 2005).

The 1960s saw substantial growth in the number of self-contained classrooms. However, widespread public fervor for the civil rights and humanist movements during the 1960s and early 1970s created a new climate that raised ethical and moral arguments against segregation of students with special needs. This climate led to a great deal of federal legislation, culminating in Public Law (PL) 94-142 – Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), 1975 (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Stainback & Smith, 2005; Thomazet, 2009; Winzer, 2007).

The EAHCA, later titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), empowered local school boards to place students with disabilities in educational settings along a continuum of care. Based on the principle of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), it encouraged integration policies – placing students with disabilities, usually mild ones, in integrated classrooms, as least for part of the time (Brath, 2005; Thomazet, 2009). In these classrooms, special education teachers began helping students with special needs by implementing practices and teaching techniques developed in segregated special education settings (Brownell et al., 2010). Even though the special education law was successful in that it provided access to public education for students with disabilities, the integration policies began to draw criticism because of preference for placement in special education (Brath, 2005) and low achievement levels among students with disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 2000). This criticism gave rise to the Regular Education Initiative (REI), which called for an end to "dual systems" and uniting the two into one system (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Stainback & Staiback, 1992; Will, 1986). The concept of inclusion developed from this initiative.

Shyman (2015) suggested that in the field of education, attempts to capture the concept of inclusion are probably more numerous than any other and appear in a great many contexts: legislative, social justice and human rights, location of learning, and schools as communities. In fact, to date, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the meaning of the term or the policies that should emanate from it. The more radical interpretation sees inclusion as

an unequivocal demand that all students attend only general education classrooms, and rejects outright the "continuum of placements" (Dixon, 2005; Gordon, 2013; Lipsky & Gartner, 2008; Mitchell, 2015; Snyder, Garriott, & Taylor, 2001; Stainback & Staiback, 1992). Sailor and Roger (2005), for example, noted that inclusion is a "zero reject policy" and espoused "100% placement in general education classrooms," while Idol (2006) stated, "Inclusion is when a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs is educated full time in the general education program" (p. 78).

More moderate approaches advocate that students with disabilities be placed in general education classrooms only to the extent to which their educational needs can be addressed, accepting the need for a "continuum of alternative placements" (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011; Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, & Jordan, 2015); Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Kavale & Forness, 2000). A moderate and very broad definition of inclusion is offered by Waitoller and Kozleski (2013):

Inclusive education is a continuous struggle toward (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs, (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools, and (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes that advance and define claims of exclusion and the respective solutions that affect their children's educational futures. (p. 543, emphases is the original)

According to this and other definitions, inclusion offers a more nuanced approach than integration towards human diversity: While integration principally accepts human diversity as a problem that must be overcome, inclusion considers it a value, an opportunity to be taken advantage of and embraced (Acedo, Ferrer, & Pàmies, 2009; Thomazet, 2009). Integral to the integration process is the assumption that the mainstream education system is superior to the special education system and there should be movement of students with disabilities from special to general education (Dixon, 2005; Idol, 1997). Admitting them to general education, however, is conditional on students' ability to meet its demands and function according to its standards – they must "earn" the right to study in it. In contrast, the inclusive approach maintains that as a natural right students with special needs belong, first and foremost, in general education classrooms. Only when all options are exhausted for meeting their needs there (and this is only true according to more moderate approaches to inclusion) can other special education options be considered (Idol, 1997; McGregor, 1997; Sherrill, 2006; Snyder et al., 2001).

The integrative approach considers its major concerns "placement" and "location" of learning – access to learning opportunities, but with students with disabilities excluded from the social community (Mitchell, 2015; Odom, Buisse, & Soukakou, 2011). Inclusion, in contrast, espouses organizing the "social space" from the very beginning to provide opportunities for students to explore and develop within it, while representing the interests of all students (Gale, 2001). In integration, students with disabilities receive remedial help in their weaker subjects, outside the general education classroom, in order to help them survive in the general classroom. In inclusion, the school itself changes to meet the needs of these students (Skidmore, 2004). Gordon (2013) suggested that inclusion maintains that providing practical solutions to all students in the general classrooms falls under "legal human rights."

2.2. *Inclusion practice and the role of IST*

The principles of inclusion practice require, first of all, the

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