

Does Placement Matter?

Comparing the Academic Performance of Students with Special Needs in Inclusive and Separate Settings

Canadian Council on Learning

As part of its *Lessons in Learning* series, the Canadian Council on Learning recently completed a systematic review of the literature comparing the academic outcomes of students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive settings with their counterparts in separate settings. This review was designed to investigate claims that inclusive settings are more or less beneficial than separate ones.

Thirty relevant studies, conducted primarily in the U.S. but also in the U.K. and Canada, were identified. These studies examined students with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, language impairments and mixed disabilities.

The balance of evidence shows favourable academic outcomes for students with SEN educated in inclusive settings. However, these results are not homogenous and effects are generally small in magnitude.

A number of lessons can be drawn from this review.

Building capacity in teachers to educate students with SEN is likely the most important step toward ensuring their academic success. While most teachers support the philosophy of inclusion, they often feel unprepared to instruct students with special needs in their regular

classroom. Systematic and frequent professional development opportunities may be the best way to ensure teachers are ready to work in inclusive environments, beginning at the pre-service level.

Thoughtful implementation of inclusion is critically important to its success. The studies of initiatives where students with SEN in inclusive settings were successful were characterized by adequate support above and beyond that available to general education students. Often this involved team teaching and/or extensive collaboration with a qualified special education teacher.

Teachers are more likely able to provide effective and individualized instruction when they have a manageable number of special needs students in their classrooms. For similar reasons, reasonable class size may also be a crucial factor in making an inclusive approach successful. Teachers will have more time to serve students with SEN individually in smaller classes. In addition, boards and schools may do well to ensure a range of services are available to support students with differing needs.

The full report is available from the Canadian Council on Learning website: www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20090318SpecialNeeds.htm



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