



INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH SEVERE AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES.
INTO REGULAR PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL SETTINGS.

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A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, at the University of Adelaide.

awarded 4.6.90

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December, 1989.

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Abstract.

Two programmes for the integration of children with severe and multiple disabilities are evaluated. The first study reviews the effect of regular contact between eleven pre-school children with severe and multiple disabilities and children in a community kindergarten. The second study examines the effects of the placement of a special school unit for students with severe and multiple disabilities on a campus with two regular schools.

Evaluation measures for both studies involved assessing the attitudes toward integration held by the non-disabled children, before and after contact. The social acceptance shown the children with disabilities, the attitudes of relevant adults toward integration and the effect of staff programmes designed to facilitate integration were also assessed. Results showed that, after regular contact with children with disabilities, pre-school children showed a positive attitude toward integration while the school-aged children did not. Both groups of non-disabled children voluntarily spent a regular amount of their free time with the children with disabilities. The nature of these interactions is discussed in terms of social behaviours, friendship preferences, and attitude change.

Parents generally expressed positive attitudes about the integration of children with severe disabilities, as did the staff involved with the pre-school children. Teachers in the school setting however, had more equivocal attitudes and expressed anxieties concerning their own level of preparation and the amount of support available for integration programmes. Results indicated that programmes to promote the acceptance of children with disabilities had some success. Implications of these two studies are expanded and recommendations are made for future research.

STATEMENT

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any University, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any person, except where due reference is made in the text. I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of the degree.

Signed__

H.M. Sandford

December, 1989

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I particularly wish to acknowledge the help advice and patience of my supervisor, Dr Ted Nettelbeck. I am also indebted to my husband Donald whose support and encouragement were invaluable. Thanks are also due to Dr Rob Elzinga for his patient assistance with the statistical analysis of the data.

A number of other people contributed in some way to this thesis and I would like to express my grateful thanks to everyone involved in these studies. In the first study staff from the Children's Services Office especially Geraldine Slattery and Katherine Kenny were very helpful. I would like to particularly thank Sally Sorrel, Director of the Woodville Gardens Kindergarten, she displayed a great commitment to this study and her help was very much appreciated. My thanks also go to the children and parents of this kindergarten involved in this study. I would also like to thank the Director Sally Cooke and the parents children and staff of the Woodville West Kindergarten. The contribution of the staff of the Spastic Centres of South Australia is also gratefully acknowledged. The assistance of Tanya Black, Trisha Chisholm and Robyn Young in scoring the data is appreciated .

In the second study the assistance of the manager of the special unit and the principals of the three schools involved, Trish Gleed, Alan Young, Robyn Sweatman, and Sally Cuthberlet deserves special mention. My thanks also go to Dr David Thomas for his work on the survey of teachers attitudes. and to Robyn Young who helped score the data. I appreciated the contribution of the parents and staff of the schools involved.

Preface

Over the past 16 years there has been a great deal of research supporting the integration of children with disabilities into normal school environments (e.g. Bricker 1978, Apolloni, Cooke and Cooke 1977 and Brinker 1985). Despite this, the various Australian states have equivocal policies in regard to mainstreaming. The changes in school practices that have occurred in South Australia and Victoria over the past five years illustrate this ambivalence.

In 1984 the Victorian State Government gave statutory recognition to the right of children with disabilities to be integrated into regular schools. Consequently financial support was provided to support and integrate students in the normal class room who appeared 'different' to an ill-defined norm. Five years later a large amount of money had been spent but the special school population remained at the same level as it was in 1984 (Tarr,1988).

In 1986 the South Australian Education Department formally recognized the right of all school-aged children to receive education. This change in policy allowed children with severe and multiple disabilities access to the Education Department's facilities and staff. Two years later the Education Department issued a discussion paper on policy for special-education integration (June 1988). This defined integration as;

"a planned progression and functional participation of students in more demanding educational programmes and settings"(p. 2).

Integration was also seen as,

"more than interaction or association with nondisabled peers - it is about participation in educational programmes"(p. 2)

and could occur;

"In a range of educational settings. - It can occur in special classes and special schools as well as in regular classes in the neighbourhood school" (p.2).

However, no specific policy directives followed from the discussion paper

and the Education Department continued to retain separate special education services and special schools which effectively segregated and isolated children with severe disabilities.

The Federal Government, through the introduction of tied funding arrangements for special education programmes prior to 1986, provided some coherence and direction to State integration programmes. In 1986 following the proclamation of the Disabilities Services Act, the Federal Government published a policy document called 'New Directions'. This reviewed the services offered to people with disabilities and recommended that future federal funding should be based on the principles of normalization and be aimed at achieving the integration of persons with disabilities into local communities. The new policies encouraged organisations which were federally funded under the Disabilities Services Act to review their own policies and services to ensure that they were congruent with federal policy.

The Spastic Centres of South Australia was one of these organizations. Before 1986 it had offered a comprehensive range of specialized services to people with physical and intellectual disabilities from babyhood to old age. All clients had access to short and long term accommodation services, either in a nursing home or in small cottage homes. A rehabilitation workshop made and supplied specialized equipment, including wheelchairs, for all clients.

For children aged 0 to 6 years intensive early intervention was provided in the form of assessment and therapy from psychologists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, plus kindergarten-type activities for children aged 3 to 6 years. Children who attended the early intervention services had a wide range of intellectual and physical disability. Speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychological services were provided for children aged 6 to 20 years who attended a specialized education school which was attached to The Spastic Centres. This school was staffed with staff from both the Education Department and Spastic Centres. Children who

attended this facility had severe physical and intellectual disabilities. Adults were offered minimal therapy services but had access to an activity and recreational centre. This provided daily programmes of a fairly limited nature and clients attending had very little contact with community activities.

By 1986 the organisation had begun to adopt some of the principles of normalization and had introduced procedures aimed at facilitating integration and social interactions between people with and without disabilities. The new federal guidelines accelerated this process and a Corporate Plan was developed. This focused on developing a community presence for all clients of the Spastic Centres and removing any institutional image the organisation had acquired.

The studies which follow evaluated two of the programmes established by The Spastic Centres following the adoption of the new corporate policies. These programmes aimed at providing integration opportunities for children with severe and multiple disabilities. The first study was an evaluation of a programme designed to give integration experiences to a group of preschool children who, because of the severity of their disabilities, would previously have remained in segregated settings throughout their lives. The programme was designed to give them access to community preschool services, and contact with their nondisabled peers. It provided data on the degree to which these aims were achieved, and described some of the variables that influenced the effectiveness of the programme. These included the degree of disability, integration of groups rather than individuals, teacher training, and the attitudes of the nondisabled children. Possible training programmes for both groups of children were reviewed and the need for teacher training was emphasized.

The Spastic Centres aimed to facilitate the integration of some of its school-aged clients through the establishment of a special unit on the campus of a suburban primary school complex. This complex contained the unit for children with severe and multiple disabilities, a primary school, a junior primary school

and a special education school. The second study investigated the extent to which extended contact with children with severe and multiple disabilities changed the attitudes and behaviours of children in the community schools. It also described teacher and parental attitudes towards the integration of such children into the local community.