

Students' Perceptions of Instruction in Inclusion Classrooms: *Implications for Students with Learning Disabilities*

This study summarizes 20 studies of more than 4600 students in kindergarten through Grade 12. Seven hundred sixty of the students have learning disabilities. The studies cover a 22 year period. They looked at students' views, opinions, and attitudes on teacher practices in inclusive, general education classrooms. Seven areas were explored:

- Grading practices,
- Homework,
- Assignment routines,
- Helping practices,
- Instruction,
- Grouping, and
- Adaptations.

In general, students with and without disabilities have similar beliefs and values on teacher practices in each area. Overall, both groups want the same activities, books, homework, and grading criteria. They believe this to be the most fair. At the same time, the students recognized that not everyone learns in the same way or at the same speed. Students value instructional strategies that are adapted to individual student need. Specifically, teachers are seen as helpful to individual learning when they:

- slow down instruction when needed,
- explain concepts and assignments clearly, and
- teach the same material in different ways so that everyone can learn.

Grading Practices

The majority of students in the studies said that preferential grading for some students is unfair and creates a double standard. The students were divided about whether to give one grade for effort and another for accuracy. However, almost all agreed that a passing grade based solely on effort is not fair. They said that the standards for a passing grade should be the same for everyone.

All the students view grades as providing feedback about their work. They view grades as an expected, necessary part of school life. They consider consistent grading criteria to be important for all students.

Homework

The most consistent belief was that everyone should have the same homework. Teacher behaviors that make homework easier:

- 1) assign homework at the beginning of class;
- 2) explain how to do the homework and give examples;
- 3) provide time to start homework in class;
- 4) assign small amounts of homework at a time;
- 5) provide help;
- 6) relate homework to class work;
- 7) check finished assignments and give feedback; and,
- 8) establish a homework routine at the beginning of the year.

Assignment Routines

Some of the teacher behaviors that make assignments easier for students are to:

- 1) provide clear, well-organized directions;
- 2) repeat instructions;
- 3) tell students about the assignment early;
- 4) explain how to do the assignment and give examples;
- 5) help as needed;
- 6) provide an understood purpose, clear benefits, and time for completion;
- 7) describe how the work will be graded; and
- 8) give feedback.



The two behaviors seen as most helpful are giving clear, well-organized directions and allowing students choice in their assignments. Students said that assignments are made more difficult when teachers use inconsistent language, will not answer questions, or do not give adequate directions.

Helping Practices

Students were asked who they prefer to help them in class and how they prefer to be helped. The practices most valued included:

- 1) help from teachers (general or special education);
- 2) help from other students; and,
- 3) help from two-way, small, flexible student workgroups.

Instructional Practices

Instructional practices were rated as most helpful or most bothersome. Across grade levels and disability status, students said the practices most helpful to them were to:

- 1) give extra time for work;
- 2) provide students with choices and opportunities for creative expression;
- 3) explain lessons carefully;
- 4) help with math or reading;
- 5) allow opportunities for interpersonal interactions; and,
- 6) promote active, hands-on activities.

Grouping

Students prefer working in mixed-ability pairs or groups to working alone or as a whole class. Most students like flexible rather than fixed groups. Younger students preferred self-selected groups and older (high school) students preferred teacher-selected groups.

Adaptations

Study questions revolved around whether adaptations, in general, are a good idea. The questions sought to understand students' preferences for specific types of adaptations. An overwhelming majority of students see adaptations as a good idea. They also see them as being applied infrequently by their teachers. The types of adaptations seen as most useful are those that help students to understand difficult content material from textbooks.

Summary

The results from this study are highly relevant to today's classrooms. More students with learning and other disabilities are receiving education in the general education curriculum and classrooms than ever before. As a result, they are achieving more than ever before.

Students in this study said they do not feel that the use of instructional adaptations and accommodations for some students is unfair or negative. Most see that it can benefit all students. The practices most students value are those that can be considered best educational practice. These practices have relevance for both special and general education students.

For More Information

Klingner, J.K. & Vaughn, S. (1999). Students' perceptions of instruction in inclusion classrooms: Implications for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 66 (1), 23-37.