Public Perceptions of Inclusive Education and Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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<th>What is this research about?</th>
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<td>Despite the presence of inclusive education policies across Canada, some advocates for inclusive education have argued that many students with intellectual disabilities are being taught in separate settings outside the regular classroom (Porter, 2004). This study investigated public perceptions of the best education practices for students with intellectual disabilities. The potential obstacles and impacts of including students with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms were also investigated.</td>
<td>This study examined public perceptions of inclusive education practices for students with intellectual disabilities. Results were mixed with 51.6% of respondents choosing inclusive settings as the best type of schooling for students and 42.4% preferring separate schools. Perceived obstacles to successful inclusionary practices were identified as lack of resources and inadequate teacher preparation.</td>
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**Intellectual disability** (ID) in this study is defined as limited functioning in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills such as communication (American Psychological Association, 2000).

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<td>The researchers conducted a telephone survey using an adapted version of the Multinational Study of Attitudes Towards Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Questionnaire (Special Olympics, 2004). The survey was given to a random sample of 680 adults (18 and older) from a six-county area in Ontario.</td>
<td>The survey asked participants to indicate their views on kind of schooling best suited for students with intellectual disabilities. Questions were closed ended</td>
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— in other words, participants were provided with a pre-determined list of answers to choose from.

**What did the researchers find?**
The researchers found that 51.6% of participants believed the best schooling for students with ID was to attend school with non-disabled students compared with 42.4% who indicated best practice to be attending special schools for students with ID. Of the 51.6% who chose inclusive settings, over 85% chose either full integration or a combination of integrated and special classes as the optimal learning environment for students with ID while 13.9% chose special classes only.

In terms of possible impacts, less than 35% of respondents believed that the presence of students with ID would cause discipline problems in regular classrooms or make it harder for other students to learn. Participants also believed that two major obstacles hindered the inclusion of students with ID into regular classrooms, including: lack of required special resources (79.0%) and unskilled teachers (69.4%).

The researchers suggest that these results indicate that the public is divided on the issue of inclusive education.

**How can you use this research?**
School administrators and education policy makers may wish to use this research as the starting point for discussing inclusive education policies and the way these policies are communicated to the general public including student families. Specifically, school administrators, school boards, and education policy makers may wish to consider:

- examining the wider body of research on inclusive education;
- enhancing communication with the public to raise awareness of the Ministry’s commitment to inclusive education practices;
- partnering with government ministries such as Children and Youth services to fund programs for students with ID and their families;
- Create disability awareness programs for able bodied students and their parents.
Original article
To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:

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*Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 87, 1-22.*

About the researchers:

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Other references


Keywords: Inclusive education, public perceptions, intellectual disabilities

About this summary

The Ontario Education Research Ex-change (OERE) is a project of the *Knowledge Network for Applied Educa-tion Research*, an Ontario network pro-moting the use of research in educa-tion. The OERE’s clear lan-guage sum-maries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary has been adapted from the *ResearchSnapshot* series developed by *York University* and *ResearchImpact* and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily repre-sentative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original doc-ument for complete details about this re-search. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.

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