Academic and Social Outcomes of Children with SEN in the General Education Classroom

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Abstract

This paper reviews the research literature on academic and social outcomes of children with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive settings. It offers an overview of the current debates on issues such as classification of SEN and labelling, varieties of inclusion, followed by a review of separate studies focused on academic and social outcomes. Recommendations are given regarding a wider re-conceptualisation of outcomes and the need for mixed-methods longitudinal studies exploring and measuring outcomes for children with and without SEN.

Keywords: *SEN, inclusive education; academic outcomes; social outcomes;*

1. Introduction

Mythologising the past contributes partly to the maintenance of unreconstructed notions of schooling and educational defectiveness. There is also a tendency to mythologise the present as progressing towards some idealised inclusive state, with statements like 'not yet there' or simply moving 'towards inclusion' (Slee & Allen, 2001). Inclusive education is a topic that has caused much debate, stirred emotions, and has received great attention. Inclusive education has been driven by a belief that this is the correct or the only morally right approach, to include rather than segregate and exclude (Lindsay, 2007). Meanwhile, there are voices (e.g. Mock & Kauffman, 2005) that dissent, stating that *full* inclusion is an unscientific and unjustified endeavour, rather a delusion, a product of the current post-modernist thinking in education and social sciences in general.

Is *full* inclusion a "good" idea? Is it morally "right" and at the same time "practical"? Is it "efficacious"? Is it politically incorrect to question it or even oppose it? This paper will (and can) not dwell in or answer such philosophical, sociological or strictly educational questions regarding the conceptualisation or validity of inclusive processes in education (or society). The aim is much more modest than that, i.e. to offer an overview of studies exploring the academic and social outcomes of students (identified and labelled as) with special educational needs (SEN) in the general education classroom. This presentation will, hopefully, be of special interest to psychologists and educators, who are trying to contribute to the improvement of the academic progress and emotional/social well being of children with SEN in different contexts.

2. SEN and Inclusion: definitions and related problems

2.1 Special educational needs: is labelling really necessary?

Due to cross-national inconsistencies in the classification of SEN, the OECD obtained agreement across countries to re-allocate their national categories into three types, for the purpose of obtaining data for international comparisons:

Category A: Disabilities: students with disabilities or impairments viewed in medical terms as organic disorders attributable to organic pathologies (e.g., in relation to sensory, motor or neurological defects). The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems attributable to these disabilities.

Category B: Difficulties: students with behavioural or emotional disorders, or specific difficulties in learning. The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems in the interaction between the student and the educational context.

Category C: Disadvantages: students with disadvantages arising primarily from socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistic factors. The educational need is to compensate for the disadvantages attributable to these factors (OECD, 2005, p.14)

Some countries have taken a strong stance in relation to categorisation. Sweden has generally adopted an anti-categorisation approach to special educational needs and has opposed the use of medical categories for educational purposes. Given the reluctance to categorise children, psychometric assessment techniques have not been widely used. An exception to the Swedish anti-categorisation stance is the recognition of deaf or hearing impaired students as a separate group who may have the option of attending a special school for the deaf. While, in the UK, various categories or areas of general 'difficulties' are organised in terms of four broad dimensions called 'needs' (DfES, 2003). They are:

A. *Cognition and Learning Needs*
   Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD); Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD); Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD); Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD).
B. *Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development Needs*
   Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulty (BESD).
C. *Communication and Interaction Needs*
   Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN); Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
D. *Sensory and/or Physical Needs*
   Visual Impairment (VI); Hearing Impairment (HI); Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI); Physical Disability (PD).

Lindsay (2007) points out that the generic term of special educational needs has been widely used in the UK for nearly 30 years to cover 'all children who have developmental difficulties that affect: their learning; their behavioural, emotional and social development; their communication, and their ability to care for themselves and gain independence'. Such conceptualisation has been considerably influential in Europe (e.g. Germany, Netherlands) where it has been used in legislation endorsing policies of inclusion in education. The terms 'special education' and students with 'special education needs' are widely used in the literature. The term 'special educational needs', as a form of labelling, is not without its critics (Norwich, 2010). In the past three decades, educators have been embroiled in a debate regarding pros and cons of labelling and categorization of students with disabilities. During the last two centuries, derogatory labels such as imbecile, stupid, and retarded were normally used by psychologists and educators to describe individuals who did not conform to the societal norms (Mukuria & Bakken, 2010). Their function was geared to exclude people with disabilities from facilities, and activities enjoyed by people without disabilities. Unfortunately, this resulted in alienation, isolation, and institutionalization of individuals with disabilities (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009).

The proponents of labelling have suggested that labelling may communicate a child's strengths and weaknesses, establish a diagnosis, suggest interventions, be used to raise financial support, and provide foundation for research on etiology and prevention (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1990). In addition, they posit that labelling is imbedded in the law, recognizes meaningful differences in learning, leads to a proactive response, provides common language for researchers and professionals, helps in fundraising for research and other programs, enables disability-specific advocacy to promote programs and spur legislative action, and helps make exceptional children's needs more visible to policy makers members of public (Hallahan et al., 2009). According to Mukuria and Bakken (2010) labelling, however, should be assigned professionally, cautiously, and with common sense so that it does not become an end to itself. In addition, labelling may lead to a protective response in which adults and children without disabilities become more accepting of atypical behaviour of an individual with disabilities than a child without a disability who exhibits the same behaviour. Above all, according to Mukuria and Bakken, it is critical for individuals with disabilities themselves, to understand themselves and appreciate who they are, since by understanding their strengths and weaknesses they will be able to set high but realistic goals. Labelling may help the students with disabilities recognize that there are individuals out there who are like themselves, thus not only removing them from isolation but also helping them get some consolation, create a better self-image and develop better self-esteem.

Lynch (2001) warns that the term SEN should be used with caution. Lynch argues that the term may perpetuate the binary divide between 'ordinary' and 'special' students and systems. Second, the label may present a barrier to the development of inclusive practice, and it is not very helpful in pinpointing the educational difficulties of the learner. Third, the label tends to put the burden on the learner and a focus on individual deficits, rather than the characteristics of the school and environment and therefore excuse schools from change. According to labelling opponents (Blum & Bakken, 2010), disability labels have outlived their educational usefulness - although the origin of disability labels is connected to the medical model of identification where diagnostic medical disability criteria are useful in disciplines such as, medicine and psychiatry; however, they have little meaningful instructional application in education, despite the persistent use of

them in the general and special education. Instead of using a disability labelling approach, alternate assessments that provide an ecological framework to guide educators in the identification of students with disabilities may be adopted as more useful and empowering.

It is worth noting that, according to Norwich (2010), the term special educational needs (SEN) was introduced in the UK in the late 1970s to move away from deficit categories – what the child or young person could not do – to what was required to provide learning opportunities and support learning (DES, 1978; Warnock Report). The assumption has been that the significant difficulties that give rise to special educational needs lie along a continuum. Difficulties are a matter of degree; with the difference being one of degree not of kind. The term is specifically an educational one that relates directly to teaching and learning. It contrasts with the related term 'special needs' which has tended to be used as a general cross-sector term. 'Special needs' like the term 'disability' applies across different areas of life activities; but 'special needs' has also been used to refer to needs beyond learning difficulties and disabilities, for example, English as an additional language need. Another valued aspect of the special educational needs term, again according to Norwich, has been the focus on individual needs, which promotes an interactionist conceptualisation, which recognised the combined role of individual and social factors and is consistent with the more elaborate and recent versions of a bio-psycho-social model of disability, as found in the International Classification of Functioning applied to children and young people (WHO, 2007). This kind of interactionist model is a useful way of going beyond the unnecessary polarisation between medical (individual) and social models.

2.2 Inclusion (s): are people talking about the same thing(s)?

The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 2000, affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental right and established the new millennium goal to provide every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. EFA also clearly identified Inclusive Education as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. The fundamental principle of EFA is that all children should have the opportunity to learn. The fundamental principle of Inclusive Education is that all children should have the opportunity to learn together. Significant numbers of disabled children and youth are largely excluded from educational opportunities for primary and secondary schooling. Exclusion, poverty and disability are linked. Education is widely recognized as a means to develop human capital, to improve economic performance, and to enhance people's capabilities and choices. Exclusion from education can result in a staggering loss of freedom and productivity in the labour market (Peters, 2003). One of the first expressions of the philosophy occurred nearly 40 years ago when Scandinavian countries began referring to the principle of 'normalization'. This was defined as the process of making available to disabled persons 'patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society' (Nirje, 1969). In almost every country, inclusive education has emerged as one of the most the dominant issues in the education of students with SEN. In the past 40 years the field of special needs education has moved from a segregation paradigm through integration to a point where inclusion is central to contemporary discourse (Mitchell, 2010).

It is important to note there is no universally accepted definition of inclusion; thus, this term holds different meanings to different individuals (Fuchs &Fuchs, 1994). Inclusive education may be implemented at different levels, embrace different goals, and be based on different motives, reflect different classifications of SEN, and provide services in different contexts. Specific goals may focus either on improved educational performance and quality of education, or on autonomy, self-determination, proportionality, consumer satisfaction or parental choice. Some of these goals may conflict and produce tensions. Similarly, motives for Inclusive Education may derive from dissatisfaction with the system, from economic or resource allocation concerns, or from a vision of educational reform. Finally, SEN services may be viewed as a continuum of placement options (multi-track approach), as a distinct education system (two-track approach) or as a continuum of services within one placement—the general education school and classroom (one-track approach). All of the variants produced by these different aims, levels, systems and motives may be called inclusive education (Peters, 2003; Meijer et al., 2003).

Inclusion has been imposed on or embraced by the educational systems of many societies as a moral imperative, thus, not necessarily in need for empirical support of its efficacy. However, for researchers in the pragmatist tradition, the critical question for educators and families should be, ''Will the general education environment result in improved achievement for learners with diverse needs and disabilities?'', or, "Does evidence support the widespread belief that inclusion will improve social outcomes for students with SEN?"

The lack of a definition of inclusion makes evaluation difficult. If a judgement is to be made about how well inclusion is working, it arguably necessitates some consensus both about what inclusion is and how to define 'working'.

It is possible to identify commitment to the principles of inclusion, the existence of policies for inclusion and evidence that practice is becoming more inclusive, but still not be clear how any of this contributes to more positive outcomes for the individual child or young person. A developing theme has been a focus on outcomes for the individual learner and a consideration of what inclusion means at the level of the child or young person's experience (McLaughlin & Rouse, 2000; Ellis, Tod & Graham-Matheson, 2008)

3. Academic and social outcomes of children with SEN in inclusive settings

Outcomes of inclusive education are often illusive and difficult to measure. Student achievement tests of content knowledge provide only one indicator of impact, and are not strongly linked to success in adult life, nor do they provide a measure of creative and analytical problem-solving skills needed for survival. The challenge is to measure success in terms of broad indicators of outcomes and impact (Peters, 2003). Lynch (2001) advocates for evaluation of inclusive education programs at all levels (institutional and teacher performance as well as student performance), and against the goals of inclusion within a democratic, human-rights-based environment. Researchers have shown ongoing interest in the academic skills acquisition/performance and social/affective outcomes of students with SEN in inclusive settings. This paper will briefly present and discuss here selected studies, in order to illustrate the nature and objectives of some of the research on the efficacy of inclusive practices.

3.1 Academic outcomes

There is large body of research that addresses the question of how inclusion impacts on the achievements of students with and without special educational needs. In interpreting these studies, however, several cautions need be taken into account: (a) some of the earlier studies may not be relevant to current conditions, (b) many of the studies compare placements only and do not 'drill down' into the nature of the educational programmes the students received, (c) many studies are methodologically flawed, and, of course, (d) all studies are specific to the context in which they were conducted (Mitchell, 2010). Other potential problems with the data which is collected to document academic progress, may include: (a) data are collected mainly from children with mild to moderate learning difficulties or emotional/behavioural problems, whereas in the special education schools students with more severe and challenging issues are educated; (b) teachers may use different standards when evaluating students with SEN in the classroom, for example, be more lenient or hold lower expectations regarding class-work, attendance, or participation; or (c) they may inflate the grades of children with disabilities perhaps, due to personal compassionate feelings, providing incentives (as a form of external motivation), or external pressure on the school to comply with standards of excellence.

Unique to Europe, Italy's National Law 118 (1971) and National Law 517 (1977) established Inclusive Education as national policy. In the report by Gobbo *et.al.* (2009) on the inclusion of students with SEN in the Italian school system, which (since the legislation of 1975 on inclusive education) currently accommodates about 98% of this group in the general education, some concerns on the poor outcomes are mentioned: (a) 56.5% complete compulsory education, and only 10.4% get an upper secondary degree or a university degree – the highest achievers are those with sensory-physical (motor) disabilities, only a few of those with language or psychological difficulties achieve at a similar level; (b) every year about 10% of disabled students fail and need to repeat the grade, while 26.3% have repeated at a least a grade during their school career (p.49-52). This report however reports only national statistical data, and doesn't provide details of research exploring these concerns.

In Germany, students with SEN are also considered as at-risk group for school drop-out – more than 2/3 leave school without any sort of qualified certificate, however, the majority of these "failed" students attend special schools (for mental diseases!), since students with SEN in integrated forms are normally entitled to receive a leaving school certificate (Gogolin and Jochum, 2009).

In France, in the second half of 2000, there were expressed strong criticisms regarding the inadequacy (or lack) of legislation and provisions necessary to enable inclusion (Ebersbold, 2006; Tranchant, 2008). However, the heated discussion is still at the socio-political level – systematic research evaluating outcomes of inclusive practices, has yet to come.

In the Netherlands, students aged four to approximately 12 years may be educated in mainstream schools, in special primary schools or in special schools; 95% of all 4–12-year-old children in the Netherlands attend mainstream schools, 3% special primary schools and 2% special schools. Special primary schools are schools for students with moderate learning difficulties and moderate behavioural difficulties. Special schools are schools for students with more

severe difficulties, e.g. physical handicaps, mental handicaps or severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Instead of referring students to special schools, mainstream schools may include these students and obtain a budget for additional support, which for the most part has to be spent on support by a peripatetic teacher. There are no special classes in mainstream schools, so students are either included in or excluded from mainstream classes (I.van der Veen et al., 2010). Despite the fact that it has been Dutch government policy for over a decade that as many students with special needs as possible should be educated in mainstream schools, there has still not been a substantial scaling down of the percentage of students in separate provision (Smeets, 2007).

Peetsma et al. (2001) conducted a 4-year longitudinal study of matched pairs of Dutch pupils with mild learning and behavioural difficulties, one in special and one in mainstream placement. The mainstream pupils academically outperformed the special school pupils over the period. The results were that, after two years, only a few differences in development were found: students made more progress in mathematics in inclusive settings, but school motivation developed more favourably in special schools. After four years, students in regular schools had made more progress in academic performance, whereas there were no differences in psychosocial functioning. However, a small–scale qualitative study, which was incorporated as part of the major study, showed that students with psychosocial problems made somewhat better progress in special education than in regular education, pointing to the need to pay attention to the psychosocial development of students with mild disabilities when they are placed in inclusive settings. I.van der Veen et al., (2010) found in their large-scale study of children with SEN in general education, and their numeracy and literacy attainment levels, that cognitive problems had a much stronger effect on the school career than social–emotional and physical problems.

More systematic reviews of research on outcomes of inclusive practices come from the US and UK, where discussion of effectiveness indicators predominates in the literature. The assessment of outcomes for children included in mainstream education is key in current policy initiatives in both the US and UK (US Department of Education, 2002; DfES, 2003). However, one criticism of this "outcome-focussed" approach, maintains that indicators do little to promote an understanding of development and treat inclusive education as if it were an event, not a dynamic process (Peters, 2003).

In one of the earliest meta-analyses, 50 studies compared general (i.e., inclusive) and special class placements. It was found that placement in general classes resulted in better outcomes for learners with mild mental retardation, but poorer outcomes for students with learning disabilities or behavioural/emotional problems (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980). Another early meta-analysis of 50 studies (Weiner, 1985) compared the academic performance of mainstreamed and segregated students with mild handicapping conditions. The mean academic performance of the integrated groups was in the 80th percentile, while segregated students scored in the 50th percentile. Baker, Wang and Walberg (1994) conducted meta-analysis of inclusive education studies that generated a common measure of effect size. This measure demonstrated a small to moderate beneficial effect of inclusive education on academic and social outcomes of SEN students.

Lipsky and Gartner (1992) argued that special education, compared to regular education, had poorer outcomes for students with disabilities. For example, students with disabilities in special schools or classes were less likely to complete secondary education, and when they did leave school were likely to be unemployed, to live at home rather than independently, and to have few friends. Few were likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education, or were engaged in any productive activity after they left school. The problem with such conclusions about outcomes is that they fail to show how outcomes are determined by educational setting interacting with individual student background and characteristics, which are independent of the setting. Manset and Semmel (1997) reviewed learning outcomes for mainstreamed and segregated pupils, finding no difference in mathematics but a small advantage for mainstreamed pupils in literacy. These authors also found that 'normal' pupils in mainstreamed environments were actually advantaged in terms of attainment by the presence of pupils with special educational needs – perhaps because their teachers were sensitised to the different learning needs of others in the class with challenges.

A study comparing 8th grade students in middle schools in the US, one inclusive the other implementing a pull out special education system, with matched groups of students with LD, found that the inclusive education group achieved significantly higher levels on a range of academic measures and equivalent scores on others (Rea, McLaughlan, and Walther-Thomas, 2002). These children also had better attendance and equivalent levels of suspension. The features of this relatively successful model included a 'teaming model' whereby teachers planned work together and classes rotated during the day.

A UK study compared the outcomes for adolescents with Down syndrome of similar abilities but educated in mainstream or in special schools. The results showed no evidence of educational benefits for those in segregated

settings, despite the higher teacher-student ratios. Those who attended their neighbourhood mainstream schools made significant gains (two-three years) over their special school peers in expressive language and in academic achievement (Buckley, 2006). Several studies have found that quality of instruction, rather than placement, is the most important predictor of student achievement. For example, in one study of mathematics achievement of students with hearing impairments, placement in regular or special classes did not seem to impact on achievement. Rather specific features of quality placement included a supportive teacher, regular and extensive reviews of material, direct instruction and a positive classroom environment (Kluwin & Moores, 1989)

A range of studies has investigated academic progress of children with SEN within mainstream schools. There is evidence that children can make appropriate progress in a mainstream setting if specific curriculum differentiation and teaching strategies are employed (Manset & Semmel, 1997). Cross and Walker-Knight (1997) reviewed studies of inclusive provision for children with SEN. Successful methods for promoting inclusion involved planning for common tasks and small group learning requiring co-operative behaviour, individual accountability and responsibility. Fisher and Frey (2001) suggested that academic inclusion is facilitated by specific alterations to the delivery of the curriculum that are different and additional to the normal differentiation of the class, collaboration amongst the teaching team and involvement of peers.

Lindsay (2007) in his meta-analytic review found that the evidence does not provide a clear endorsement for the positive effects of inclusion. There is a lack of evidence from appropriate studies and, where evidence does exist, the balance was only marginally positive. Another point of mixed evidence can be found in a report from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003). This suggested that inclusion generally works positively at the primary school level, but serious problems emerge at the secondary level. This was attributed to increased topic specialisation, the different organisation of secondary schools, and the increasing gap between the achievement of students with SEN and other students with age.

On the other hand, findings from studies suggest that there are no adverse effects on students without special educational needs of including students with special needs in mainstream schools (Kalambouka et al. 2007). The rationale behind inclusion, then, is the concern that children should not be segregated from their peers and excluded from the mainstream curriculum and practice (Lindsay 2007). Whether students with special needs will be able to develop well enough in mainstream education and how great is the risk that they will be referred to a form of special education depends on a number of different factors. Characteristics of the child, the teacher, the class and the school all play an important part. The important task now is to research more thoroughly the mediators and moderators that support the optimal education for children with SEN and disabilities and, as a consequence, develop an evidence-based approach to these children's education.

Although inclusion can be (relatively) effective academically, research literature suggests that children with SEN can experience rejection and bullying in mainstream schools (Dyson, Farrell, Polat, & Hutchenson, 2004). Therefore, to be considered successful, a programme to place a child with SEN in a mainstream school would need to enable both academic and social inclusion.

3.2 Social outcomes

Successful implementation of diversity in education requires a special effort to respond to the special educational needs (SEN) of students. Schools generally tend to place priority on acquisition of academic knowledge but rarely make provision for activities designed to foster socio-affective development of special needs students (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003). Research studies that have investigated the social and affective outcomes of educating pupils with SEN in mainstream schools have produced equivocal results; these children have poorer outcomes overall compared with their peers, and this is the case even in primary schools, notwithstanding greater concerns about secondary schools (Frederickson et al. 2007; Warnock, 2005). Although inclusion often is touted as improving the self-concept, social integration, and peer relationships of students with disabilities, evidence concerning the benefits of inclusion for the social functioning of students with LD reveal differential benefits (Vaughn & Elbaum, 1999). Furthermore, although the social functioning of students with disabilities is very important, few would suggest that the academic performance of students with LD be sacrificed as a means to enhance social outcomes. (Vaughn et.al., 2001).

In a meta-analytic review of social skills deficits and learning disabilities, Kavale and Forness (1996) found that approximately 75% of students with learning disabilities received lower ratings of their social skills when compared with peers without learning disabilities. As a group, students with disabilities are perceived by all categories of raters to exhibit poorer social skills than their peers without disabilities. Across 152 studies analyzed, students with disabilities were at

approximately the 25th percentile in terms of social skills. Teachers perceived that students with learning disabilities are most frequently distinguished from their peers without disabilities by academic deficits and less frequent social interactions. Students without disabilities respond towards their peers with disabilities most frequently y rejection or limited acceptance, wherein students without disabilities are friends with only about 30% of their peers with LD.

A Swedish study of 183 pupils (9–3 years) found no difference in self-concept between those receiving support from special educators in mainstream schools (Allodi, 2000) although there was some evidence of those supported in mainstream having lower levels of self-concept for academic competence compared with those in small groups in special units. Cambra and Silvestre (2003) studied the self-concept and social preference of Spanish students with a range of SEN and comparison LD children in a mainstream school with Special Experimental School status (35% had SEN of various kinds). The typically developing group had significantly more positive social and academic self-concepts and were also more likely to be selected and less likely to be rejected. Hence, mainstreaming in this study was not associated with equivalent socio-emotional development for the SEN group.

Self-concept is a particularly relevant issue for students with LD for three reasons (Vaughn et al., 2001). First, when compared with their peers, students with LD demonstrate difficulties in both the academic and social areas, thus supporting the hypothesis that their self-concept may be adversely affected by low academic functioning. Second, students with LD are identified as needing special support to enhance their academic performance, and this identification and labeling process may negatively affect their self-concept. Third, students with LD differ from other students with disabilities in that they demonstrate average or above-average intellectual capability that is inconsistent with their academic performance. This average-to-high cognitive functioning may make students with LD more aware of their academic challenges, thus influencing their self-perceptions.

A meta-analysis of self-concept of students with learning disabilities derived from an analysis of 36 research reports allowing 65 different placement comparisons (Elbaum, 2002) provides more substantial evidence. This found no overall relationship between self-concept and setting (regular classroom for all instruction, part-time resource, self-contained for all academic instruction and special school) for four out of five comparisons suggesting that students fared no better or worse in terms of self-concept in regular or separate classrooms.

Friendships are an integral part of the social development for all children and can be distinguished both empirically and conceptually from peer acceptance, or social status. A student's peer acceptance is assessed by obtaining ratings by the student's classmates of how much they like the student. In comparison, friendships reflect reciprocated attachment, affection, companionship, and support between two individuals (Vaughn et al., 2001). In an interview study of 14 young people (12–18 years) with Down syndrome attending either their local mainstream secondary school or a resourced mainstream school, Cuckle and Wilson (2002) found that the young people were positive about friendships and having role models among mainstream peers but friendships were mainly limited to school. More truly reciprocal friendships were noted with peers who also had SEN, including others with Down syndrome.

Vaughn and Elbaum (1999) examined the friendships of more than 4,000 elementary students, including more than 900 students with LD. Ninety-six percent of students with LD listed at least one best friend, with approximately 67% listing six or more friends. At the elementary level, perceived quality of friendships was modestly higher for students without LD than for students with LD and continued to increase through high school. In contrast, the perceived quality of friendships for students with LD remained the same. Analyzing perceptions of friendship quality by the component dimensions of companionship, intimacy, and support for self-esteem, the authors found (a) no difference between students with and without LD in terms of companionship, (b) higher friendship intimacy for students without LD, and (c) less support for self-esteem for students with LD.

A number of teaching strategies have been identified that can promote the development of social relationships among primary school pupils with and without SEN. Among those identified by Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro and Peck (1995) were: co-operative grouping, opportunities for collaborative problem solving, focussing on social interaction, the use of peer tutors and structuring time to provide opportunities for generalising and applying learning. In the absence of such facilitating strategies, full-time physical placement (physical inclusion) of a child within mainstream school does not necessarily reduce negative social perceptions.

In a study of McConaughy et al,(2011), medium to large group effects showed significant academic and social impairments for elementary school children with ADHD compared to controls and other referred children without ADHD. Children with ADHD scored significantly lower than controls on standardized achievement tests, and significantly lower than controls and other referred children without ADHD on parent and teacher ratings of their academic performance and social behavior. Of children with ADHD, 15-55% showed clinically significant impairment in academic performance and 26-85% showed clinically significant impairment in social behavior.

A study by Avramidis (2010) which involved 566 pupils drawn from seven British primary schools, contrary to most previously discussed studies, found that pupils with SEN were found to be equally likely to be members of the friendship clusters of the class and occupied similar levels of network centrality as their non-SEN peers. In keeping with earlier studies, pupils with SEN were more likely to be nominated on anti-social indicators. Specifically, boys with SEN were more frequently perceived as 'rule breakers' while girls with SEN as 'shy/withdrawn'. However, those pupils with the pro-social characteristics of leadership and sportsmanship were well integrated in peer groups.

4. Conclusions

There is a lack of a firm research base for inclusive education to support either whether this is a preferable approach in terms of outcomes, or how inclusion should be implemented (Lindsay, 2007). Concerns about the possible negative consequences of full inclusion for students with LD have led various researchers to advocate a more individualized approach to inclusion in which the learning and social needs of each student are considered first and foremost, rather than the "place" where the student is educated (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, & Fernstrom, 1993). Suggestions for the responsible inclusion of students with LD have underscored the need to individualize placement decisions, provide appropriate training and resources to teachers, and monitor the outcomes of placement decisions and interventions so as to make changes as needed (Vaughn et al, 2001). However, negative results could be interpreted as examples of bad integration practices, rather than as indicators of the efficacy of inclusion. Nevertheless, studies focusing on academic and social outcomes could serve to obtain a "baseline" for the "functioning" of not only students with SEN, but of the general education settings also, as a starting point for improving the design and implementation of inclusive practices.

It appears, according to Davis and Watson (2001) that much of the literature homogenises the lives of adults and children in schools. They are characterised as only responding to structural influences within their life worlds. Disabled children encounter discriminatory notions of 'normality' and 'difference' in both 'special' and 'mainstream' schools, and that these experiences relate not simply to the structural forces that impinge on schools and teachers, but also to the everyday individual and cultural practices of adults and children. Mixed methods (qualitative-quantitative), action-research and/or longitudinal studies could perhaps be carefully designed by school psychologists and experienced teachers working in inclusive schools (in consultation with parents and children themselves), in order to understand and evaluate the impact of various practices called inclusion, on the development pathways of children and youth with and without SEN, not only on their grades or perceived social status in a certain semester in the general education classroom.

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