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PREVIEW

**EXAMINING CRITICAL FACTORS
TO INCLUDE CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL
NEEDS IN TYPICAL CHILD CARE SETTINGS**

by

Barbara Johnson Wilmes

A DISSERTATION

**Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska**

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Major: Interdepartmental Area of Administration
Curriculum & Instruction (Teaching, Curriculum & Learning)**

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert L. Egbert

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1995

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Examining Critical Factors To Include Children With Special

Needs in Typical Child Care Settings

BY

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

EXAMINING CRITICAL FACTORS TO INCLUDE
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN TYPICAL
CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Barbara Johnson Wilmes, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 1995

Adviser: Robert L. Egbert

This study was designed to determine the extent of inclusion of children with special needs in typical child care settings in Nebraska. Independent variables included: education level, work experience, workshop training of providers, and furnishing consultation to providers. The dependent variable was inclusion.

A mailed survey was utilized to conduct the study. A questionnaire was developed and reviewed by five professionals in early childhood. A pilot was completed, followed by mailings to 550 randomly selected child care providers throughout Nebraska.

Responses were recorded and analyzed to determine demographic data and ascertain relationships among the variables. Analysis was conducted using Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient. Analysis was illustrated in tables, charts, and narrative explanation.

Findings were reported in demographic descriptions

of the population and in response to each of eight research questions. Significant relationships were found between education level and inclusion and education, experience and inclusion. Experience alone was not significant.

The following conclusions have been drawn from the study:

1. A Bachelor of Arts or Child Development Associate degree increases inclusion opportunities.
2. *Experience alone* was not significant, but *experience with education* increased inclusion opportunities.
3. Less than one in five child care providers currently serve special needs children.
4. The number of exceptional children integrated is commonly one child per setting.
5. Child care for children ages 6-12 and 0-2 is less available than other ages.
6. Care providers prefer workshops in their own communities, maximum travel time from 15-60 minutes, scheduled after five p.m. weekdays or Saturday mornings, 2-3 hours duration, and at no expense.

7. Consultation would make a difference in enrollment and caring for special needs children.
8. Care providers perceived eight work shops as useful in caring for both typical and special needs children.
9. Less than 30 percent of care providers have no interest in special needs children.

The researcher recommended education requirements, consultation, and workshop training to increase inclusion opportunities.

PREVIEW

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Today the needs of families for child care are a high priority. Life has changed dramatically in the past two decades for Americans. That change is evident in families changing patterns including (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1994, p.8):

- One out of four children is born to an unwed mother
- Today's teenage mother is more likely to keep her baby
- Single-parent families, headed by women, now comprise one of every five families with children
- Married families are divorcing earlier than in the past (38% within four years)
- More than two of every three children has an employed mother.

Gordon and Browne (1993, p.244) noted the following family changes in addition to those above:

- There is a significant increase in mobility, thus parents feel alone in unfamiliar territory
- There is often no extended family to assist or teach child-rearing skills to new parents

- When fathers are present, many are more active in child care
- For children living in poverty, fifty-seven percent are in female-headed households
- In the 1990's, there are more dual-income parental homes.

The demands on households who have special needs children places increased stress on families. These stressors included increased requirements on time because of caretaking, decreased time for sleep, social isolation, financial demands, marital discord and increased divorce rate. A significant stress is in the need for relief from parenting duties, but at the same time finding nurturing, quality day care more difficult to access (Peterson, 1987).

This study examined the type and size of licensed child care settings in Nebraska which provide child care to children with special needs. The results of the study should can now be utilized by the licensing agency (Nebraska Social Services) as well as to academic institutions in planning comprehensive workshop/in-service plans which best fit the current needs of child care providers in Nebraska.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the

current status of inclusion of children with special needs in licensed early child care programs in typical child care settings in the state of Nebraska.

Specifically, the study attempted to determine if a relationship exists between type of care setting (home or center) and 1) the providers' years of child care experience 2.) the level of education of the respondent (the primary administrator or child care provider with the longest tenure at individual settings), 3) the type(s) of workshops selected by the respondents, and 4) the inclusion of children with special needs.

The research questions designed specifically for this study include the following:

1. To what extent are Nebraska's typical child care programs enrolling children with disabilities?
2. What are the educational backgrounds of Nebraska's early childhood care providers?
3. Is there a relationship between an early childhood degree and inclusion of children with special needs in typical child care settings?
4. Is there a relationship between years of experience caring for young children and inclusion of children with special needs in typical care settings?
5. What in-service programs do Nebraska's education and care providers perceive as being of most

benefit to assist their programs in providing services to typical preschool children in inclusive programs?

6. Which in-service training programs do Nebraska's education and care providers perceive as being of most benefit to assist their specific programs in providing services to preschool children with special needs.
7. Which convenience factors do child care providers prefer when they are considering enrolling in work shop and in-service training sessions?
8. Would consultation services make a difference to child care providers in the decision to enroll and care for children with special needs?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study attempted to link together the research on adult learning through attitude change and the enrollment status for special needs children. Helping adults develop positive attitudes toward working with children who have special needs may increase the number of care settings available to families with special needs children. Research on the topic of adult attitudes toward learning provided insight into 1) what it is that changes adult attitudes toward new ideas, and 2) how

attitude affects implementation of new learning. Based upon years of experience and study, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor of adult education and educational psychology Wlodkowski (1981, p. 66-68) listed an array of strategies to increase positive attitudes among adults toward change and learning:

- provide learners with suitable learning tasks
- when advisable, allow the learner to originate or guide the process of learning
- allow the learner to plan and set goals
- let the learner identify potential roadblocks to learning.

Malcolm Knowles (1980) found that learners who know nothing or little about a topic may benefit from a teacher directed instructional format. Designing instruction in collaboration with adult learners produced greater success.

Tough's (1971, 1979) found that nearly 90 percent of adults are engaged in learning projects, 70 percent of which are planned by the learners. According to Mezirow (1990) adult change, through a process of self-directed learning, is:

more inclusive, discriminating, permeable,
and integrative perspective, superior
perspective that adults choose because they
are motivated to understand the meaning...

Strategies for maximum learning are impacted in the initial stage by two motivation factors:

- attitudes toward the environment, instructor, to the subject matter, and to oneself.
- needs within the learner at the time of learning (Galbraith, 1990, p. 104).

Galbraith supported adult self-determination to initiate and/or direct one's own learning because adults are inclined toward autonomy. To the degree possible, adults should make choices, set goals and plan for their own learning about what, how and when to learn.

Wlodokowski (1985) stated that people may be in learning sessions for reasons over which others have no control. Some of these reasons included professional growth, job requirements, and personal needs. His research supported a needs assessment to enhance learner motivation and attitude before beginning instructional sessions.

Licensed child care providers are required to document a given requirement of in-service hours in child care education each year, thus insuring a "need" for in-service education. In Nebraska, that requirement is twelve hours. This researcher contacted the Nebraska Department of Social Services to inquire if there had been a needs assessment of licensed child

care providers for the inclusion of children with special needs in typical care settings. Debra Mabry-Strong (1994) reported that to her knowledge there had been no such study, but that the information could be helpful to social services and to others in the field.

Are there identified barriers to adult attitudes and new learning? The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (1982) supported the "Collaboration in Life Long Learning Conference," sponsored by the American Association for Continuing Education. Leaders were surveyed for perceived problems confronting learning. Areas identified by over forty percent of the participants were:

- failure of curricula to meet needs of learners
- lack of awareness of public education on importance and need for adult education
- the public is unaware of resources for adult learning
- non-collaborative efforts exist at all levels
- need to restructure and respond to technology is not met at participant's level (p. 66-68)

Which needs are most important to the attitude of individuals in learning? The foremost requirement critical to adult attitude and learning is the specific content or course of study. Other factors worthy of exploration included but are not limited to time of day

for the sessions, financial costs, space or location, and unpleasant consequences, such as excessive travel time to and from the training (Wlodkowski, 1985).

Middendorf (1992) described a three year project involving eleven child care programs which was designed to improve opportunities for special needs children in child care. The model involved 40 hours of teaching child care providers about children with disabilities, on-site consultation/observation and follow-up assistance. The results confirmed a gain in enrollment for 59 children with disabilities. Middendorf demonstrated that an in-service model expanded opportunities for children with disabilities in Kentucky. With careful planning and training, could this also be true in Nebraska?

Thoretically, utilizing adult learning theory should maximize the improvement of child care provider knowledge and attitude toward enrolling children with disabilities in typical child care settings in Nebraska. When directly applied to child care training programs, the critical factors which should be included in work shop training are: 1) a needs assessment of child care providers; 2) content of workshops and in-service education specific to early childhood providers; 3) factors related to environmental conditions for workshops; and 4) cost to work shop

participants. These concepts were carefully constructed and based into the design of the research study and the instrument utilized in this study. The collaborative approach between educators and child care providers this researcher utilized included directly asking child care providers which workshops and which form of consultation are needed to include children with special needs in their own child care programs. This direct involvement of care providers allowed Nebraska's care givers to have a direct role in the selection and planning of future in-service programs. Thus, care providers now have ownership of the concepts and methods involved in mainstreaming children with special needs in typical child care programs.

PREVIEW

Definition of Terms

At-risk. Children who have not been identified, but are considered subjected to biological or environmental factors which increases their probability of later failing in school (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

Attitude. A mental position or feeling regarding a fact, a process, or a state (Knowles, 1980).

Care provider. One who provides for the social, emotional, physical, and educational needs of young children in the absence of the parent(s).

Consultation. To engage in seeking or conferring information or services.

Child Care/Day care. Care given to children by persons other than their parents during parts of the day that parents are absent. Child/day care may or may not include academic/cognitive curriculum (Gordon, & Browne, 1993).

Children with special needs refers to children who differ from their peers in at least one dimension, and who often require some kind of accommodation to meet their full potential. Exceptionalities include gifted children, children with learning disabilities, speech or language disorders, mental retardation, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, hearing impairments, emotionally/behaviorally impaired, multiple disabilities, and other impairments (Wood, 1993).