

**AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL FOR INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH ASD IN GENERAL
EDUCATION SETTINGS –
A PRACTICAL LESSON IN ISRAEL**

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We propose an inclusion model for students with ASD referred to regular schools. The modified model based on Dunkin and Biddle (1974), consists of five interdependent elements: 1. Presage variables related to the included student; 2. Teaching context variables; 3. Content variables including the class curriculum and the adapted curriculum for the included student; 4. Process variables; 5. Product variables consisting of short-term and long-term effects on academic performance and social and behavioral skills and status. When combined together they provide the essential framework for establishing a successful inclusion as well as methodology for conducting formative and summative evaluation of the program. Practical recommendations for implementing the model are suggested, based on a two-year experience in the Israeli education system.

Over the last two decades inclusion has become a crucial part of reform efforts to improve the services for students with disabilities, by placing them in general education settings (Praisner, 2003). The term inclusion stems from the philosophical argument that children with mental, physical, or emotional disabilities are entitled to an education within the mainstream of public education (UNESCO, 1994). Although inclusion is relevant to a wide range of disabilities, this paper will specifically focus on individual inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the regular education system, which has been applied only recently in the Israeli education system.

Today, autism is referred to as a *spectrum* disorder (Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD), as there are enormous differences between individuals with autism, both in the severity of the disorder and in the visible characteristics manifested in each individual (Gillberg & Billstedt, 2000). This continuum ranges from individuals manifesting relatively mild autistic-related disorders such as Asperger's Syndrome to those manifesting autism with mental retardation and other relatively severe symptoms (Scheuermann & Webber, 2002). Although the diagnosis of ASD is made on a behavioral basis rather than on genetic (or other) criteria, we can still identify a number of shared characteristics, in varying degrees: difficulties in social interaction and communication; unusual sensory experiences; resistance to environmental changes; and obsessive and stereotypic behaviors (American Psychiatric Association – APA, 2000; Chakrabarti & Fombonne, 2001; Goldstein, 2002; Lawson, 1998; McConnell, 2002; Powell & Jordan, 2001; Wing, 1996).

Inclusion of Students with ASD

There are many challenges to the inclusion of students with ASD in general classrooms, due to the varied nature and possible severity of the disorder. Nevertheless, inclusion programs are found to help in advancing children with ASD as well as their peers who are without disabilities (see Dybvik, 2004; Fryxel & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994). Advocates of full inclusion portray the benefits for the included child. These benefits take in behavioral modeling of non-disabled peers, improvement of social and academic performance, higher self esteem, and greater opportunities for expanding social networks (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Mesibov & Shea, 1996). Additionally, peers of children with disabilities benefit from being exposed to a diversity of talents and temperaments as they learn to tolerate the others and internalize values such as equal rights and opportunities (Heward, 2006).

Inclusion, in itself, does not guarantee a successful learning experience (Laushey & Heflin, 2000; Roeyers, 1996). Some components have been reported in the professional literature as essential for inclusion to succeed:

1. Preparing, guiding, and supporting included students and their families – Students with autism need to be prepared, guided, and supported on individual basis. Behavioral, academic, social, and emotional parameters are all incorporated in the preparatory work (Burack, Charman, Yirmiya, & Zelazo, 2001; Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Kohler, Strain, & Shearer, 1996; Mesibov & Shea, 1996; Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirato, 2001). There must be continual contact and cooperation with the families, as well as ongoing support for them (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, & Kincaid, 2003).
2. Tailored curriculum, learning environment and teaching methods – An individual program must be tailored to each included student, based on the assessment of a trained team of professionals and with the parents' cooperation. An individual program identifies the student's weak and strong points in order to establish clear goals. Such a program is necessary for systematic inclusion and assessment (Dybvik, 2004; Gena & Kymissis, 2001). A structured learning environment includes, for example, audiovisual tools which permit independent learning; a reduced work load; the ability to use various modes of expression; alternative activities when the class activity is inappropriate; and class activities that give classmates an opportunity to assist, as in cooperative learning or research projects (Farlow, 1996; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Iovannone et al., 2003).
3. Collaboration among the staff members – Collaboration among all staff members, including the general education teachers, special education teachers, and the administration and support team, both in and out of the school, is crucial for inclusion to succeed. Collaboration consists of delegating responsibilities and positions, while maintaining uniform decision-making (Dybvik, 2004; Heward, 2006; Simpson, Boer-Ott & Smith-Myles, 2003; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). To ensure collaboration, various communication channels (e.g., a contact journal, staff meetings on a regular basis) must be established among all the parties involved in the inclusion process (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001).
4. Staff training and support – Supporting the staff is vital to successful inclusion. When support is provided, teachers tend to show a greater willingness to accept students with autism in their classrooms. General education teachers who have not received proper training should receive in-service training (Dybvik, 2004; Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Iovannone et al., 2003; Kohler et al., 1996; Vaughn et al., 1996).
5. Preparing classmates and their parents – Classmates and their parents play a significant role in inclusion, and their positive attitude facilitates the inclusion process. In order to gain their support, information on the included student's disability and unique abilities should be provided at a level that is appropriate to the class. A discussion with classmates on moral standards should be held so that the included student will not be subjected to pity or ridicule (Farlow, 1996; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Schmidt, 1998; Vaughn et al. 1996).
6. Applying appropriate strategies – Useful strategies found in studies on inclusion of students with autism should be applied - for example: a. Priming – previewing materials and activities with the student before they are presented in class, and pre-practice can reduce challenging behaviors (Farlow, 1996; Zonolli, Daggett, & Adams, 1996); b. Prompting and picture schedules may be used in place of speech and reading. Prompting has been found to improve behavior during transition periods. When transitioning from one activity to another, picture schedules have proven effective in preparing students for upcoming changes (Sainato, Strain, Lefebvre, & Rapp, 1987). Significant increases in verbal initiatives have also been observed in various contexts following the use of a tactile prompting device (Taylor & Levin, 1998); c. Delayed contingencies, such as positive reinforcement; d. Self-management strategies; e. Peer-mediation intervention; 6. Cooperative learning (Odom et al., 2003).

Inclusion of Children with ASD in Israel

The Special Education Law in Israel has been in effect since 1988 (Ministry of Justice, 1988). However, only a few regulations concerning the support of ASD students have been implemented. In the year 2006 about 600 students with autism were integrated into the regular education system using the option of individual inclusion. Individual inclusion refers to the placement of the student in the regular system with or without an assistant. Other options are versions of small classes including ASD students; however, these were not included in this study (ALUT – the Israeli Society for Autistic Children, 2008). The Israeli Ministry of Education supports students with special needs who are assigned to the special education system. However, individual inclusion in regular education requires specific support

within this system. Therefore, a supplement to the special education law was added in 2002 (Ministry of Justice, 2002). It states that a special inclusion committee should determine the additional services to be granted to the student. These services may include additional learning, psychological consultation, and assistance in class (e.g., a helper). The educational staff is required to design an Individualized Education Program (IEP) specific to each included student for the full year of study.

One of the major resources is the personal helper. Nevertheless, limited budgets dictate only a minimal allocation of support hours and very low pay. This results in a shortage of helpers, and those who are hired usually lack essential educational preparation and skills. Consequently, many parents provide extra payment, to increase the support of their child (Leibowitz, 2000).

In recent years several parents' organizations have sued the educational system, claiming that it did not adhere to the special education law. Most claims won the courts' support and parents are now waiting for a major breakthrough. At this point in time, the special education law with its inclusion implications has not been fully implemented in Israel. In this transition phase, parents who were eager to promote the inclusion of their children have taken a major part of the load. For example, they hired professionals better trained than the helpers operating in the education system. Parents demanded that these professionals have an academic degree and be trained for the purpose of inclusion. They termed their role *Inclusion Coordinator (IC)*, to differentiate their function from that of the helpers. Therefore, most coordinators were hired and partially paid for by the families; the education system provided partial support to some families. In order to ensure quality inclusion, families hired in addition an advisor for the program, who was in charge of selecting and advising the coordinators. Inclusion schools were selected by the advisors based on their willingness to support the program. School principals and superintendents were fully involved in monitoring the implementation of the inclusion programs.

An inclusion advisor is a professional responsible for designing the inclusion programs, presenting them to the families and the education system, and guiding the ICs who work directly with the students in the educational environment. The inclusion advisor usually meets with the inclusion coordinators on a weekly basis and maintains regular contact with them in order to solve any ongoing problems. As part of promoting individual inclusion, a special course for coordinators has been offered by the major parents' organization in Israel (ALUT – the Israeli Society for Autistic Children, 2008). It is important to note that prior to this inclusion course, no official training in this field was offered in Israel. In the few programs where inclusion advisors were employed, they trained the coordinators based purely on their own professional judgment and experience.

The Need for an Inclusion Model

Despite the trend of including students with ASD in general classrooms, only few models have been formulated to enhance the successful inclusion of these students (Schwartz, Sandall, McBride, & Boulware, 2004; Simpson et al., 2003). Research indicates that early intervention should always be based on the combination of a thorough understanding of a. the nature of ASD in general, b. an awareness of the range of best and/or recommended practices and, c. individualizing the program for the child based on a careful, comprehensive assessment (Marcus, Garfinkle, & Wolery, 2001). The student's unique needs, skills, preferences, and learning characteristics, along with the parents' preferences, should be incorporated into any intervention program or plan (Hurth, Shaw, Izeman, Whaley, & Rogers, 1999; Iovannone et al., 2003).

We suggest a model designed to support general educators, parents, and inclusion personnel, which will guide them in assuming responsibilities, caring for and teaching students with ASD. The suggested model emphasizes the need for collaboration and coordination, particularly between and among the school personnel, the family members, and the inclusion team. Moreover, it stresses the necessity for teachers to acknowledge the services these experts can provide, so that they may better assist their students. By proposing such a model, the authors wish to ensure that inclusive programs are effective, use strategies that are evidence-based, and overcome the challenges of the many individual differences and needs. In addition, such programs should be compatible with the social contexts of mainstream public education.

The model proposed here is based on the initial efforts of the Israeli education system to implement the 1988 Special Education Law (Ministry of Justice, 1988). A major challenge for this system has been the inclusion of individual students with ASD, who otherwise would have been referred to special education institutions. Furthermore, some fundamental components of the procedures derived from that law have not yet been implemented in Israel. The major reason for this is financial; however, there are

some other professional issues that need to be established. A key one is to clearly define the role of the Inclusion Coordinators (IC) in supporting the child with ASD in his/her educational environment. Teacher education programs in Israel do not yet offer specific training for this function. A coherent inclusion model is warranted for promoting such programs.

The Context

The various characteristics included in the proposed model are based on information that was collected during a two-year empirical follow-up on the application of individual inclusion programs in Israel (Eldar, Talmor, & Wolf-Zukerman, 2005). Thirty-seven ICs took part in supporting children with ASD in the regular education framework, either in kindergarten or in elementary school. All children exhibited basic interaction and verbal skills. The coordinators took part in a one-year training course in the process of working with the students.

Three qualitative procedures were used for collecting information during and after the course: 1) Each coordinator filled in bi-monthly reports, for a period of four consecutive months, in which they were asked to report any salient instances of inclusion difficulties and successes that had occurred over the two previous weeks, and explain the possible causes; 2) Submission of a comprehensive report on one instance of success and one instance of a difficulty and their relation to the inclusion model at the end of the year; and 3) Focused open interviews – Interviews were conducted with eight coordinators one year after the end of the school year. These coordinators were asked to specify effective inclusion model components, and their consequences on the functioning of all parties involved in the process.

The Parent Model

One frequently cited model in teaching, teacher education, and learning literature is the 3P model of classroom learning, outlined by Dunkin and Biddle (1974). This model specifies the main components in classroom learning in terms of the three P's: Presage (students' characteristics and teaching context), Process (task processing), and Product (nature of the outcome). This basic framework was adopted for designing the inclusion model suggested here, while new components that are unique to the individual student with ASD were added. Placing the inclusion process into an empirical model, which is highly valued in the field of education, increases the model's validity and allows clinicians and researchers to test its applied effectiveness. In addition, the basic framework is a good example that presents the concept of interrelations between and among the different components of the context of learning.

The Immerging Integrative Model

The modified model presented here consists of five interdependent elements that, when combined together, provide the essential framework needed to establish a successful inclusion process: 1. Presage variables related to the included student (age, gender, previous experience in educational settings, etc.); 2. Teaching context variables (the school, the home-room and other teachers, the inclusion staff, supported programs outside of school, etc.); 3. Content variables including the class curriculum and the adapted curriculum for the included student; 4. Process variables (teachers' behavior, included student's behavior, typical peers' behavior, the IC's behavior, and the interaction among them); and, 5. Product variables consisting of short-term and long-term effects on academic performance and social and behavioral skills and status. Figure 1 describes the adapted components of the integrative inclusion model based on Dunkin and Biddle (1974).

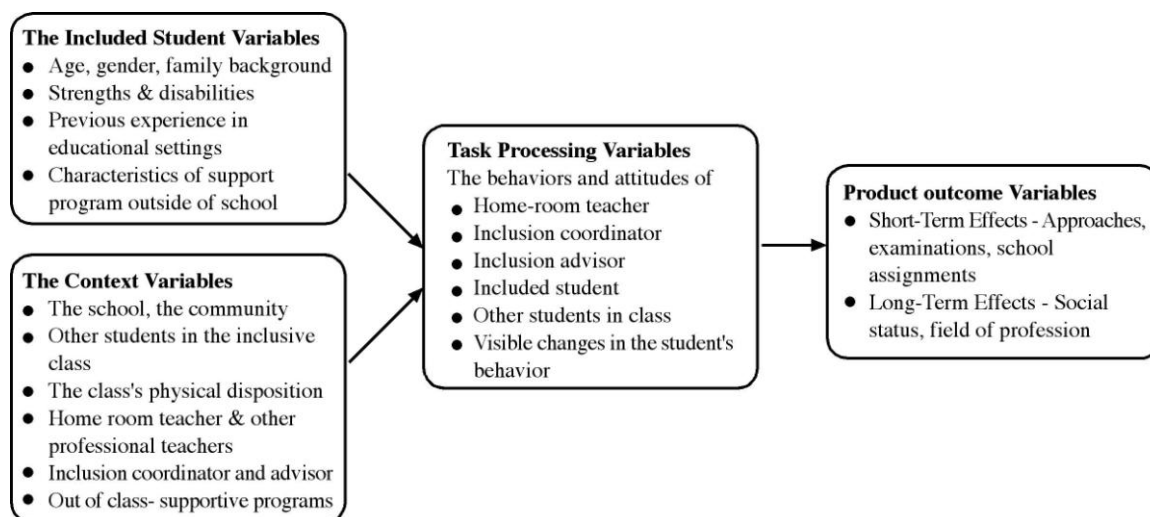


Figure 1. The adapted components of the integrative inclusion model based on Dunkin and Biddle (1974)

Presage – Variables Related to the Included Student

Variables in this category include the student's age, gender, and his/her capability to cooperate with others; the family socio-economic status; the parents' occupation, etc. In addition, there is a description of the student in terms of both strengths and weaknesses in the following four areas: cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional for example, the student's verbal proficiency, his/her ability to delay gratification, playtime skills with peers, and attitude towards physical contact. Furthermore, it contains variables related to the experience of the student in previous educational settings, various treatment methods, or earlier inclusion trials.

Context Variables

The context variables refer to school and community factors, such as the school social climate, the inclusion supportive factors, principal's attitude towards inclusion, the school's parental community, and the bureau of education's policy. Additional variables refer to the typical peers in the inclusive classroom: tolerance and acceptance of those who are different, discipline problems, difficulties in social interaction, class structure, and various in-class obstacles that need to be overcome. Furthermore, this category includes variables related to the physical structure of the class such as the organization of chairs and tables, availability of different workstations in and out of the class, available equipment and the possibility for the existence of disturbing factors such as noise. The model also takes into account the educational team – the home-room teacher, the IC, and other professional educators. It aims at describing their attitudes and beliefs towards the acceptance of those who are different, and attempts to determine how much each of them is willing to personally contribute to the success of inclusion process.

Content Variables

Content variables include all aspects of the curriculum designed by the home-room and professional teachers for the entire class. They also refer to individualized planning designed by the teachers and the IC in order to support the inclusion process.

Process Variables

These variables describe the behavior of students and staff in class, illustrating their interrelation and cooperation patterns. Among them are teachers' behaviors towards the included child and other students, strategies employed by the IC, the behavior of the included student in the cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional domains as well as visible changes in his/her behavior. Additional variables include typical peers' attitudes towards the included child both in class and during after-school extracurricular activities.

Product Variables

The product outcome variables refer to periodical changes, mainly related to the included student. These changes are assessed in aspects such as academic achievements measured by exams, achievements in various skills, social status, and, in the long run, the acquisition of a profession and life attitudes. In addition, outcomes measured by changes in attitude relating to other partners of the inclusion process (such as teachers and typical peers) are also evaluated in this category. Furthermore, it includes measures of long term changes that have an affect on the student's inclusion in society.

Implementation Procedures

Several steps are essentials for ensuring a constructive inclusion process. These important procedures are pre-planned before the beginning of the school year and are utilized throughout the year. One main advantage of this model lies in its flexible structure, where several steps may alternate with others or simply interrelate. The following chapter portrays the steps necessary for an effective inclusion. Each step is related to the corresponding part of the model (in parentheses).

Preliminary Procedures

1. Choosing the inclusion advisor who will be in charge of the program and staff involved – in coordination with the parents. Advisors should be certified, well trained, and experienced. They are typically selected by the education system but it is vital to ensure a good *chemistry* with the family. This can be evaluated in a few meetings with the family and the student (context).
2. Collection and summation of all the important variables characterizing the included student and his/her family – done by the advisor and family (presage).
3. Choosing the school – performed by the advisor and family. The location should preferably be a close distance from the student's home to encourage after school social interaction. The

school's principal should take an active role in the inclusion process and acknowledge the student's right to equal opportunities in his/her education. It is important that he/she will demonstrate a high desire to learn about the characteristics of the student and share this information with school colleagues in order to establish up a strong foundation for the benefit of everyone concerned: the home-room teacher, other professional teachers, typical peers in class, and the included student (context).

4. Choosing the home-room teacher and other professional teachers – performed by the principal: The home-room teacher should cooperate with the inclusion team, and especially with the IC, and meet with them on a frequent pre-planned schedule. It is important to choose educators who are passionate about meeting this challenge, who are capable of team collaboration, and show strong abilities in class management (context).
5. Selecting the room and class size – done by the advisor and principal. It is recommended to choose a room that has an additional unit adjacent to it. This unit will be used for individual learning as well as in cases of inappropriate behavior, when a temporary removal of the student from the class is necessary. It can also be used during class breaks for purposes of group or peer play. In addition, administrators may need to reduce the number of students in the class to support the added physical and instructional adjustments needed for the inclusion program (context).
6. In-class seating position – The home-room teacher and the inclusion staff should identify a place from which the student can clearly see the board/learning stimuli and can communicate with the teacher. Also, the chosen spot should be such that exiting from class can be done quickly. It is recommended that the IC sit either behind or next to the student, where he/she will not interfere and will be able to effectively assist the student. In addition, it is crucial to identify a typical peer that will sit near the included student and constitute his/her role model but, at the same time, will socially interact with him/her. In cases where seating in the class is a group arrangement, it is recommended to find a group whose peers possess tolerance and tranquility (context).
7. Choosing the ICs – The IC will be in charge of implementing the program and all professionals involved. It is vital to select two coordinators (this will provide a substitute in case of absence as well as ease the distribution of the assignments). Second, the ICs form a support group for times during the process when difficulties arise. It is of great importance that the ICs have similar backgrounds, preferably in areas such as inclusion, pedagogy, ASD, and special education. The coordinator should be well trained. He/she should be selected by the advisor with the collaboration and approval of the superintendent/school principal (context).
8. Developing rapport between the student and the IC – The IC should be presented to the family before the initiation of the program to ensure effective collaboration. The initial contact should be scheduled for at least two months before the beginning of the school year. Both ICs must learn to recognize the student's cognitive, behavioral, social and sensory/emotional capabilities. They need to develop trusting and secure relationships with the student, based on discipline, and to prevent as much as possible any instances of manipulation that usually characterize the early stages of acquaintance, when limit setting takes place. In addition, the ICs need to collect relevant data regarding the student's behavior, while focusing on meaningful events and favored activities and consequences. A pre-planned school tour to become familiar with the educational environment is essential (process).
9. Setting up the initial contact between the student and his/her home-room teacher – This should take place at the student's home (a familiar context) for purposes of initial observation and acquaintance (process).
10. Preparation of school materials by the home-room teacher and the advisor/IC – Designing a work outline while taking into account both the school personnel and the inclusion team. These should be a distribution of tasks among the various members, while strongly emphasizing collaboration and coordination, and a briefing of the professional teachers with regard to strengthening of learning materials. Arranging, rewriting and revising material to correspond with the level of the student should be done (content).
11. Precise coordination between the inclusion team member – Both in the various modes of action and in reporting (process).
12. Preparation of school team – Preliminary workshop or lecture specified to the school faculty and given by the IC or others. Various aspects related to ASD, should be introduced, together with understanding the characteristics creating an accepting and supportive environment.

Future meetings will discuss task allocation and raise the issue of expectations stemming from the inclusion process (process).

13. Pre-instruction of classmates done by the teacher and the ICs – Arrangement of a class conversation discussing issues such as equal rights, uniqueness, empathy for those who are different etc., appropriate for the level of class (process).
14. Information for class parents – A decision has to be made whether to inform all parents with regard to the inclusion. In cases that such a decision is made, the IC with or without the principal should describe, during the first parents' meeting, the process as a whole, while informing the parents about the current and future major steps involved (process).

In class roles and procedures

During the school year, it is necessary that all procedures be maintained simultaneously.

1. The IC's responsibilities: Writing a precise daily report and sharing the information with the various staff members as well as informing the parents of the included child about any socially or academic step taken. ICs are also responsible for instructing the included student and his/her group's classmates. They need to identify instances where difficulties arise (in raising one's hand, organization of equipment etc.), in order to resolve them later on during their at-home-discrete teaching program. While being able to anticipate early signs of an upcoming inappropriate behavior, IC's should strive to prevent it before it escalates by communicating with the teacher using cues such as body gestures or altering academic content. In cases of severe inappropriate behaviors that may disrupt the class order, IC's should escort the student out of the class to a special room reserved for these occasions. In general, the removal of a student from the class should be avoided and done only in cases where conducting the situation in-class could not be in a respectful manner. While staying out of the class, IC's should abstain from preaching or rebuking the student and concentrate on teaching educational material relevant to that being taught at the moment in class. This is in order to prevent a situation in which inappropriate behavior is used to disrupt teaching or avoid educational tasks. Priming or exposing students with ASD to school assignments before their presentation in class is a useful strategy for affecting academic performance and preventing problem behaviors. Our research results indicate that the occurrence of problem behavior decreased and academic responding increased when priming preceded curricular activities. These results are consistent with previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of antecedent modifications in reducing problem behaviors (e.g., Dunlap, Foster-Johnson, Clarke, Kern, & Childs, 1995; Dunlap, White, Vera, Wilson, & Panacek, 1996; Lee, Sugai, & Horner, 1999; Moes, 1998). One possible explanation is that priming involves high amounts of reinforcement, and therefore the student may associate enjoyment with the academic assignment. In addition, every included student should have an individual education plan, taking into account both the gaps and the difficulties that characterize him/her. It is important to organize in-class simulations, dealing with social codes with which the included students are not familiar and to create social interactions with their classmates during after-school hours as well. It is imperative for the teachers to pre-provide the IC's with teaching materials for exams and assignment preparation in so that the chances of a successful academic inclusion are enhanced. Another responsibility of the IC is to assist the student in developing social networks by incorporating peers into the intervention environment, providing intervention in community settings, and structuring the intervention around naturally occurring social routines. The IC is the most prominent figure in the inclusion process. Figure 2 portrays the position of the IC within the educational framework of the included student. The general described model does not intend to provide the framework of the IC in detail. Rather, it is based on a strong theoretical rationale and a tidy target definition based on the student's needs and the unique characteristics of the inclusion environment (context/process).
2. The home-room teacher's responsibilities: One major duty of every teacher supporting inclusion is to give his/her included students valued roles. Students with special needs are at risk of becoming objects of pity. These students are more likely to receive respect if they assume valued roles in the school through involvement in student body organizations and sports teams, and by serving as office and teaching assistants. If a bizarre behavior is being carried out by the included student, it should be ignored by the other students. In general, the teacher should continue the flow of the lesson without batting an eyelid. Students are likely to interpret his/her *extinction* as if the student's

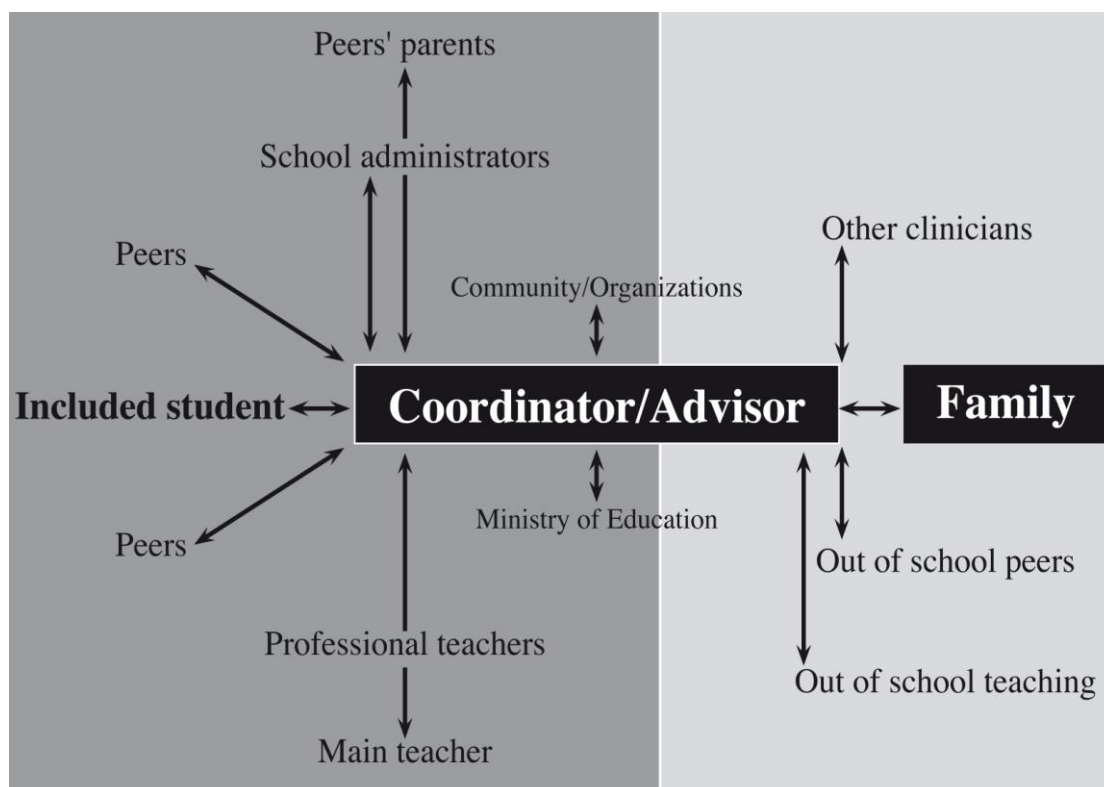


Figure 2. The position of the IC within the educational framework of the included student.

bizarre behavior has no major concern for the environment. In other appropriate situations, however, the teacher should emphasize the student's unique abilities as well as mention his/her name indirectly with regard to class rules and regulations, for example; to praise his/her group for working quietly. The teacher should always take a direct route in addressing the student (not via the IC), but at the same time accompanied by eye-contact with the IC's to verify correct timing. It is important to create opportunities for the teacher to work with the student and/or his/her group while the IC is working with other groups. The home-room teacher is the main figure capable of observing and identifying differences in the working styles of the two IC's. It is thus imperative that he/she gather data regarding their functioning (context/process).

3. The inclusion advisor's responsibilities: To maintain the initial motivation and to be able to reflect on the process as a whole, meetings should be held on a regular basis. These should include the ICs and the school advisor, other professional teachers, the school's principal and the home-room teacher. The inclusion advisor should visit the school as often as required mainly for observation purposes –meeting with both the inclusion staff and the student in his/her environment. During these visits, data collection will take place and information will be analyzed by both the advisor and the IC's. Upon completing the analysis, primary and secondary goals will be determined. Another duty of the inclusion advisor is to assist the staff promptly in emergency cases (e.g. extreme violent acts against others or self-injurious behavior). Inclusion advisors are responsible for guiding both the family and the ICs throughout the inclusion process. They instruct the ICs in detail in regard to both real and hypothetical scenarios that may arise during the day, and provide them with creative solutions to problems that may arise (context/process).
4. The typical peers: These students should be instructed to treat the included student as an equal, and always confront him/her directly (not via the IC). It is imperative to encourage a group of students suitable for the task to collectively work on social codes that the included may find difficult to follow. The rationale behind this is to create a situation in which the students motivate their classmate to behave appropriately by providing personal examples, and by being the role model for appropriate behavior. Peer tutoring is an excellent tool, where both

sides take an active role. The application of this strategy requires advanced preparation and special training (context/process).

5. All processes involved with inclusion should be followed by a programmed data collection, such as tests and examinations, interviews and observations for all the members in the process (product).

Discussion

Inclusion is a concept that highlights the value of accepting and appreciating diversity and difference. The implementation of an inclusive program for a child with ASD is challenging in nature, yet a rewarding process for all involved. Positive and inclusive experiences in their early years will enable children to become skillful lifelong learners and increase their quality of life.

The suggested model has attempted to describe the various resources that educators may employ to improve the inclusion process. We have strongly emphasized the demand for collaboration and integration between and among the various parties involved: family members, service providers, and educators (Dybvik, 2004; Heward, 2006; Simpson et al., 2003; Vaughn et al., 1996), mainly coordinated by the IC. No one method can guarantee success, however the main recommended practices for early intervention as indicated in the model, including enhancement of social inclusion, parents' and professionals' attitudes and involvement, background knowledge and special training for the inclusion personnel, enhancement of functional curriculum content, and applying a collaborative intervention in the natural settings will lead to positive achievements in the inclusion of ADS students.

One of the greatest resources of the inclusion process is the involvement of typical students who possess maturity and creativity (Odom et al., 2003). Allowing peers to facilitate learning whenever possible may occur naturally, or with the assistance of the teacher who can structure classroom activities to make peer support available. Strategies such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring enhance social inclusion to the benefit of all students, not just those with difficulties (Dybvik, 2004; Fryxel & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt et al., 1994)

An additional important factor relates to the beliefs of all parties involved. The attitudes of typical peers, parents, staff, administrators, and the community have a tremendous effect, and will fundamentally determine whether the inclusion is ultimately a successful one. The analysis of the ICs' interviews in this program revealed that positive attitudes will be achieved primarily through communicative education and engagement in affirmative inclusive experiences. A similar finding was revealed by Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi and Shelton, (2004). They found that parents of children with severe disabilities and needs, who were supportive of inclusion held optimistic and clearly identifiable attitudes. In addition, when difficulties arose, they were better able to cope with them and to find solutions for their questions and concerns.

Furthermore, professional knowledge and sustained professional development are also necessary to successful inclusion. Training and background knowledge related to the nature of children with special needs as well as thorough planning for the inclusion and development of those children are essential in building and implementing an inclusive program (Dybvik, 2004; Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Iovannone et al., 2003; Kohler et al., 1996; Simpson et al., 2003; Vaughn et al. 1996).

Finally, to achieve collaboration, the natural setting should be structured in a way that facilitates communication. This can be accomplished by developing an environment which not only requires communication and collaboration but also reinforces it, for example by arranging weekly team meetings, and by requiring monthly evaluations of the inclusive setting and individual reports on successes and difficulties (Dybvik, 2004; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Simpson et al., 2003; Vaughn et al., 1996). Within this context contained in the suggested model, roles will be clearly defined and all members of the inclusive setting will be well informed. In their interviews, the team meetings were described by the ICs as providing an outstanding opportunity to share daily difficulties and to suggest ideas to solve them, to talk about goals, and mainly, to transmit a feeling of unity concerning modes of action.

Successful inclusion is possible and can be a landmark experience for children, parents, and professionals. The proposed model may provide an effective framework for preparing inclusion professionals, designing appropriate inclusion processes, and conducting ongoing formative evaluation, in order to ensure their success.

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