

Understanding the Current Learning Needs for RECEs Implementing Inclusive Practice

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Background

Introduction

With the increasing number of young children with special needs entering the early learning environment, there is now a greater understanding of the need for professional development and intervention training as it relates to inclusive practice for early childhood educators (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009).

Literature Review

Although training is being requested, there is little research on the current learning needs of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs), and the specific trainings/support services required when working directly in an inclusive classroom (Baker-Ericzén, et al., 2009; & Loreman et al., 2013). While there are many potential methods and frameworks for providing further training and support for educators in inclusive classrooms and early childhood environments, Brebner et al. (2016) recommend further research into exploring more successful strategies and programs, and how they may be beneficial for educators.

Research Question

What are the current professional learning needs for RECEs working with children with special needs, and what do they propose as the most effective way of supporting these needs?

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research design.

Instrument

Data was collected through a semi-structured, face-to-face interview of 14 open-ended questions.

Procedure

RECEs from child care centres across Toronto were recruited by email to the centre supervisor.

Participants

The participants for this study included 4 RECEs with a range of 5-20 years of experience working in the field and directly supporting children with special needs.

Results

Reflecting on Current Practice

- Educators today are not prepared to enter the inclusive early years environment due to lack of experience and hands-on pre-service training

I think in the whole program you're only taught with one class on special needs. You're learning just kind of basic stuff.

It'd be nice if we could all just attend the training so we're all on the same page.

Barriers to Inclusion

- Lack of funding for special needs services and resources, including ability to support continuous training for all staff

Competency & Self-Efficacy

- Experience is a key factor in building required skills and competencies for success

- Initial training and education does not provide the knowledge and skills required to support various abilities of children in care

We've had reports done by Occupational Therapists...they just sit and observe, and then write up the report...It's like they just put all the recommendations not thinking of what can be done here.

Training & Supports

- Hands-on training provided by clinical specialists

Recommendations for the Field

- Patience is key!
- Never truly know the needs you will be supporting

You're not coming into a room full of typically developing children...you're going to have a variety of needs, and it's your job to support them in that.

Conclusion

This study identified a hands-on training model, with an aspect of performance feedback provided by a clinical specialist, as the most effective training model to implement when supporting RECEs in the inclusive early years environment. Similar to Baker-Ericzén et al.'s (2009) study, educators wish to receive specific training as it pertains to a specific child, as opposed to the generalized written reports currently being provided. While participants report feeling comfortable in their inclusive role, they attribute this feeling to years of experience and hands-on training. Consistent with the literature (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Brebner et al. 2016; & Loreman et al. 2013) initial training and education does not provide the necessary skills to support an inclusive environment.

Limitations

- The individual professional background of the selected RECEs, and years of experience may influence decision to participate
- Convenient sampling from one site
- Central Toronto child care centres may have easier access to organizations and agencies providing support to educators

Recommendations

- Support educators through hands-on training in the child care environment, specifically provided by clinical specialists;
- Increase number of inclusion courses and training seminars offered at the diploma and degree training levels;
- Increase funding for special needs services, resources, and continuous learning opportunities; and
- Incorporate hands-on learning elements, as well as information looking beyond foundational knowledge in workshops.

References

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