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AID: An Inclusion Resource for Student Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, and Supervisors

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AID (Assisting Individuals with Disabilities) is an original resource guide for student teachers to help them address inclusion needs in the classroom. AID was developed to insure the continuity of coursework and field experiences for student teachers. It provides student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors with a number of specific inclusion teaching methods related to special education foundations and strategies. A qualitative study was designed to determine the effects of such a resource on teacher preparation and student performance.

Participants included 4 student teacher supervisors and 26 student teachers in 24 different schools during a one-year period. Fifteen of the student teachers were preparing for dual certification and 11 were preparing for general education certification only. Data collection included surveys, student reflections, and supervisor interviews and field notes. The results of the study indicated that collaborative resources, like AID, are valuable tools for addressing student needs and can positively affect student performance. The study also heightens the awareness of special and general educator roles defined under IDEA.

In order to better serve students and comply with increasing litigation from local and federal mandates, school districts across the U.S. are working to create inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities. While some gains, such as increased numbers of inclusion placements, have been made since the first Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) litigation in 1975, much of the research data still indicates there is a dissonance among general and special educators.

This discord is often related to the general educator's acceptance and ability to meet the needs of inclusion students. Unfortunately, general educators have negative attitudes about inclusion and often feel left out of the process (Bruneau-Balderrama, 1997). Many general educators believe that inclusion is dumped on them without appropriate support and resources (Bruneau-Balderrama, 1997; Cook, 2002; Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs, & Mastriopieri, 1998; Kavale, 2000; McGregor, 1997; O'Shea, 1999). Some inclusion advocate policies are even likened to a, "Here we come, ready or not!" battle cry (Guetzloe, 1999, p. 92). Others have referred to inclusion as an "uninvited guest" (O'Shea, 1999, p. 179). Although high numbers of general educators report they accept the concept of inclusion (Scruggs & Mastriopieri, 1996), they often prefer not to take part in the delivery of services because they believe they do not have the expertise and confidence to work effectively with special education students (O'Shea, 1999). General educators find they appreciate the presence of special education students in their class, but often think these students are "short changed" due to the general educators' lack of knowledge and experience with special education needs and methodology (Snyder, 1999). General educators need not only resources, but guidance in using resources effectively (Bruneau-Balderrama, 1997; Cornoldi et al., 1998; Guetzloe, 1999; Kaufman & Chick, 1996; Mastriopieri, 2001; Snyder, 1999). Efforts from schools, administrators, and teacher educators are needed to insure that both special educators and general educators are prepared and supported as they attempt to address the needs of students with disabilities in their classroom (Snyder, 1999).

The struggle to provide effective education, training, and support for teachers of inclusion classrooms is not limited to districts and schools alone. To prepare preservice teachers for the challenges of inclusion, college and university personnel seek viable teacher education experiences for both special and general education students to understand and address special needs of students in our schools. Little and Robinson (1997) state that meaningful partnerships with universities and schools that clearly outline goals, outcomes, and competencies related to special education can increase teacher effectiveness. University programs integrating special education coursework and field experiences are even more successful in helping teacher education students address the individual needs of students. In

these programs, special education foundations, concepts, and methodology are infused throughout syllabi and are adapted in collaborative experiences (i.e., field work and seminars) with university and school personnel (Cook, 2002; Kaufman & Chick, 1996; Shade & Stuart, 2001; Stayton & McCollum, 2002). Throughout many studies, the emphasis on collaborative problem-solving in the field experience related to specific teacher practices such as adapted instruction, behavior assessment, and intervention benefited both preservice and inservice teachers (Cornoldi et al., 1998; Kaufman & Chick, 1996; Lewis & Doorlag, 2003; Olsen & Chalmes, 1997; Shade & Stuart, 2001). It is not only the knowledge of and positive attitude toward inclusion that foster effective teaching, but also the skills and experience required to meet specific needs of diverse students in the classroom that empower a teacher to successfully teach students with special needs (Cook, 2002; O'Shea, 1999).

Based on the premise that both novice and experienced educators continue to need ongoing professional development in special education foundations and practices through collaborative methods (Little & Robinson, 1997), Assisting Individuals with Disabilities (AID), a special education competency list and resource guide, was developed to infuse special education strategies into the student teaching experience for both general and special education preservice teachers. With the increase in the number of inclusive student teacher field sites, it was clear that student teachers would benefit from a practical resource to address a variety of needs in different field situations. AID was developed at the university level as a collaborative, problem-based learning experience for cooperating teachers, student teachers, and university supervisors. To develop the AID resource, typical assessment, instruction, and behavior issues related to special education students in the mainstream were recorded. Based on these needs, a list of special education methods and pedagogical practices to address these needs was identified and explained. Thus, AID was developed as a resource that supervisors, student teachers, and cooperating teachers could use to seek, monitor, and review appropriate and effective practices and solutions to meet the needs of special needs students in the inclusion setting.

AID is an instructional tool designed to assist student teachers in meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities in their

classroom. It is a reflective and experiential resource that utilizes a variety of pedagogical methods and strategies. The list of teacher competencies is accompanied by the AID resource guide, a 24-page guide including an assignment description and rationale for each competency. Each competency is aligned with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards for Beginning Special Education Teachers. The AID competency list describes specific competencies often related to assessment, service, instruction, and evaluation of individuals with disabilities (see Appendix A). Other supporting information such as work samples, definitions, and helpful tips is presented to assist student teachers in completing competencies and ultimately assist individuals with special needs in the classroom. The AID resource tool was designed to accomplish the following:

- Create a collaborative and meaningful experience for student teachers, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers to address the needs of individual students.
- To help general and special educators realize their responsibility and potential for meeting the local and federal mandates regarding individuals with disabilities.
- To enhance the depth and breadth of teacher education as student teachers work toward meeting INTASC and CEC standards.

After implementing the AID resource, the researcher analyzed its impact to determine if such a tool was helpful in increasing professional development of pre- and inservice teachers and the performance of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Methodology

Participants

Participants included 37 student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers (N=37). Of these participants, 26 were student teachers, 7 were cooperating teachers, and 4 were supervisors. All

participation was voluntary. Fifteen of the student teachers were preparing for dual certification in special and general education and 11 were preparing for general education certification only. We followed 5 of the student teachers into their first year of inservice teaching positions. Two of the supervisors implemented AID on an informal basis, utilizing it as a guide for practice and intervention when different issues arose, and 2 of the supervisors formally utilized the guide by collecting student-related AID competencies and completing surveys based on their experience.

The researcher was a university supervisor who, with her colleagues, developed the AID competency list and resource document. She reviewed and explained the use of AID resources on an individual basis with all supervisors who volunteered to participate in this study. Supervisors then shared AID information and competencies with their student teachers either at the onset of the field experience or as relevant issues arose in specific placements. All supervisors expected student teachers to complete at least five of the competencies with their classes during their semester of student teaching placement.

Setting

Student teachers were placed in elementary or intermediate school settings in first to fourth grade classrooms. Of the 15 dual certification student teachers, 7 student teachers had primary placements in self-contained classrooms, but each had the opportunity to work with a large group general education class for one to five periods per week. The other 8 placements were in inclusive classrooms. In these classrooms, general and special education students were mixed for instruction. There were 3 inclusive structures: 3 classes had both general and special education teachers working with children in one room for the entire day; 2 classes had general and special education students and teachers together for part of the day and in their own classrooms the other part of the day; and 3 classes had special education students in the classroom but the student teachers worked only with a general education teacher and an aide. Of the 10 general education certification student teachers, 2 had placements in inclusive settings, 1 worked with a general education teacher and an aide, and the others worked with both a general and a special education cooperating teacher. Seven rooms

were labeled general education classes but had at least one classified student participating in class for part or all of the day. All school sites were suburban environments located in central and southern New Jersey. Twenty-one were public schools and one was a non-denominational private school.

Data Collection

Data sources included: (a) transcribed interviews from all supervisors, (b) supervisor field notes, (c) 45 reflections from student teachers, (d) surveys from 12 student teachers after student teaching experience, (e) surveys from 5 former student teachers who are currently active teachers in the field, and (f) surveys from 7 cooperating teachers [3 special education and 4 general education].

Reflections, field notes, and surveys were collected after the student teaching experience. Interviews were also conducted at the end of the research project. The researcher was available and discussed issues related to AID implementation with student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers throughout the experience. Most discussions were related to the clarity of AID competencies and student teacher reactions to AID expectations. Information from these discussions was recorded in the researcher's field notes and used in the final analysis of the study.

Student teachers and cooperating teachers completed Likert scale surveys with 15 questions related to the implementation and usefulness of AID. The items concerned laws and teaching responsibilities, teaching methods, student performance, and student teacher growth as professionals. Cooperating and student teachers were asked to complete the survey at the end of the student teaching experience. Open-ended interviews consisting of eight questions for supervisors addressed AID as it related to: (a) the depth and breadth of the student teaching experience, (b) student teacher professional growth, (c) implementation and integration of the AID resource, and (d) the overall advantages and disadvantages of using the AID tool. Student teacher alumni who utilized AID in their student teaching experience were asked to respond to five open-ended questions relating to the relevance of AID in their own professional experiences in their current

teaching placement. All participants were asked to make recommendations and modifications for the AID document and experience.

Student work samples from children in student teacher classrooms were also collected to evaluate class or student performance outcomes from AID competency implementation. This was possible because several AID competencies required student teachers to take pre- and post-assessments or collect baseline data before utilizing an instructional or behavioral strategy. When additional information was required, the researcher used a member-checking by contacting participants and questioning them about specific data source responses.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed data by organizing all recorded information from supervisors, student teachers, alumni, and cooperating teachers. Drawing on a qualitative ethnographic method, the researcher analyzed descriptive information and used categorical aggregation to find emerging themes and develop interpretations (Creswell, 1998). Information was coded and data were analyzed from displays as patterns were found among all groups and themes were developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coded information was then separated and categorized by separate participant groups: supervisors, student teachers, alumni, and cooperating teachers. Responses were again reorganized by special education and general education participant groups. Rearranging data into categories facilitates analysis and helps to determine comparisons as well as specific and over-arching themes (Maxwell, 1996). All recorded information from interviews and surveys was counted, reviewed several times, and coded to formulate outcomes and themes. When at least 80% of responses to survey and interview questions were similar, themes and outcomes were developed. Reflections, field notes, and work samples were examined to support or oppose conclusions. When recording results, outliers were presented to provide a complete view of participant responses so that interpretation could be examined by the reader.

Results

All participating groups had quite favorable responses to using the AID guide to assisting students with disabilities. Many themes permeated across all groups and data sources including:

- AID presented appropriate strategies for students with special needs.
- AID experience positively impacted student performance.
- AID heightened knowledge and awareness of IDEA legislation and inclusion practices for student teachers and general education teachers.
- AID facilitated a student-centered experience for student teachers.
- AID could be used for multiple professional development and instructional purposes.

Themes

AID Presented Appropriate Strategies for Students with Special Needs

All participant group responses unanimously reported that the strategies provided in the AID competency list were meaningful components of inclusion practices and could connect to different situations in classrooms with multiple student needs. Competencies included IEP development and monitoring, assessment practices, instructional strategies, and behavioral interventions. These topics were generic enough to fit in multiple situations from individual to small and large group concerns and could be applied to different grade and functioning levels. One student teacher commented, "They [competencies] provided categories and strategies from other sources and fit them into one resource." Methods, either academic or behavioral, were broad enough to address the needs of different populations in different settings, but were specific enough to become meaningful components of instruction and individual student goals. Student teachers were not required to utilize all strategies, but could pick and choose

those that were appropriate to classroom student needs as issues arose. Another special education cooperating teacher said the competency list helped the student teacher to "think out of the box." A supervisor stated, "It absolutely gives them actual tools for things they can *use* … it's like taking something home after a teacher workshop and you could use it tomorrow."

There were mixed feelings about the AID guide. Some reported that the guide was useful because the appendices provided actual work samples and the descriptions of specific competencies. Some felt the descriptions of individual strategies in the guide enhanced their understanding of the competencies and professional terms used to describe them. Others felt that the competency list itself was most important and it was not necessary to read the entire guide to implement and monitor the use of strategies. One supervisor commented, "It [AID guide] has a lot in there and the guide really helps, but will they [student teachers and cooperating teachers] read that guide when they have all that work? Do they really look at it and read it? This is the question I had." Some cooperating teachers felt relieved that they had the guide as a reference just in case the student teachers were using terms from recent coursework cooperating teachers were unfamiliar with. The cooperating teachers may not have known the formal terms for different methods (i.e., Curriculum Based Assessment [CBA] or Functional Based Assessment [FBA]), but understood these methods after reading the guide.

Overall, participants agreed or strongly agreed that AID special education competencies provided appropriate strategies for assisting students with special needs in the areas of instruction and behavior. Furthermore, all alumni student teachers reported using the guide as a meaningful reference in their current teaching positions. Alumni student teacher participants who are now teaching, reflecting on their own growth related to using the AID resource, reported:

> If I did not have to complete those competencies, I would not be as prepared as I am now teaching … I teach a general education kindergarten, but I have students [I believe] that will definitely be classified in the future. The strategies that I have learned I use often with my students, such as differentiating instruction and behavior modification systems.

> Now that I have my own class, the special education competencies helped me in assessing and instructing my students. I am able to modify and adjust in any area for any one of my students based on their needs.

Only one student teacher felt that the competencies did not help her address classroom challenges as they arose because she was required to follow a rigid curriculum from the district. When her supervisor was asked to comment on this response, the supervisor indicated the student teacher should have been able to use the strategies, but it was the student teacher's own inflexibility that made such implementation difficult.

AID Experience Positively Impacted Student Performance

The teaching methods and strategies presented in the AID competencies led to improved student performance in the student teacher classroom in both academic and behavior areas. Students' pre- and post-assessment work samples were used to support such findings. The majority of cooperating teachers and student teachers reported students in the classroom benefited to a great degree. When asked if the students benefited from the AID list, a seasoned special education cooperating teacher stated, "Yes! Most [AID competencies] were skill specific and directly applicable."

Many of the competencies (i.e., #1 Implement, update, and evaluate IEP goals and #6 Implement a behavior modification) required student teachers to assess the performance of students in their class before and after instruction or behavior intervention. Thus, student work samples indicated that using the methods from the AID list did improve classroom performance in several areas. For example, student teachers were able to use work samples such as portfolios to assess student progress on specific IEP goals. If special education students did not meet IEP goals, student teachers could conduct error and task analyses to make recommendations for future goals.

Student teachers who implemented behavior modifications through FBA assessments were able to submit baseline data before the implementation of an intervention and recorded outcomes after the

intervention to provide proof of successful behavior modification. Student teachers used anecdotal records and Antecedent Behavior Consequence (ABC) recording methods to track student responses before and after an intervention. In a supervisor's interview, the following comment was made:

> Most of my students [student teachers] did behavior modifications; some formally in FBAs [Functional Behavior Assessments]. Thus, they baselined student performance before and after an intervention so that data allowed us to see growth based specifically on the FBA or the intervention. Other student teachers actually implemented pre- and post-tests before and after using instructional tools that they had developed like place value boards and games … so actually I was able to monitor classroom student growth through those experiences.

Prior to the introduction of AID, student teachers developed classroom rules and token economies, but had not actually recoded specific ABC data or baseline data before implementing a modification. Thus, the success rate of interventions could be evaluated more accurately. Sometimes student teachers complained about the amount of time it took to record baseline information, but were quite rewarded when they had empirical proof to account for student success based on the strategies they applied to specific behavior concerns.

Analyzing different assessment data, student teachers were able to identify specific behavioral needs formally and address them during instruction (i.e., creating a spacing tool for second graders to improve their writing skills or conducting a curriculum based assessment [CBA] for all class members on math unit objectives). She did an individual error analysis for each student and then charted one for the entire class. Based on this pre-assessment, she developed individual learning packages for students to work on independently to address specific needs. Another student teacher created a listening program for a student with an auditory processing disorder. The student teacher addressed multi-step direction goals by recording how well a student could complete directions with and without use of headsets and a tape recorder. After implementing this instructional tool for a child, and monitoring

progress in minutes and seconds over a period of weeks, the student teacher remarked, "Sam's listening/reaction time has improved significantly."

Not all strategies and methods brought about positive growth the first time around. In one case, a student teacher painstakingly created a photo journal album for an 8-year-old student who had organizational needs. The journal was used successfully for only a few days, but she could not continue her post-assessment because he lost the journal! Thus, she decided to address his organizational needs with a more conventional method. Although student teachers were unsuccessful in improving performance in some cases like this, they were able to examine the causes and limitations of interventions and student needs to find more appropriate solutions. These real-life situations fostered professional conversations that led to valuable learning experiences for student teachers.

AID Heightened Knowledge and Awareness of IDEA Legislation and Inclusion Practices for all Student Teachers and General Education Educators

While all the student teachers stated that the AID competency experience helped them learn more about the teacher's role and responsibilities under IDEA, the ones most affected were those working toward general education certification only. A few general education students told supervisors they had never heard of IDEA or an IEP before the AID guide was introduced to them in the student teaching experience. Similarly, cooperating teachers who had general education backgrounds found that the AID experience heightened their awareness and knowledge of IDEA policy. One supervisor with general education experience reported, "AID definitely impacted my own knowledge of laws and responsibilities and that of her [student teacher] students." While cooperating teachers had an understanding of inclusion and the policy promoting it, they did not have specific information about their legal responsibilities to assist in the development and implementation of the IEP. Many of them still saw it as the role of the special educator only. One student teacher, who had great success with a student with Aspergers, said, "The general education cooperating teacher never looked at his IEP the whole time and didn't care about it … I would

have never even known about his goals if my supervisor didn't keep pushing me to get them and it was a requirement for AID." For special education supervisors and cooperating teachers, IDEA law and practices were not new. They did find the AID competencies helped student teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities in a practical and meaningful way.

AID Facilitated a Student-Centered Experience for Student Teachers

All cooperating teachers and supervisors and almost all student teachers reported that AID created a student-centered learning experience for preservice teachers. Competencies such as following referral processes and interdisciplinary planning were ongoing strategies that took place outside of the actual observation period. Many student teachers were very motivated to get involved with the class before they actually took over lessons. "One of my student teachers was thankful she had the AID guide because she said it made her feel she could work on something and contribute to the class before her cooperating teachers were ready to let her teach!" reported a supervisor. During this time, student teachers began observing student behaviors and baselining data for behavior interventions. Others analyzed and reorganized the classroom to address the needs of "the conducive learning environment" outlined in the AID guide. Cooperating teachers reported that having the expectation to complete AID competencies enabled students to evaluate situations and take initiative. This initiative might not have typically occurred otherwise. One student teacher commented, "It made me take more responsibility in planning, organizing, and analyzing." Supervisors also reported that AID developed a more student centered approach to student teaching. "It took it [student teaching] beyond just what I observed that day and discussed. They were looking for information, compiling data, and creating things for me continuously, and they were ready to discuss them at post observations in addition to what I had seen." A cooperating teacher also commented, "AID tends to encourage student thinking in terms of tools, direction, and management in a special education placement. Designing an adaptive tool, George (her student teacher), toyed with many ideas—the exposure [to AID] was effective." An

alumni student teacher reflected, "The list gave me goals to reach for. I am an over achiever and it helped me put things in perspective … I developed stronger skills in assessment and planning."

AID Could be Used for Multiple Professional Development and Instructional Purposes

Participants from all groups made suggestions to use the AID competencies and guide for a number of professional development purposes. The student teachers unanimously reported that they found the AID competencies closely aligned with teacher professional standards, especially INTASC standards. Since student teaching portfolios are based on INTASC standards, completing AID competencies helped them to develop reflections and artifacts for each standard to incorporate in their portfolios. These portfolios exhibit the student teachers' efforts towards meeting professional standards.

Student teachers found the AID tool instrumental in the interview process. One said, "I have way more evidence to show what I know." Some students said they reviewed the AID competency list repeatedly before entering an interview. By doing so they were able to recall what methods and strategies they used to address individual needs in the classroom and share them with interviewees. Having real life examples helped to make them more credible teaching candidates.

Cooperating teachers also found multiple purposes for AID. One cooperating teacher said, "It could be used for parent conferences to discuss different types of adaptations and methods used in the inclusion classrooms for different children." Another recommended that school administrators use it to understand inclusion and special education practices as well as fostering professional development and supervision activities.

Supervisors also found that they could effectively address inclusion issues in student teacher seminars by using the AID tool. AID was effectively used as a professional development tool for other university faculty members teaching education courses and supervising student teachers. These faculty members found it important to discuss and update themselves regarding current policy and procedures, especially those that have legal implications for both general and special educators. Special education faculty found AID work samples and

portfolio contributions to support CEC standards. Supervisors also suggested the AID tool be used to develop portfolios throughout the entire teacher education program to insure and evaluate the development of inclusion philosophies and practices as an integral and ongoing part of course and field experiences.

Finally, supervisors felt that faculty members could integrate specific AID strategies in general education methods courses. Introducing AID to general education teacher certification students helps them to understand their legal role and responsibilities under IDEA and provides them with strategies to meet the special needs of students in the classroom. One supervisor said, "It [AID] gives them [general education student teachers] the special ed[ucation] aspects of this experience and makes it relevant to them." A special education cooperating teacher also commented, "AID could be used to educate general education teachers." One supervisor believes, "AID is viable for university classroom discussions and can be used with simulated case studies about inclusion classes and individual needs." Two university supervisors are currently infusing AID into their inclusion methods courses "to share real life experiences from student teaching and as a base to target instructional needs and strategies to address them."

Discussion

Supervisors' Perspectives

Supervisors' perspectives are integrated into thematic results, but are presented separately to provide greater insights into the use of the AID tool to assist professional development during the student teaching process. These perspectives are highlighted because supervisors could analyze the use of AID over multiple semesters and with a number of school sites and student teachers. They could offer comparisons from different individuals and groups. These overarching perspectives inform the discussion and final analysis of the study.

Supervisors reported that the AID guide was an effective instructional tool that increased the depth and breadth of the student teaching experience. All supervisors reported that general education

student teachers and cooperating teachers gained more than their special education counterparts throughout this experience. Most importantly, supervisors saw AID as a tool to empower student teachers. “They didn’t just have to think about the academic and social problems in a classroom, they had something in their hands to create practical and meaningful solutions to problems.” Finally, supervisors found using AID was a method of insuring that student teachers were implementing appropriate strategies and methods in the student teaching placement previously learned in university coursework.

> It was a way of keeping track and monitoring that students were actually connecting and having those experiences from the university to the student teaching experience. What it [AID] did was organize the activities so it was like an insurance that they [student teachers] would do it. Even though it was something we expected them to do, it hadn’t been in written form and it hadn’t been kept track of before.

The only disadvantages reported during AID implementation were the initial reactions of student teachers and the interest level of the cooperating teachers. If AID was introduced formally at the onset of the student teaching experience, many student teachers perceived it as an additional, rather than integrated, assignment. Student teachers and supervisors commented on the “overwhelming amount of work” that comes with student teaching, and AID presented the perception of “another assignment.” In addition, supervisors reported that the interest level of participating cooperating teachers was also mixed. One supervisor said that if the cooperating teachers understood the importance and reality of working with inclusion students, they wholly supported the AID program. Supervisors found they had to make professional decisions based on individual student teachers and their needs when deciding how and when to implement AID effectively. Introducing AID as a formal assignment at the onset of student teaching could create more stress for the student teacher and would not be as effective as introducing and integrating AID competencies as different student concerns arose in the student teacher’s classroom.

Philosophy and Practice

According to the Center for Studies on Inclusive Practices (CSIE), inclusion is recommended to improve special education student expectations as well as social and academic performance (CSIE, 2003). Still, many general educators report they are not prepared for this challenge no matter how much they may support its theory and feel compassion for students (Bruneau-Balderama, 1997; O'Shea, 1999; Snyder, 1999). Using a hands-on collaborative resource like AID may address the needs of general educators with such dilemmas. For many inclusion teams, special and general educators, finding mutual time to collaborate and plan can be difficult (Friend & Cook, 2003), and it is essential for administrators and teachers to make time to assess and address needs together (Mastriopieri, 2001). Supporting inclusive partners require a common language, a shared vision, a set of guiding principles, and powerful intervention strategies to develop a unified system of education (Weiner & Murawski, 2005). While all participant groups in this study reported spending extra time completing competencies, it ultimately had an effect on student performance as well as increased readiness to teach students with special needs. Such accomplishments may lead to increased professional confidence and the willingness to accept and facilitate the growth of individuals with disabilities in the general education setting.

Conclusions

This study indicates that preservice teachers may learn more from addressing special needs in the classroom by appropriately integrating policy into practice. Used correctly, integrating the AID competency list and guide is one method of providing a formal and useful tool to empower both pre- and inservice teachers and positively support instruction and classroom behavior issues. The rewards of using a practical tool like AID not only bring a greater breadth and depth of learning to student teachers, but can positively affect the performance of students in their classroom. It is important to note that this resource was shared and implemented with the support of cooperating teachers and supervisors, so that multiple team members could assess a specific

need and determine appropriate methods of addressing such needs. Resources used with collaboration and support are necessary to enhance inclusion programs and affect students with special needs (Bruneau-Balderrama, 1997; Mastriopieri, 2001). The results also support research which specifically calls for professional development activities to be shared between special and general educators to have the greatest impact on teachers and students (Stayton & McCollum, 2002). University based professional development, specifically, can often improve teacher attitudes and ultimately student performance of pre- and inservice teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

AID provided concrete strategies and solutions to address problems collaboratively with other school community members. It is clear that the presence of specific pedagogical resources with instruction and guidance for implementation can make a difference. It was also important to connect professional standards to methods in competencies so that pre- and inservice teachers could make meaningful connections to practice (Little & Robinson, 1997). Identification and reflection of standards related to resource methods help participants find opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and attainment of professional standards. It was reported that prior to the introduction of AID, many cooperating teachers did not share IEP information with student teachers unless they were preparing for an upcoming IEP meeting. Also prior to the introduction of AID, student teachers developed classroom rules and token economies, but had not actually recorded specific ABC or baseline data before implementing a modification. Sometimes student teachers complained about the amount of time it took to record baseline information, but were quite rewarded when they had empirical proof to account for student success based on the strategies they applied to specific behavior concerns.

Since the student teacher supervisors were able to use the AID guide for purposes other than supervising student teachers, it is obvious that there continues to be a need for ongoing collaboration and professional development among all members of the education profession regarding inclusion policy and effective practice. The greatest surprise was to find that so many general education students and cooperating teachers did not understand their own legal roles and

responsibilities related to individuals with disabilities under the law. For general education cooperating teachers and student teachers, AID unanimously had the highest ratings in the following areas:

- Finding appropriate strategies to accommodate student needs.
- Highest recommendations to use as a resource for future students.
- Increased knowledge of special education legislation and inclusion practices.

While the study was originally intended to support the student teaching experience of the dual certified student teacher, the outcome of the study revealed that the general education population, pre- and inservice teachers, benefited the most from this experience. Although there was a limited sample of cooperating teacher participants, the findings from the sample support the premise that preservice teachers can make contributions to the professional development of inservice general educators in a collaborative and supportive program with universities. When classroom teachers work with student teachers collaboratively, they find they are often refreshed and extend their repertoire of successful interventions they are using in the classroom (Kaufman & Chick, 1996). Using special resources with collaboration and support is sound professional practice for inservice teachers, especially those new to the inclusion setting (Mastriopieri, 2001). Making such resources and collaboration an integral part of the teacher preparation program can only enhance the skills and competence of preservice teachers as they prepare to meet the challenges of inclusion settings (Mastriopieri, 2001; Shapiro et al., 1999).

Implications

University and teacher education programs must insure that all general educators, as well as special educators, are learning about the laws and practices regarding the inclusion of individuals with special needs. The number of inclusion programs is increasing rapidly in our school systems, and legislators are holding both general and special educators responsible for student performance. The more ways we can

collectively understand and meet the individual needs of students, the healthier the school experience will be for educators and students alike. Connections need to be continuously made in all facets of professional development and among all constituents in the school community. Supporting policy with practical experience will empower educators to meet the needs of all children and confidently meet new challenges presented by individuals with disabilities.

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Appendix A: AID Teacher Competencies

1. **Implement, evaluate, and update IEP goals. Make recommendations for future goals with suggested practices.** (Mandated for any student teacher with a student with an IEP in the classroom and all student teachers who are being certified as special and elementary teachers. IDEA Legislation requires *all* teachers to be part of the IEP process.)
(I# 2,3,4,7,8,9/CEC# 1,2,3)
2. **Follow the prereferral or referral process for one student.**
(I# 2,3,9,10/CEC# 2,3,10)
3. **Complete a student evaluation progress report for assessment purposes**.
(I# 2,6,8,9/CEC# 8)
4. **Complete an error and/or task analysis.**
(I# 1,2,9/CEC# 2,3,9)
5. **Introduce one original or adaptive learning tool for a specific student or group.**
(I# 2,3,7,9/CEC# 2,3,4,7)
6. **Implement a behavior modification (FBA).**
(I# 2,3,5,7,9/CEC# 2,5)
7. **Complete anecdotal records and/or ABC observations.**
(I# 3,8,9/CEC# 3,6,8)
8. **Develop a conducive learning environment.**
(I# 2,8,9/CEC# 2,3,5,6)
9. **Plan, organize, and implement multiple lesson plans for different functioning levels** (large and small group lessons simultaneously in one period).
(I# 2,3,8,9/CEC# 2,3,4,8)
10. **Plan effectively for aides and other adults in the classroom.**
(I# 2,3,8,9/CEC# 7,8,9,10)
11. **Interdisciplinary planning with other school community members** (i.e., related service providers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, etc.).
(I# 1,2,6,7,9,10/CEC# 2,3,7,8,9,10).
12. **Develop and implement at least 3 assessment tools for students with special needs** (i.e., Curriculum Based Assessment, Criterion Referenced Assessment, Performance Assessment, Portfolio Assessment, Norm Referenced Test, Ecological/Life Skill Assessment).
(I# 1,2,3,6,10/CEC# 2,3,8)

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