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Impacts of Inclusion on the Academic and Social-emotional Skills of Students With Special Education Needs

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IMPACTS OF INCLUSION ON THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

SKILLS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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Abstract

This literature review examined studies focusing on how students with disabilities are

benefited by receiving services in the general education classroom, or least restrictive

environment. It also aims to determine the negative impacts of students with special

education needs (SEN) receiving instruction alongside their nondisabled peers, regarding

both academic and social-emotional outcomes. As the trend for inclusive practices

continues to rise nationally, it is critical that educators have access to and are

knowledgeable of the successfully implemented inclusional classroom, where students of

all academic abilities are integrated into the classroom community. Inclusion is relevant

to all educators who teach students with a wide range of needs, and legislative mandates

require those who teach students with SEN do so in the general education setting

whenever possible. Within this literature review, the following questions are addressed:

What are the academic and social-emotional impacts of inclusive classrooms on special

education students? As approaches to special education continue to evolve, it is critical

that administration revisit such an important issue that may play a significant role in

students' success. Results of the research analyzed suggest mixed results for both

academic and social-emotional outcomes for students with disabilities in the inclusive

classroom. Despite this, the short- and long-term positive results of the inclusive

classroom are noteworthy, as educators continue working to integrate all students into the

general education setting.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

National Trends Provoke Push for Inclusion

National requirements for including students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom date back to the four-piece legislation of what is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originating in 1975, which provides children with disabilities rights to a free and appropriate public education. Not only did the law set requirements for the education of students with disabilities, but it states that educators must provide the curriculum in settings with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2011), which can be defined as the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE is not a setting in itself, rather, it is a guiding principle that students with SEN should be immersed in the general education classroom with their peers, gaining access to grade-level instruction. Although the LRE is widely accepted, and in other countries mandated, there are still concerns about successfully implementing inclusive classrooms, or classrooms where students with disabilities are equally integrated into the general education setting. As an educator, meeting a wide range of student needs through inclusive practices can be demanding and overwhelming, however there is consistent evidence demonstrating substantial short- and long-term benefits for all students in this setting.

National trends using data regarding least restrictive environment have indicated a steady increase in the amount of time students with disabilities spend in general education in the last three decades (Morningstar, Kurth, & Johnson, 2017). With this

national trend comes a greater push for administrators and educators to examine inclusion practices, justifying a need for more current and extensive research data.

Inclusion is a relevant topic for all educators, as they are required to serve on IEP teams and determine the most appropriate educational setting where students will receive special education services. Inclusion considers the integration of special education students into all aspects of general education, including student concerts, field trips, and extracurricular activities. It considers the greatest amount of general education activities and classroom experiences the student with special needs will benefit from participating in, and what the student needs in order to engage in those activities. The IDEA mandates and accountability requirements make administrators and educators responsible for ensuring that students with SEN are included in the general education setting, creating a significant topic of discussion (Morningside, et al., 2017).

IDEA legislation has caused much of the movement towards inclusive practices, and ensures that students with SEN will be provided an equal access education that is individualized, meaning all children with disabilities are provided special education and related services designed specifically to meet their unique needs. The services outlined in the IEP must prepare them personally for further education, employment, and independent living following their public school experience. In order to meet each student's exceptional needs, the team must look at each part of the student's day to determine the setting that will most benefit them and allow access to the grade-level curriculum. With increasing pressure from legislation, it is critical that educators are

cognizant of the benefits and implications of inclusion in order to advocate for student needs and make the most informed decisions for placement.

Although many educators agree that the most beneficial place for student learning is in the general education setting with peers, there are still many concerns about implementing an inclusive classroom due to lack of resources, supports, and time. It is the team's responsibility to immerse the student in activities and classes surrounded by general education peers, and only pull them out when the team deems the environment is not appropriate for the student to learn effectively. Inclusion is a considerable commitment to providing instruction and supports that meet the needs of all students and forming a sense of community which includes all. Research which focuses on educator input on the challenges and barriers to implementing an inclusive classroom is necessary in order to develop better programs and systems. The focus is no longer exclusively on where a student is taught, but it includes "what" the student is taught and learns, and "how"—the methods and pedagogy that teachers use (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). To successfully teach students with special needs among their regular education peers, we must consider both the supports and instruction necessary.

An essential aspect of supporting all students in the classroom is the use of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework, which encompasses Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) models. The MTSS three-tiered decision-making model allows staff to respond to children's academic and behavioral challenges and tailor instruction to their specific level of need. It is used to improve the achievement of all students in the diverse classroom, supporting each

students' unique strengths and weaknesses before larger academic or behavioral problems occur, which may require special education services. With a strong MTSS model implemented, quality teaching and effective instruction can provide all students the supports they need to be successful in the general education classroom, and in some cases, reduce unnecessary referrals to special education (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2009). A staple of the MTSS framework is differentiated instruction, or building lessons and using varied approaches so that all students can learn classroom content, regardless of their level ability level. With each tier level, evidence-based interventions target student need, with Tier I being the least intensive and focusing on all students. Tier I includes high-quality instruction taking place in the classroom, as well as universal screenings, which allow educators to determine if each student is making adequate progress, is at some risk for failure without extra assistance, or is at high-risk without specialized supports. Progress monitoring is a continual process, and data-driven decisions are made to provide the necessary interventions and supports. Tier II interventions increase in intensity, as students are marked as being "at-risk" for academic failure or continued behavioral issues. These students receive focused supplemental instruction to target their strength and weakness areas. If progress monitoring shows continued shortfalls, students are provided an additional layer of support through Tier III interventions, which are more intensive and designed specifically for the individual student's needs. Instruction can be delivered one-on-one or in small-group setting, and frequent progress monitoring continues. Tier II and III interventions ensure that students will receive sufficient instructional and practice opportunities, and meaningful data will

be collected on the child's response to the interventions (Fox et al., 2009). The Multi-Tiered System of Support framework is applicable to inclusive classrooms, as it provides strong evidence-based instructional practices to students of all ability levels, and provides a way for all students to learn the same information together, but through different methods and levels of support. The three-tiered intervention models have been a growing and effective model in schools, such as in a study of one district's implementation of the system. Results over three years revealed that the RTI model improved student outcomes and decreased rates of students being referred to child study teams and needing special education services, and that positive feedback was received from teachers using the framework (Bianco, 2011). With the possibility of eliminating referrals to child study teams and special education, it is critical that districts evaluate their current models and utilize systems that include individualized, targeted interventions in the classroom.

For schools possessing the required staff, resources, and training, fully inclusive classrooms have proven to be a successful way of meeting all student needs, including those with SEN. Within an inclusive classroom, students with special education needs are able to learn alongside their peers, as teachers are able to support a wide variety of student needs through the use of teacher assistants or co-teaching methods, modifications of the curriculum or skill, accommodations, and ability grouping. Approaches to serving special education students continually evolve and educators must examine their perceptions of inclusive classrooms to employ the best methods of providing special education services within the general education setting.

Significant progress has been made toward meeting the needs of students with disabilities and improving educational outcomes, however, there is still work to be done (Morningstar et al., 2016; Schifter, 2016). With international trends which favor inclusion programs and research which validates the practice, it is imperative that there be more empirical evidence of how to successfully initiate inclusive school programs, allowing all students to receive instruction in the least restrictive environment and educators to support students with a wide variety of needs.

This literature review was written to examine the following research question: What are the academic and social-emotional impacts of inclusive classrooms on special education students? This report aims to analyze studies which included student participants across disability categories in order to identify benefits of inclusive classrooms, as well as present the repercussions for this student group.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of ERIC (EBSCOhost), Academic Search Premier, EBSCO MegaFILE, and SAGE Journals Online were conducted for publications from 2008- 2018. This list was narrowed by reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals which focused on the academic and social-emotional impact of students with special education needs (SEN) in the full inclusion classroom. Keywords that were used in these searches included "academic inclusion impact," "academic special education inclusion," "social-emotional inclusion impact," and "special education inclusion." The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on full inclusion classrooms and impacts on special education students in the following order: positive and negative impacts on academic skills and positive and negative impacts on social-emotional skills.

Academic Benefits of Inclusion Practices

Studies which target academic outcomes within inclusion classrooms have highlighted the need for all students to receive accommodations necessary to fully participate in learning opportunities in school, specifically, students with special education needs in general education settings (Bottge, Cohen & Choi, 2018). Through adequate supports which allow students to fully participate in classroom instruction alongside their same-age peers, positive literacy and mathematics outcomes have been documented (Dessemontet & Bless, 2003; Graaf & Hove, 2015). In fact, there is lack of

evidence that separate classroom placements for students with SEN improves academic achievement (Waldron & McLeskey, 1998).

Literacy and mathematics outcomes. Through inclusion practices and co-teaching methods, students are academically supported in the general education classroom, in many cases, with the support of a classroom and special education teacher through the cooperative teaching model, or frequently, with a classroom teacher and instructional assistant. These service delivery models come at a higher incidence as the national trends for inclusive practices continues to increase. Many findings highlight the positive impacts of inclusive practices on academic achievement of students with SEN, specifically, reporting positive outcomes on literacy skills for students fully included in general education classrooms with support. A study by Waldron and McLeskey (1998) supported this finding, as they aimed to identify the impacts of an Inclusive School Program (ISP) on the reading and math skills of students with Learning Disabilities (LD). Seventy-one students with learning disabilities from three newly implemented ISP programs were compared to 73 students with LD in three other elementary schools within the same district, which had volunteered to run ISP, but had not yet started. Progress was measured using curriculum-based measures and subtests from a group-administered achievement assessment, which was conducted in the fall and spring. Results revealed that students with LD in the inclusive setting made significant gains in reading and comparable progress in math when compared to students receiving special education services in the pull-out setting.

In a study by Graff and Hove (2015), 121 parents of children with Down syndrome completed two extensive questionnaires regarding their child's developmental and academic history, with a four year span between each. A 5-point scale was utilized which derived an overall score based on the provided answers measuring skills in reading, writing, math, and language. With the specific information provided by parents, researchers focused on the impact of the academic setting on the reading development of these children. The study tested whether the amount of time spent in regular schools, or a typical general education setting, within the four years had an impact on students' reading development. This is in comparison to students who received instruction in special schools, or schools with smaller class sizes that focus more on practical academic and social skill acquisition. Results showed that the more years children spent in a regular school, the higher reading scores were at the time of the second questionnaire, particularly for students who were nine years old or younger. Another study by Bottge, Cohen and Choi (2017) demonstrated similar findings in the inclusive setting. Researchers targeted mathematics instruction and compared the pretest and posttest scores from two different settings; the first year of the study focused on students who received pull-out services, and then inclusive practices in the second year. Researchers aimed to test the impacts of enhanced anchored instruction (EAI) on students' computational skills with fractions and problem solving and compare results based on the instructional setting. Results of the study revealed that students who received individual instructional support from a special education teacher in the inclusive classroom demonstrated higher scores and made fewer errors than those receiving the same

intervention in resource rooms. Both the pretest and posttest scores favored students with disabilities who received specialized curriculum in the inclusive classroom, confirming that when co-teaching models are implemented with fidelity, students can find greater success learning alongside their peers.

Although studies report the positive impacts of an inclusive classroom on students with disabilities, data demonstrating the effects of inclusive classrooms on students without disabilities is lacking. There have been many questions regarding inclusive practices and whether or not the inclusion of students with disabilities has an impact on the learning of their nondisabled peers in the general education setting. Many study results have disproved this position, indicating that there was no significant difference or impact on other students' performance, and that inclusive practices provide both academic and adaptive behavior benefits for all students. Specifically, Dessemontet and Bless (2013) compared the academic achievement of 202 second-grade students in Switzerland to assess the impact that students with intellectual disabilities (ID) had on others included in the general education setting. Researchers aimed to identify whether or not there was a negative effect on non-disabled students when learning alongside students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. In this case, students with ID spent at least 70% of their day in the general education classroom. Academic achievement was assessed in three student groups; low-, average-, and high-achieving peers without disabilities using a pretest and posttest. Based on results of the academic achievement tests, there was no statistically significant difference in the progress of their low-, average-, and high-achieving peers in classrooms with or without inclusion. Although the

study did not monitor students with other special education needs, this study demonstrates that student achievement was not compromised by students with ID being taught in the same classroom setting.

The primary purpose of another program evaluation (Idol, 2006) was to evaluate eight schools within a large, metropolitan school district on the methods used to provide the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. Eight schools within the district were broken into levels (elementary and secondary) and each was rated on a continuum by the degree of inclusion each school program used, from no inclusion to full inclusion. Data was collected to determine the degree to which students with disabilities were taught in the general education classroom, the various ways special education services were offered, and systems used to support these students. Qualitative data was also collected and analyzed in the form of an interview completed by educators from each of the chosen eight schools. Researchers collected information on the role of the special education teacher, the rate of referrals for special education, staff attitudes toward inclusion, and educator skill in teaching students with SEN in the general education classroom. Results from educator interviews indicated that of the four secondary schools, each school made noticeable improvement in average student statewide test scores over a period of four years, with the exception of one. At the secondary level, attitudes toward inclusion ranged from being willing to try inclusion to being very much in favor of it. In qualitative responses, educators highlighted a need for students with SEN included in the classroom to have another form of assistance other than the classroom teacher. Overall, the findings of the program evaluation strongly supported the practice of inclusion.

A study by Peetsma, Vergeer, Roeleveld, and Karsten (2001) supports the same positive conclusions of the inclusive classroom. At-risk students in general education were matched with similar students with behavioral disorders and intellectual disabilities in special education, considering gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, school type, and age. The focus of this study was to compare the development of matched pairs of primary-aged students in mainstream and special education over periods of 2 and 4 years in the areas of language, math, motivation, and self-confidence. After 2 years, data showed that mainstream students made more progress in mathematics than in special schools (for learning and behavioral difficulties and mild intellectual disabilities). After 4 years, students in general education had made more progress in academic performance than their matched peers in special education. Based on teacher questionnaires and interviews examining children's development, at-risk students in the general education classroom demonstrated greater progression in mathematics and language development compared to those in a special education setting, keeping in mind that students in the general education classes had more mild educational problems than those receiving special education services. Aside from not making as much academic progress as students in the general education classes, Peetsma et al. found less favorable outcomes for SEN students regarding the eight major healthy developmental stages that children go through. This included their self-concept, social behavior, attitude towards work, and extent of support at home. As students get older, the gap in the developmental stages and academic achievement tends to be more evident.

Least Restrictive Environment. Academic progression plays a large factor in weighing the benefits of inclusive classrooms, and researchers have examined graduation patterns for students with disabilities based on demographic and educational factors. Schifter (2016) compiled statewide data on students with disabilities from years 2005 to 2012 and aimed to find graduation probabilities for special education students from the ninth grade through graduation age, and to determine whether students with disabilities who were fully included in the general education classroom had differing results from those served in substantially separate settings, specifically for students in ninth grade. Over 36,000 student profiles were analyzed by disability category. Reports state that across all disability categories, students who had been fully included in the general education classroom had higher graduation probability profiles than those who had received instruction in substantially separate settings. Taking into account the different settings for individualized instruction, it is worth noting that students with disabilities took an extended time to graduate, often 5-7 years after entering high school. Regardless of studies that demonstrate positive results for students in the inclusive classroom, national trends for educational placement still report a lack of access to the general education classroom and instruction alongside their nondisabled peers, especially for students with significant disabilities. Data from 2000-2015 was gathered by Morningstar, Kurth and Johnson (2016) through *Annual Reports to Congress* which reported on educational placements of students in special education under all 13 disability categories from ages 6-21. Data showed a clear progressive trend towards spending a majority of their day in the general education classroom, with the exception of those with significant

disabilities, who were much more likely to be placed in separate settings and spent approximately 40% of their day with nondisabled peers. It is the responsibility of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to determine the setting that is most appropriate to meet child-specific needs and provide access to the general education curriculum, but often, the availability of the programs or settings has more influence on where the student is placed. This becomes problematic, as special education legislation states that the student must be placed in a setting that is most appropriate for meeting their individual needs. Many barriers stand in the way of students with significant disabilities gaining access to the inclusive classroom, a majority of these issues needing to be addressed by administration and staff before it will be feasible for these students to receive instruction in the general education setting.

Social-Emotional Benefits of Inclusion

Students who spend more of their school day alongside their nondisabled peers are exposed to countless opportunities to learn and generalize a wide range of social skills, and within their time in the general education classroom, develop their social interactions with peers. Students with special needs benefit from observing and participating in appropriate interactions with others (Rovira, 2014; Hwang & Evans, 2011). Fostering classroom community and inclusion is critical for students with disabilities, and when they feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to be an active participant in both academic and social situations and become more positively involved with peers (Garrote, 2017).

Peer Relationships. Many studies conducted (Evins, 2015; Rovia, 2014; Garrote, 2017; Galvan, Jenne, Lemus, Morgan and Perez, (n.d.) have supported the inclusive classroom as a place where students establish and maintain positive relationships with their peers. In fact, a study by Garrote (2017) reported that students with intellectual disabilities do not require high levels of social skills to be befriended or accepted by classmates. The study aimed to investigate what extent the social participation and acceptance of students with disabilities was related to their social skill capabilities. Thirty-eight primary classrooms were assessed using teacher questionnaires and individual pupil interviews, which included a total of 692 first through fourth-graders. Students completed a 5-point questionnaire and teachers were asked to estimate the social skills of their students with ID and complete another questionnaire with a 3-point scale which assessed a range of social skills. Results indicated that students with intellectual disabilities participating in inclusive classrooms were not identified as popular, but were accepted by their peers, supporting the stance that not all students with disabilities are at risk for isolation and rejection by their nondisabled peers. At least 63% of students with ID had one reciprocal friend, and approximately 53% of all participants with ID fell into the "average" group, meaning they were not rejected, isolated, or popular.

Evins (2015) focused on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students with and without disabilities at the secondary level. Four teachers from two schools were selected based on specific criteria and willingness to provide qualitative data in the form of an interview. Through open-ended and follow up questions, researchers aimed to highlight teachers' understanding and perceptions of the effects of

an inclusion classroom on the development of students with and without disabilities. Following interviews, data was analyzed to identify common themes and ideas throughout the four educators' responses. Three main themes emerged from results of the study; including a mutual learning that takes place from interactions between students, various challenges that take place when teaching students with diverse abilities, and the positive social, emotional, and behavioral development that occurs when students with and without disabilities learn in the same environment. With each theme came positive and negative responses, however, teachers reported evidence of mutual learning and positive social interaction between students. Although educators reported challenges regarding differentiating instruction for all students, they also witnessed many behavioral and social changes that took place in the classroom. According to Evins (2015), "Through the inclusive classroom, students learn how to be positive role models, how to accept differences, and how to cope with others' differences" (p. 27).

Social-emotional behavior development. Studies have analyzed the impacts of inclusive classrooms on children's social-emotional health and development in attempts to identify benefits for students with special needs, as well as recognize the unanswered questions and concerns related to students of all ability levels learning together. Many studies support inclusion practices and report the social-emotional advantages these settings provide for students (Galvan et al., n.d; Evins, 2015).

A study by Galvan et al. (n.d.) examined this topic in a preschool program setting, where half of students enrolled in the class were diagnosed with developmental delays or disabilities. The study aimed to determine whether students with social-emotional deficits

benefit from an inclusive classroom. A survey was completed by 17 educators within the district who had experience working in inclusive classroom settings in order to elicit general perspectives and form generalizations based on the information collected. According to results of the study, the majority of respondents indicated that they agreed strongly that inclusion improves communication and social skills of students with social-emotional disabilities (p. 18). Participants agreed that it was beneficial for all students, as children learned to be more accepting of differences and more sensitive to the needs of others. Respondents to the open-ended interview reported that inclusional setting provided social opportunities for students with disabilities and their typically developing peers to interact with and learn from each other.

Another study by Rovira (2014) examined the needs and positive social behaviors of children in an inclusive setting, specifically, students with autism in kindergarten through fifth grade. Interviews were conducted with four teachers of inclusive classrooms in order to gain educator information on instructional experiences which included working with students with autism, and from these, many useful methods were identified in order to enhance the social behaviors of this group of students. Data was analyzed and common themes were identified. According to the educators interviewed, not only does the behavior of students with autism increase positively from being in an inclusive classroom, but so does the social behavior of other students in the general education. In addition to this, benefits of inclusion classrooms include increased teacher expectations, opportunities for behavioral modeling from typically developing students, an increase in learning, and improved self-esteem from developing relationships with peers.

Opposing Factors of Inclusion

In contrast to studies which report positive effects of inclusion classrooms, there is contradictory research which reveals some of the implications of students with special needs receiving full instruction in the classroom. In order for inclusive classrooms to be implemented successfully, school administration and teachers must be aware of and willing to overcome programming challenges to meeting the needs of all learners. Not only do these major barriers need to be addressed before students can learn alongside their peers, but teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for differentiating curriculum and academic tasks for students with a variety of disabilities, as well as dealing with a spectrum of behaviors. After considering all of the positive factors of inclusive classrooms, it is clear that there are also some opposing factors worth consideration.

Academic outcomes shortfall. A major consideration of the least restrictive environment is dependent on how the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team believes the student will fair academically in the classroom, with exposure to grade-level curriculum and standards. Despite the big push for inclusion practices, not all students experience positive results in the classroom, regardless of training and efforts by educators. Various studies aim to determine whether the needs of students with SEN are truly met in the classroom in respect to differentiated instruction and access to the curriculum, and many report little or no academic gains in the areas of mathematics and literacy for students who take part in classroom instruction with their peers. A study by Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm and Elbaum (1998) documented the effects of an

inclusion program on students' academic growth, particularly students with learning disabilities (LD). Participants included 114 students grades 3-6, including a total of 25 students with LD. All educators received an intensive, year-long professional development program focusing on outcomes in literacy. The professional development program was completed and co-teaching model was implemented within the classroom. Data collection took place at the beginning and end of the school year, examining the gains of each achievement group separately (low-to-average achieving students and high achieving students-based on teacher rating). T-tests were conducted, with results showing that low-to-average achieving and high-achieving students made statistically significant improvements on all reading and math measures. Some students with LD improved at statistically significant levels in reading, but not in mathematics. Of these students, 82% of 3-6 graders showed gains. Overall, more students with LD showed growth in reading than low-to-average students, suggesting students with LD were making some progress toward closing the academic gap that existed between the two groups of students, but others did not benefit from full-time placement in the inclusive classroom.

Dessemontet, Bless and Morin (2012) completed a comparative study of 34 students with intellectual disabilities included in a general education classroom with support, and 34 comparable children in special schools, all ages 7-8. The purpose of the study was to compare the effects of educational placement (inclusion vs. special school) on children's progress in their academic achievement in literacy and math and adaptive behavior over two school years. An academic achievement test was administered three times over the two school years, and an adaptive behavior assessment was completed by

parents and teachers at the beginning and end of each school year. Results of the study showed a significant but slight difference in the progress of the two groups in literacy, but no significant difference between the two groups in mathematics and global adaptive behavior.

Results of other studies, including Daniel and King (2001) indicate that consistent academic gains are not recognized in the inclusion classroom. Of the 12 third-through-fifth grade classrooms that were studied, included students were more likely to experience slight gains in literacy scores, but showed no significant difference in math, language, or spelling. In addition to this, parents of students in the inclusion setting had more concern for their child's education program, there were more reported behavior issues in the inclusion classroom, and students with SEN reported lower levels of self-esteem. Not only has there been little progression shown for students with SEN in the inclusive setting, research has also investigated the academic impacts on students without disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Brown and Babo (2017) aimed to identify if there was a correlation between eleventh grade general education students who were placed in inclusion classrooms versus general education students placed in non-inclusion classrooms and their academic achievement on the state literacy assessments. Two hundred fourteen eleventh-grade participants were selected from two secondary schools, each having valid state assessment cluster scores in the area of literacy, and each being considered a general education student. Researchers completed the study controlling for gender, student ethnicity, socioeconomic status, student attendance, and academic past performance. Based on data analysis, nondisabled students in the inclusion classroom

performed more poorly on state assessments than their nondisabled eleventh grader same-age peers who were in a non-inclusive classroom. It is noteworthy that researchers indicated three factors which were statistically significant in predicting performance for language arts literacy on the state assessments, including inclusion, attendance, and past performance, which accounted for 34% of the 37.7% of the variance in performance attributed to the independent variables. In addition, researchers found that the specific school a student attended made a difference on their testing performance as well. This indicates that school level factors also contributed to the academic performance of the students in the two types of classes. Factors could include things such as class size, curriculum, and quality of instruction. Similar results were found by Demirdag (2017), when data was collected to analyze the effects of an inclusive science classroom on students without disabilities. Within this study, both inclusive and non-inclusive classrooms were included, and 120 students in grades 6-8 were selected through non-random selection. A pre, post, and post-post assessment were used in order to analyze the scientific conceptual understanding of all students. Results indicated that within the inclusive science classrooms, there was a significant and positive effect on the conceptual understanding of students without disabilities, indicating that having students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms may negatively impact students without disabilities. In many instances, students with SEN who are educated amongst their general education peers have experienced some slight gains, but overall, have demonstrated little progression and reported lower levels of self-esteem.

Teacher training insufficiency. Concerns related to successfully implementing inclusion practices are recognized across settings by administration, teachers, and parents. Main concerns identified in research relate to an insufficiency of supports and lack of preparation necessary to fully access grade-level curriculum within the general education setting (Idol, 2006; Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, Scott, 2013). This may be due to a variety of reasons; including lack of educator training on working with students with special needs, lack of collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers, or insufficient planning time and materials to differentiate curriculum. Because of this, students in special education are frequently served in a pullout style, where they miss instruction, or a portion of instruction, in the least restrictive environment.

Gathumbi, Ayot, Kimemia, and Ondigi (2015) set out to gain information from 140 teachers and 13 administrators in Kenya about the availability of learning resources and management policies for students with SEN. From the surveys completed, they identified a general lack of training and knowledge on how to teach students based on their specific needs, as well as limited school management policies that did not cater to all students' behavioral needs. Specific questions asked participants to identify whether they felt they were competent enough to handle students with special needs in their classrooms, and self-assessment responses indicated that 35.7% reported they did not have relevant competence. The survey also posed the question to teachers on whether their school staff as a whole had received adequate training in teaching students with special needs, with 79% of teachers reporting they had not.

Results of similar surveys completed by undergraduate elementary and secondary education majors in the southeastern United States reported that following an additional course on integrating exceptional students in the general education classroom, students who were near the end of their program still felt they needed support in numerous areas. One third of student participants identified that they still needed more education in the areas of instructional approaches, maintaining an environment conducive to learning, greater knowledge regarding specific categories of exceptionality, and methods of better meeting the needs of students with SEN in a mixed-ability classroom. Approximately 30% of students at the end of the course stated that they either they did not agree that SEN students could be educated in general education rooms, or that they were undecided about their stance on inclusion practices (McCray & McHatton, 2011).

Rowan, Kline and Mayer (2017) also sought out to gather information on teaching readiness from 971 teachers in Australia who had recently graduated from an initial teacher program and had obtained a first-year teaching position. Their research aim was to evaluate the preparedness of newly licensed educators on teaching students who were culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse, including students with disabilities. Graduates were asked to complete an exit survey at the conclusion of their teacher preparation program, which included a "Preparation for Teaching Scale". Overall, teacher responses were generally positive over the nine key domains of teaching. Despite this, when specifically asked if they were prepared to support full participation of students with disabilities, only 8.2% strongly agreed, and 34.3% agreed.

Recent research also questioned the benefits of students participating in the general education classroom for total instruction, reporting that many students receive less standards-related instruction and are exposed to less content than their non-disabled peers. Miller, Lacey, and Layton (2003) examined literacy hour teaching framework to determine whether this framework could provide an inclusive learning environment for students with SEN in the general education classroom setting. Participants of the study included students from a variety of disability categories, including autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavioral disorders, language and communication needs, severe and moderate learning disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, specific learning difficulties which included dyslexia, and physical disability. One hundred fourteen educators completed the surveys from various primary schools within the urban, rural, and metropolitan areas, including mainstream schools, special units attached to schools, and special schools. Data collected provided general information about the children in their schools, and educators were asked to identify a specific child from literacy hour to focus their information on. Teachers reported on how they made arrangements for students in order to modify and accommodate during Literacy Hour, the training they received for Literacy Hour, and their views on being able to support students with inclusion who had SEN. In the second phase, 30 case studies were managed and observations were completed from these specific case studies, who had also taken part of the survey. Following observations, staff shared ideas and challenges related to supporting and including the specific child during the literacy block, and focus students were interviewed. Data showed that educators of the study were making efforts to include

students with SEN during their literacy hour, but in many cases, the literacy skill at hand was interpreted by the teacher as a more general communication activity, rather than meeting literacy standards. The researchers concluded it is probably not true to say that these students with SEN were being fully supported in order to access the general education curriculum as intended by the National Literacy Strategy. These studies highlight the concern of many teachers regarding lack of access to necessary training, materials, or time to fully integrate students with SEN into their classrooms, allowing special education students to access the curriculum to the same extent as their non-disabled peers.

Despite efforts to fully include students with SEN and differentiate material to meet the academic needs of all learners, research demonstrates that frequently, teachers are not given the training and tools necessary to do so. Shani and Hebel (2016) set out to analyze an innovative integrative teacher training program in Israel, attempting to identify the main components of the program that contributed to educators' effectiveness in integrating students with SEN into the general education classroom. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 of the program graduates who had since obtained a job and completed 1-2 years in the field. Responses were analyzed and grouped into themes and categories. Following this, participants were asked to reflect on the emerging themes and findings. Overall, educators did feel that the course contributed to their ability to teach students with SEN by providing them with practical knowledge. They were provided authentic experiences within schools that added to their understanding of the inclusive classroom and the preparations necessary to successfully implementing an

inclusive classroom. Despite this, a number of negative outcomes were highlighted from the inclusive education training program. One of the main themes of the program highlight that subject matter between the elementary and secondary programs and special education programming do not successfully intertwine in order to allow students with and without disabilities the same learning opportunities in the classroom.

Another recurring theme from teacher interviews and surveys indicates a lack of understanding of the various disabilities, characteristics, and specific teaching strategies. Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson and Scott (2013) explored the challenges that teachers face when working to integrate students with SEN, specifically, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In order to gain information, 13 educators were interviewed about their experiences teaching students with autism. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds; many had taught a wide range of classes, six worked in resource rooms, and teaching experience ranged from 3-22 years and took place in both rural and urban settings. Teachers reported the main challenges related to teaching students with autism were lack of understanding and managing behaviors, lack of training and resources, and difficulty creating an inclusive classroom environment. Overall, teachers were not confident in their ability to manage outbursts and lacked specific strategies to work with students demonstrating challenging behaviors. Ten of the thirteen educators reported they lacked training to teach students with ASD, and that without this knowledge, students were being underserviced. One teacher reported that there is little support and training for working with students with ASD unless you already have special education qualifications, and there are many other barriers such as a lack of resources and funding

for educational assistants in the classroom. Without the training and supports necessary, teachers struggle to create an inclusive teaching environment.

Negative teacher outlook. Another concern regarding the implementation of fully inclusive classrooms is educator attitudes and willingness to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. The academic and social-emotional success of students in the inclusive classroom requires the support of inclusive policies and complete commitment to serving children with a wide range of abilities and needs. Teachers are the main factor for creating a successful inclusionary environment, and their attitudes play a large role in implementing these models. In addition to feeling unprepared to teach students with SEN in the fully inclusive classroom, studies have found that not all teachers have positive attitudes toward inclusion. Hwang and Evins (2011) examined general educator's perceptions towards inclusion by completing two surveys with students at a research institution, before and after participants took part in a course which focused on integrating students with SEN into the general education classroom. Undergraduates who completed the survey indicated more positive perceptions toward inclusion practices at the time of the second survey and following participation in the integration course, which was still only 41% of participants. One third of undergraduates reported a need for more supports in the areas of instructional approaches and classroom management, and ways to better meet the needs of students of all ability levels. From the same sample of students, 55% indicated they would rather not have students with disabilities in their classrooms. With legislation that requires the Individualized Education Program Team to consider the least restrictive environment, it

is crucial that teachers are prepared to meet the academic, behavioral, and social needs of all students in the general education setting (Gathumbi et al., 2015).

Social-Emotional Opposing Factors of Inclusion

Another factor that must be taken into consideration when implementing an inclusive classroom is the acceptance of students with disabilities by their same-age peers. It is important for educators to understand how feeling included contributes to a student's academic and psychological development, especially as students enter middle school age and become more aware of the school social climate **(**Stiefel, Shiferaw, Schwartz & Gottfried, 2018).

Student isolation. Schwab (2015) analyzed differences within four categories of social participation (friendship, interactions, peer acceptance, and self-perception) in students with and without special education needs (SEN) in inclusive classrooms in comparison to regular classes (defined as classes without students with special education needs). Four research questions were posed regarding whether students with SEN had fewer friendships and interactions with peers, whether they were less socially accepted by peers, and whether they generally felt as socially integrated in comparison to how students without disabilities rated themselves. Data was collected from 1115 primary and secondary students in Austria through a longitudinal study, "Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Related to Social Inclusion" in which 63 classes took part in a survey. Students were asked questions based on friendships, interactions, peer acceptance, and self-perception of social participation. Teacher questionnaires were also completed to collect information about students with SEN. Only social participation data

from the longitudinal study was presented within this article, with results demonstrating that within inclusive classes, students with SEN had lower scores in all four areas of social participation than students without special education needs, which was confirmed for both primary and secondary students. Although Schwab stated the data could only provide a snapshot of the social participation of students with and without SEN, it raises a clear need for educators to foster the participation of students with SEN.

The same results were demonstrated in a study by Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini and Peru (2015) which was designed to investigate the social position of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the elementary and secondary settings. Students ages 7-14 participated from 12 different classes with grades 2-5 equally represented in order to determine the extent of positive interactions, friendship development, and social acceptance of each student group. Students completed surveys which assessed peer group inclusion in both work and social settings. Results demonstrated that students with special education needs were significantly less accepted and more rejected by others, and rarely chosen as a favored classmate by their same-age typically-developing peers.

These studies support the notion that when determining which educational setting is the most appropriate and least restrictive for a student, the team also much take into consideration how the student will adjust to the setting and what supports are necessary. It is wrong to assume that students who are in the inclusive classroom will feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. Many times, a student's participation in the classroom with nondisabled peers does not equate to greater interactions with peers. This is supported by

a study by Stiefel, Shiferaw, Schwartz and Gottfried (2018) who completed a descriptive analysis on the feelings of inclusion among approximately 249,000 middle school students in a large New York City school district. The study addressed various research questions; how special education students and students in the general education perceive feeling included in schools that serve both populations, whether students with disabilities had different perceptions of feeling included across disability categories, whether there are differences between inclusive and exclusive services, and the extent that results are driven by differences in students' academic achievement. Administrative and student qualitative data was collected in the form of a survey. Results of the study suggested that there were small gaps between the feelings of inclusion of students in special education in comparison to students who did not receive special education services. In addition to this, students with low incidence disabilities (emotional disturbance or other health impairments) had improved feelings of inclusion when they participated in exclusive services. Although results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups, it did demonstrate findings that SEN students were more likely to report bullying and somewhat more likely to experience harassment at school. Although the findings were modest, they may have a meaningful impact on students with disabilities who are attempting to feel included with their peers.

Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, and Soulsby (2007) reported on the social and affective outcomes of a special-mainstream school which implemented an inclusion initiative with 397 students ages 8-11, which encompassed 14 different classes in 11 different mainstream schools. Researchers measured peer group inclusion, social

behavior, bullying, and feelings of belonging at school. A Social Inclusion Survey and

The Belonging Scale were used as measures to assess how children associate with others

in the classroom and to what extend children felt a sense of belonging. Results of student

surveys indicated that students who had come from special school to mainstream schools

experienced positive social outcomes and none experienced peer rejection. Despite these

results, students with special education needs were overall less accepted and more

rejected on the social inclusion survey, up to four times that of their typically developing

peers in the area of work, and twice as high in the area of play.

Another factor that needs to be considered is the students' outlook towards

receiving instruction in the general education setting, which can highly impact their

confidence and self-concept. Miller and Fritz (2000) reviewed 35 various articles related

to special education students' perceptions of classroom placement to identify students'

perceptions and personal preferences of their educational program setting. A majority of

the 27 articles addressed students with learning disabilities, specifically, and aimed to

highlight the advantages and challenges related to an inclusive setting. Findings of the

literature review summarized that special education students prefer placements within the

same classroom as their nondisabled peers, although students identified barriers to the

inclusive classroom when there was a lack of receptiveness by teachers and peers related

to differences in their learning and academic performance.

Student attitudes toward inclusion. To better understand the social barriers to

an inclusive classroom, a study by Schwab (2017) aimed to examine and understand the

relationship between contact of students with special education needs and those without,

and what students' attitudes were towards students with SEN. To gain understanding of student perspectives, 436 eighth-grade students from Austria participated from ten different schools, comprised of 12 inclusive classes and 13 regular classes (those without students with SEN). Of the students with disabilities whom participated in the study, approximately 82% had a specific learning disability. A cross-sectional study was conducted to estimate the relationship between inclusive education and students' attitudes towards peers with disabilities. All students were asked to complete a survey which asked them to nominate peers based on free recall according to questions related to classroom contact, preferences for contact in joint activities, and attitudes towards peers with disabilities. When a student nominated a student with SEN, it was recorded as having "contact with students with SEN" within the contact category. Results of the study indicated that students with SEN received fewer nominations from peers, and nominated fewer peers for joint activities themselves. Data also showed that students who had superficial contact with students with SEN had a more negative attitude towards them than peers in the regular classroom who had no contact at all. Schwab summarized that students who have more meaningful interactions with students with SEN, rather than just frequent contact, have a more positive attitude towards them. She concluded that educators of inclusive classrooms need to create high quality contact for students with SEN and those without during joint activities in the classroom in order to create more positive attitudes and a greater impact on the social participation of students with disabilities.

Communication and social skills. Another important factor of fully inclusive classrooms is the support of pragmatic language needs and skills for students with disabilities. As the population of students being identified with disabilities continues to grow, it is important that we understand the many benefits, as well as implications, of students with special education needs learning alongside their nondisabled peers. Many students in special education are not socially and emotionally prepared or possess the skill set to appropriately interact with their nondisabled peers, and often, educators struggle to make the classroom a safe and positive environment for learning, with many students displaying challenging behaviors and lacking conflict resolution capabilities. The negative consequences on classroom community and social-emotional situation within the classroom have been reported when children with SEN are instructed using an inclusion model, as well as the implications it has on these students. Kucuker and Tekinarslan (2015) studied 272 students in the fourth and fifth grade to examine whether an inclusive classroom had an impact on the self-concepts, social skills, problem behaviors, and loneliness levels of students with SEN. Three different rating scales were completed by students, teachers, and parents and data was analyzed to determine whether there was a difference between students with disabilities and those without. Results showed that SEN students had higher loneliness levels and problem behaviors than their peers. In addition to this, data showed a lower self-concept and social skills of students with disabilities participating in the inclusive classroom. Teacher's surveys confirmed the same result, and recognized that the loneliness levels of students with special education needs were significantly different than those without.

After surveying over 2,800 first graders in 64 inclusive elementary school regarding social integration, feelings of acceptance, self-concept, and classroom climate, Krull, Wilbert, and Henneman (2014) found that students with behavior problems and learning difficulties experienced levels of social rejection that were significantly higher than their peers. The aim of this study was to investigate the social and emotional situation of first grade students with behavior problems and learning difficulties compared to their typically achieving peers. All students were surveyed to determine if students with disabilities were more likely to be socially rejected than their peers within the inclusive classroom. One-on-one interviews took place with each first grader, with results indicating significant differences toward unfavorable social and emotional situation in school for children with behavior or learning difficulties comparable to those without.

The social situations for students with classroom behavior problems or learning difficulties is unfavorable, and frequently results in a lower self-esteem and academic self-concept. For those with learning disabilities, it is reported that there is a more passive rejection by other students, whereas there is a more "active" social rejection for those with significant behavior problems, as they are often viewed as "mean" by their classmates. These students are more often socially rejected, have a more negative academic self-concept, feel less acceptance from their teacher, and have poorer perceptions of the classroom climate (Schwab, 2015).

This outcome is confirmed in other research, as students with SEN are identified as having fewer social skills, lower self-esteem, an increase in behaviors, and more

loneliness compared to their other general education peers (Kucuker & Tekinarslan, 2015). The lack of social-emotional skills has also been attributed to the frustration and overwhelmed feelings students have when trying to keep up with their peers and perform on academic tasks, which creates a poorer self-concept for students with special education needs.

While some studies state that students with disabilities benefit socially and emotionally from being included in general education classrooms (Garrote, 2017; Rovira, 2014; Evins, 2015), the social participation and acceptance of this student group can be challenging (Schwab, 2015). It is imperative that educators be aware of challenges of socially integrating students with disabilities in the classroom, and that they facilitate meaningful interactions between students (Schwab, 2017).

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

This review began by investigating research regarding inclusive classrooms and the benefits and implications of students with SEN receiving instruction in the general education setting, alongside non-disabled peers. Because of special education mandate which requires schools to provide a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, national trends are showing a progressive and positive trend toward placements in the general education setting (Morningstar et al., 2016). From these increasing trends comes research focused on the graduation patterns of students with disabilities. Schifter (2015) concluded that high school students with SEN who were fully included in general education have higher graduation probability profiles than those who received services in separate settings, highlighting the importance of providing instruction in the least restrictive environment.

With inclusion practices increasing across the nation, more research is addressing both the advantages and the barriers for students with special education needs. One side of the argument for inclusive practices is the improvement in academic skills for students with SEN. Studies which examined literacy outcomes for students with disabilities in an inclusive setting demonstrated an increase in academic scores or comparable progress to their non-disabled peers (Waldron & McLeskey, 1998; Klingner et al., 1998; Dessemontet & Bless, 2013; Graaf & Hove, 2015). Studies focused on mathematic interventions have also yielded positive academic results for students with special education needs who participated in the fully inclusive classroom (Bottge et al., 2017;

Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Various studies documented the positive correlation between reading scores and time spent in the inclusive setting, concluding that the more time students received instruction in the general education, the higher their reading skills were at the end of the study.

Research places focus on the impacts of the least restrictive environment for students in special education. In a program evaluation of eight schools ranging from full inclusion to no inclusion, Idol (2006) evaluated each school's programming and analyzed teacher perceptions and academic scores of the students. Results showed that with one exception, each school made noticeable improvements in average student statewide test scores over a period of four years. In addition to the academic progress being made in the inclusive classroom, a study by Schifter (2015) indicated that students who are fully included have higher graduation probability profiles across all disability categories.

Another argument for inclusion practices is the social-emotional benefits of students learning collectively with non-disabled peers. Studies have aimed to investigate the social behaviors, skill development, and social acceptance of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. One study revealed that although students with intellectual disabilities were not regarded as popular, they were accepted in the inclusive classroom, without requiring high levels of social skill capabilities (Garrote, 2017). Other studies support the same conclusion that students with disabilities are not at risk for isolation and rejection by their peers, rather, that there is evidence of mutual learning and positive social interactions for all students involved (Evins, 2015). Social-emotional behavior development also occurs in the inclusive classroom with many positive changes taking

place, as students learn to be more accepting of differences and learn from each other (Galvan et al., (n.d.); Rovira, 2014).

In contrast to the academic and social-emotional positive impacts of the inclusion classroom, results of other studies cite the ramifications of students with and without disabilities receiving instruction in the same classroom. The first opposing factor is the documented academic shortfalls of students with SEN, specifically in the areas of language, spelling, and adaptive behavior (Daniel & King, 2001). Other studies report little to no progress in the area of mathematics for students receiving math instruction in the general education setting (Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm & Elbaum, 1998; Dessemontet, Bless & Morin, 2012; Daniel & King, 2001). In fact, not only is there evidence of inadequate academic progression, but studies have shown that students without disabilities may be negatively impacted when participating in the inclusive classroom (Brown & Babo, 2017; Demirdag, 2017).

Insufficient teacher training is another concern related to the inclusive classroom, as research questions whether students with SEN receive less standards-related instruction and are exposed to less content than their non-disabled peers. Studies attribute these concerns to a general lack of training of educators and insufficient knowledge of how to differentiate instruction in the classroom to meet the needs of all learners (Gathumbi, Ayot, Kimemia & Ondigi, 2015; Miller, Lacey, Layton, 2003). In other instances, educators still report feeling unprepared to fully include students with disabilities, even after participating in training programs (Shani & Hebel, 2016; McCray & McHatton, 2011). Educators face many barriers when implementing an inclusive

classroom environment that works to include students with a wide range of disabilities, and many report a lack of understanding for managing behaviors, a lack of time and training to learn specific strategies, and inadequate resources in their classroom (Lindsay, Proulx, Thompson & Scott, 2013).

In addition to academic shortfalls and teacher training insufficiency concerns, there is conflicting research related to whether students benefit socially and emotionally in the inclusive classroom environment. Studies which analyze the social participation of students with SEN report fewer friendships and interactions with peers and a lower self-perception (Schwab, 2015). In some cases, not only were students with disabilities less accepted and more rejected by same-age peers, they were more likely to report being bullied, and some students with low incidence disabilities (including emotional disturbance and other health impairments) felt higher levels of inclusion in the pullout setting (Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini & Peru, 2015; Stiefel, Shiferaw, Schwartz & Gottfried, 2018). In other studies, students with SEN preferred to be in the inclusion classroom, but reported a lack of receptiveness by teachers and peers related to their learning and academic performance (Miller & Fritz, 2000; Schwab, 2017). Because students with SEN require greater support of language needs and pragmatic skills in the fully inclusive classroom, findings identify higher levels of loneliness and social rejection among students with disabilities, creating a poorer self-concept (Kucuker & Tekinarslan, 2015; Krull, Wilbert, & Henneman, 2014).

Limitations of the Research

In order to investigate the research question and locate literature for this thesis, sources were narrowed to include empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals published from 2008-2018. Databases included ERIC (EBSCOhost), Academic Search Premier, EBSCO MegaFILE, and SAGE Journals Online and key search terms restricted sources to those which included inclusive classrooms and special education inclusion, containing sources which focused on academic and social-emotional impacts of students with SEN. Using these specific types of sources and search terms limited the amount of information available which addressed the specific research question. One limitation of the research was a lack of studies which included participants from all disability categories and rather, focused on students with more mild disabilities such as learning disabilities. However, numerous sources did focus on or include participants with intellectual disabilities, and addressed the barriers and advantages for this group of students with more moderate learning challenges. Another limitation was the broad range of definitions of the term "inclusive classroom". The time students with disabilities were included in the classroom ranged from study to study, with some being fully inclusive education programs. Despite the continuum of inclusive settings, the research provided a look into the short- and long-term benefits and consequences for students with disabilities. As the national trends rise for instructing students with SEN in the classroom alongside their peers, it is predicted that greater research will be published on the subject of fully inclusive classroom environments.

Implications for Future Research

Future research in the area of successfully implementing fully inclusive programming could address administrator, teacher, and parent concerns related to challenges and barriers and may prompt districts who are hesitant in executing the same model. For districts who have already put this programming into effect and are observing benefits to all students, research which analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data may identify themes for the success and clear false impressions. Other research which includes student populations from a range of disability categories (e.g. emotional-behavioral disorders and more moderate intellectual disabilities) may bring light to misconceptions of student capabilities in the general education classroom. Based on the research available, it is difficult to come to clear conclusions about inclusion practices, due to conflicting data. Not only is there a need for more solid evidence of academic benefits, but educators need access to research on effective strategies for helping students with and without disabilities interact positively. Inclusion is not a placement or a teaching strategy, it is the feeling of community and the opportunity for students to learn and grow with their peers. It would be most beneficial if research focused on ways to successfully create an inclusive learning environment in the general education classroom, improving confidence for all students.

Because of the requirements of law and the responsibility of educators to determine placement for students with SEN, it is necessary that current research is available to assist in making informed decisions. Further exploring inclusion practices will allow educators to make recommendations with the students' best interests in mind.

Implications for Professional Application

The topic of inclusion is increasingly pertinent to educators as Individualized Education Program teams are required by law to provide access to grade-level curriculum in the least restrictive environment, whenever appropriate for the student's needs. All educators are responsible for providing services and instruction in a way which allows children with disabilities as much time as possible with nondisabled peers in the general education setting.

For some schools that have the required staff, resources, and training, this may include teaching students in a fully inclusive classroom. Within an inclusive classroom, students with special education needs are able to learn alongside their peers, as teachers are able to support a wide variety of student needs. This is frequently done through the use of teacher assistants or co-teaching methods, modifications of the curriculum or skill, accommodations, and grouping by ability level or within small groups. The concern of many administrators and teachers today is the challenges and resources necessary to successfully implementing an inclusive program. Educators frequently do not have access to the necessary training, materials, or time to fully integrate students with special education needs into their classrooms, which would allow the students to access the curriculum as their same-age peers do (Gathumbi et al., 2015; Rowan et al., 2017).

In many settings, students are provided special education services using a pullout model, which has proven to have repercussions on student's academic growth and social-emotional skills. These concerns are by recognized teachers and parents alike and there is becoming a greater push for inclusive programming. Although many administrators and

educators agree that students are best served in the general education classroom, in an environment which equally includes students and provides access to the grade-level standards, the question of how to successfully initiate this type of programming remains (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Frequently, funding, resources, and the required time it would take are fundamental reasoning for the unresolved change, and the successful implementation of inclusive environments depends on effective school leadership from administrators (Demirdag, 2017).

It is critical that educators are well-informed on the positive impact an inclusive classroom environment can have on all children, as well as what is necessary to overcome the challenges that surface. Without teachers advocating to administration for such an opportunity, it remains a disservice to many students with SEN. Implementing a thoughtful, universally-designed approach and utilizing a continuum of evidence-based interventions can have prominent impacts on all students (Fox et al., 2009), and as approaches to special education continue to evolve, it is paramount that we revisit such an important issue that may play a significant role in our students' success.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are short- and long-term advantages and considerations regarding the academic and social-emotional wellbeing of students with SEN in the inclusive classroom. The overwhelming evidence demonstrates that there is certainly much to gain by having all students come together in an inclusive learning environment, ranging from academic progression to mutual learning. Although there are also visible challenges to successfully implementing these programs, when educators join forces to

provide instruction which recognizes and supports each students' individual strengths and needs, all students are benefited.

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