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STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

A MASTER'S THESIS

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MARISSA EASTLING

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STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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APPROVED

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Abstract

Research regarding the effects of extracurricular activities on youth is abundant and clear: extracurricular activities benefit students. Some even suggest the benefits go far beyond the high school experience and can have a profound and positive influence on adulthood. However, school-organized extracurriculars often leave out many in their school population, such as their students with disabilities. This thesis examines the effects of extracurriculars on secondary students and the need for all adolescents to feel socially accepted. It discusses how extracurriculars can provide the feeling of social acceptance for both students of typical development and those with disabilities. Finally, it provides an example application that demonstrates how educators can bring students of typical development and students with disabilities together to create positive school culture, more opportunities for students with disabilities, and make the long-term benefits of extracurriculars available to everyone.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Few would disagree that high school is a pivotal time for social and emotional development. This period between childhood and adulthood is arguably one of the most critical times of growth in an individual's life. In the United States, one describes adolescence as a period when one is attempting to "find or discover themselves." It is a season when a young person begins to pull away from their adult caretakers and begins to make individual choices. Oftentimes, adolescents begin to explore their place in the world as they search for meaning and acceptance. The idea of coming into one's own during adolescence is not unique to the American teenager. Two psychologists at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem described adolescence as, "a developmental period marked by substantial social-cognitive growth and the emergence of values concerning the nature and role of social and political systems" (Bardi & Schwartz, 1996 as cited in Oosterhoff et al., 2016 p. 846).

Those who study social human development agree that during the adolescent years, the effects of peer influence greatly outweigh the forces of parental influence (Bateman, n.d.). Several studies have been conducted comparing parental influence to peer influence in various scenarios including everything from sensation seeking (Wang et al., 2016) and heavy drinking (Martino et al., 2009) to church attendance (Francis, 2020). In 2011, researchers Brechwald and Prinstein stated "Research over the past several decades consistently has revealed an important, yet deceptively simple finding regarding adolescent development: adolescents' behaviors and attitudes are remarkably similar to the behaviors and attitudes of their friends" (Brewald & Prinstein, 2011, p.166). When teens are making decisions about drinking alcohol, doing drugs, or being sexually active, the voices of their peers ring much louder than the voices of their parents.

Peers' influence can make the difference between a positive or negative decision, and peers have a considerable effect on an adolescent individual's social and emotional development.

How teens perceive their environment can also impact their emotional well-being and overall mental health. A study of the teenage brain conducted by Schriber found "The link between hostile school environments and social deviance was mediated by greater reactivity to social deviance in the subgenual anterior cingulate cortex, a region implicated in social pain and social susceptibility" (Schriber et al., 2018, p. 103). When a teenager feels their school is an unaccepting or hostile environment they are more likely to behave in socially deviant ways. Perceiving the environment as one of inclusion and acceptance is a crucial piece in promoting positive behavior. Hearing negative words or put-downs from peers can cause a teen anxiety or even depression. A recent study by Lee (2018, as cited in Morris, 2018) examined adolescent neural responses to social status words like loser and popular and the correlation between those words and depressive symptoms (Morris, 2018). The study found a direct neurological correlation between negative social status words, peer victimization, and a fear of being negatively evaluated by peers (Morris, 2018). These two studies show that feeling accepted by peers in the school environment is extremely important to the average teenager.

When surveyed by *Family Life* magazine, over fifty percent of the teens listed friends as one of the top three things that are most important to them (Sliver, 2020). After more than five decades of research and countless studies examining the teenage brain, peer influence, and high school hierarchy systems, one thing is abundantly clear: what happens in high school matters. The people that surround a teen and how teens perceive their environment can have an enormous effect on the rest of their life. While the topic of peer relationships and influence has been

dramatically researched regarding students we would categorize as “typically developing,” little is known about peer relations concerning students with pronounced disabilities.

Some research has been conducted regarding students with learning disabilities and how they perceive their peers’ attitudes regarding them. In 2018, DeVries, Stefan Voß, and Gebhardt penned a study about student perceptions (DeVries, et al., 2018). The purpose of this study was to discover if students in a special education program in an inclusive school actually felt included, or if despite a school’s best efforts, these students were still struggling to feel as if they “fit in.” The authors concluded that students in the special education program have a lower academic self-concept and lower self-perception than their “typically” developing peers (DeVries, et al., 2018).

Research has also been done regarding the attitudes of typically developing teens and how they feel concerning those who have disabilities or a special education label. While it appears that attitudes have changed over the past seventy years and individuals with disabilities are more represented in general society, there is still room for improvement. As recently as 2020, Dukes and Berlingo authored a paper in which they argued that negative attitudes about students with profound disabilities are still prevalent in our American school systems. According to the authors, these attitudes result in unfortunate consequences for those in special education, and segregation appears to be the dominant trend in most public education sectors. The authors concluded that the philosophy of segregated education continues to promote negative stereotypes and an overall misunderstanding of individuals with profound disabilities (Dukes & Berlingo, 2020).

The issue at hand here is that perceptions in the absence of quality interactions over time can stifle the ways groups think about and treat each other. This absence is detrimental.

There is almost no opportunity to create or dispel long-held notions about people with disabilities. No quality contact. Thus, the medical model (biological fixedness) prevails, and reasonable people believe in uninformed “common notions about disability” that do not promote an understanding based on ability or quality of life expected for people with and without disabilities. (Dukes & Berlingo, 2020, p.16)

The good news is that with purposeful inclusion attitudes can change. Real inclusion involves people taking action to include people or groups who have historically been excluded. Real inclusion occurs when school administration does more than just invite everyone to participate and instead takes the time to specifically include students with disabilities. Schools need to create environments where equity in program outcomes is not only possible but also attainable. When this happens, those with disabilities can experience peer acceptance and inclusion resulting in an overall better quality of life.

In a 2016 article about the peoples of China, the author, Avery contended that religious faith in Chinese culture, specifically Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism can lead to negative beliefs and stereotypes towards people with disabilities (Avery, 2016). Decades ago, Chinese society labeled individuals with disabilities as *canfei ren*, which literally translates to disabled garbage people (Avery, 2016.) With this information, one could argue that, in general, the Chinese culture has been less accepting of individuals with disabilities than its Western counterparts. Avery also stated, “At least verbally, the situation in China for individuals with disabilities is improving. However, discrimination is still rampant” (Avery, 2016, para. 1) In hopes of exploring ways to help change negative beliefs about those with disabilities, Chinese researchers, Li, and Wang executed a study regarding the Special Olympics program (2013).

This study aimed to examine the effects of volunteering in a Special Olympics program

and the attitudes about inclusion of those who volunteered versus those who did not. The authors of this study focused specifically on the attitudes towards individuals with intellectual disabilities, which Li had defined in a previous paper as “individuals... that have limited intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviors that commence before the age of 18 years” (Li & Wu, 2019, p. 35). The writers acknowledged that though there are programs in place that require the inclusion of those with disabilities, negative public attitudes continue to exist, especially in a country like China where positive feelings of inclusion are not predominantly present in the public square. The authors argued that real inclusion of those with disabilities requires incorporating those with disabilities into the community’s social fabric. The authors found that even one week of volunteering in the Special Olympics can profoundly impact an individual’s feelings about those who have physical or mental disabilities. “In summary, one significant finding of this study was that we found volunteers’ attitudes towards inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities could be enhanced through a 1-week exposure to the SOG (Special Olympic Games)” (Li & Wang, 2013, p. 516). This study is highly encouraging to those who work with individuals with disabilities and strive to see a more inclusive society for those they care for. If changing attitudes is possible in a country that has previously been less accepting of those with disabilities, how much more change is possible in the United States, where inclusion and diversity are at the forefront of the social and political conversation.

As educators strive to create an educational system that is equitable for all, it would be irresponsible to ignore the positive or negative effects of peer groups on both the social and emotional health of students with disabilities. This study’s guiding research questions include asking what are the social and emotional effects of participating in a unified club (a club that consists of students in general education and students with disabilities) for secondary students in

an education environment? In addition, how vital are peers and peer groups to the development of students with disabilities? Can educators create an environment where positive peer interactions result in social and emotional growth for students with disabilities? Would implementing a peer-focused curriculum in a high school setting provide students with disabilities more positive peer-related experiences? These are essential questions in the field of education.

As recently as 2017, a study published by the New Zealand College of Psychiatry determined that 74 percent of students, in general education ages 13 to 18 felt more confident after participating in an after-school exercise club for four weeks (Rourke & Wilson, 2017). If the confidence of 74 percent of typically developing students can increase by participating in a club for as little as four weeks, it is important for those who care about students in special education to know the impact an inclusive after-school club or activity can have on students with disabilities as well.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The Academic Search Engines of ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals, and Academic Search Premier were utilized to locate the literature for this thesis. The time frame for the studies and reports applied to this literature review range from the years 1996-2020. The keywords used to conduct this review were: Extracurricular, Adolescent Development, Peer Influences, Parental Influence, Benefits of Extracurricular Activities, Extracurriculars, and Intellectual Disabilities. This chapter will review the short and long-term effects of extracurricular activities on the youth of typical development and youth with intellectual or physical disabilities. This topic will be examined in the following order: The Developing Adolescent Brain, Social Acceptance and the “Typical” Student, Social Acceptance and Students with Disabilities, The Effects of Extracurriculars on “Typically” Developing Youth, The Effects of Extracurriculars on Youth with Disabilities, The Benefits of Organized Interaction between “Typically” Developing Youth and those with Disabilities.

The Developing Adolescent Brain

Genuinely understanding the adolescent brain has long been a struggle. How many times has a parent wondered what their teen was thinking when behavioral issues arose? Adults question their teens’ odd choices and are mystified by their sometimes extremely emotional outbursts. Though many secrets remain, the scientific community has made significant gains in unraveling the mystery of the teenage brain. Now more than ever, scientists, parents, and educators can understand the importance of peers and the connection they provide to positive activities that promote leadership, empathy, and social awareness.

What is known about human brain development has changed in the past twenty years. In 2001, the National Institute of Mental Health began using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to research the human brain. When imaging the teenage brain, researchers were surprised to learn “that the teenage brain is not a finished product, but a work in progress” (Spano, 2003, p. 36). In their teen years and sometimes as late as into their twenties, humans receive a new supply of gray matter. Gray matter is described as the substance in the brain that processes the cues from the sensory organs, for example, the eyes, ears, and tongue (Robertson, 2018). A fresh collection of gray matter was initially thought to be something that the brain produced only in the first eighteen months of life (Begley, 2000). This new information on brain development is excellent news for teenagers and their caretakers, as scientists now understand individuals have the ability to make positive changes in the brain as the brain is continuing to form. Dr. Jay Giedd from the National Institute of Mental Health described how this new knowledge can impact the teenage life,

...unlike infants whose brain activity is completely determined by their parents and environment, teens may actually be able to control how their own brains are wired and sculpted. This argues for doing a lot of things as a teenager. You are hardwiring your brain in adolescence. Do you want to hardwire it for sports and playing music and doing mathematics- or lying on the couch in front of the television? (Spano, 2003, p. 37)

Here, a strong case is made for the importance of organized extracurricular activities for the growing teenager. According to Morris, Squeglia, Jacobus, and Silk, “During adolescence, the brain is primed to experience social relationships and social influences” (Morris, et al., 2018, p. 6). During adolescence, the teenage brain is experiencing significant growth and change. It is also creating neurological connections that will be near impossible to change after the brain has

fully matured. This is why an argument for the importance of positive social experiences during the adolescent years is a vital one. According to Crone and Dahl, "...social and affective processes also have crucial roles in these maturational changes" (Crone & Dahl, 2012, p. 636). One of the primary changes regarding a teen's social interactions during adolescence is the change from self-centered behavior to behavior oriented towards others, or what is described as prosocial behavior. However, prosocial behavior does not develop in a vacuum, and neither does it occur equally among all individuals. Crone and Dahl explain:

Indeed, considerations of self and others' outcomes appear to be influenced by the social environment of adolescents. For example, there is evidence that popular adolescents (that is, those frequently liked and seldom disliked by peers) generally help, share, and cooperate with peers and score highly on measures of empathy and perspective-taking. (Crone & Dahl, 2012, p. 643)

This is a strong statement considering teen bullying continues to be viewed as a social epidemic and a hot topic in educational conversation. "Mean Girls" are often portrayed in movies and television shows as those at the top of the high school hierarchy. But, according to Crone and Dahl, self-centered behavior does not make one popular and, in fact, it may be proof that an individual's brain has not yet reached the stage of maturity where it can begin to understand another person's feelings or perspectives.

Self-centered or bullying behavior is often a sign of a still-developing brain. However, when bullying behaviors linger into young and middle-aged adulthood, an under-developed brain may no longer be the culprit. Research suggests an underlying mental health issue may have come into play. "Furthermore, there is evidence that children who bully are also likely to have mental health problems that persist into adult life" (Cowie & Colliety, 2007, p. 26). Suppose

society can provide a place where maturing teenage brains can practice prosocial behaviors. Well organized extracurriculars have the ability to provide a space where young brains can participate in safe and accepting environments that teach empathy and acceptance. When this space is created, those who participate experience an environment that is likely to help them become adults who are generally more accepting of differences among individuals.

In their review, the authors, Altikulac and his fellow researchers, contested that the negative public perceptions of the teenage brain's immaturity led to more teenagers engaging in adverse and reckless behavior. The authors concluded, by distinction, if society viewed the teenage brain differently, "...by focusing on greater flexibility and learning possibilities, [this attitude] may lead to a more positive impact on public discourse and on the behavior and self-conceptions of adolescents" (Altikulac et al., 2017, p.340). This presents both a great challenge and a great opportunity for those who work with adolescents in the public sphere. When educators choose to view the teenage brain as a land of opportunity ripe with the possibilities of creating individuals with empathy and understanding, a better society waits for us all. Perhaps one way to actively pursue this ideal is to design fully inclusive extracurriculars where students with disabilities are positioned to thrive.

Social Acceptance and the "Typical" Student

Almost any parent of a teenager will tell you one of their primary concerns when it comes to their child is their group of friends. When children are young, parents have almost sole control over who interacts with their child. For example, if Sally's parents believe that little Susie is a bad influence on little Sally, the solution is simple: don't bring Sally over to Susie's house. But what happens when Sally gets older and Sally has a car or a friend with a car? The parental

control over who Sally chooses to spend her time with is greatly diminished, and Sally might be spending all her time with Susie, who is still a bad influence.

One of the top ten concerns of parents of teens is that their teen is hanging out with the “wrong crowd” (Betts, n.d.). The concern is genuine, and it is for a good reason; peers can have an enormous influence on the choices an individual teen makes. Being accepted by one’s peers is viewed as extremely important during adolescence. As discussed in the previous section, the teenage brain is undergoing a second wave of incredible development. During this development, the adolescent brain relies heavily upon the segment of the brain that processes others’ mental states and mimicry (Burnett & Blakemore, 2017). “Basically, the teenage brain is obsessed with what others are thinking” (Scott, 2017, para. 5). Because social acceptance is so vital, teens become even more sensitive to gaining approval from peers and even more so in risky or uncertain circumstances (Sebastian, et al., 2010).

When the term “peer influence” is presented, many people construct negative pictures in their heads. Images of one teen persuading another to try a dangerous drug or encouraging a friend to drive recklessly suddenly appear. Both are common themes when one hears the phrase “peer pressure.” However, what if peer pressure could be used to create prosocial behavior in teens? What if teens could gain peer acceptance and, more importantly, self-confidence through what society has coined as “peer influence” or “peer pressure?” According to a research study conducted by Hoorn, Dijk, Meuwese, Rieffe, and Crone (2016), this may be possible.

The study’s purpose was to determine if peer influence could be an agent in creating prosocial behavior in students ages 12-16 years old. One hundred and ninety-seven students participated in the experiment. The study consisted of 20 trials divided into three phases. The students participated in an online game environment where they were given tokens. The students

could choose to keep the tokens for themselves or donate their tokens to the group. By donating tokens to the group, the students received a 100 percent return on their donation, which would then be divided evenly among the group members. If the students decided to keep the tokens, they would receive no additional tokens. Choosing to keep the tokens provided no advantages. The students were divided into three experimental groups: the antisocial feedback group, the prosocial feedback group, and the no-feedback group. Students in the antisocial feedback group were praised when they chose to keep their tokens all to themselves. Students in the prosocial feedback group were praised when they decided to donate the tokens to their group's combined total. The no-feedback group received no reaction about their decision of what to do with the tokens. All decisions made about the tokens were made individually and anonymously. As one might expect, individuals who received antisocial feedback, made significantly lower token donations to the group (Hoorn, et. al., 2016). The opposite held true for students who received prosocial feedback, or encouragement when they donated to the group. "In line with our predictions, the findings of the prosocial feedback condition revealed a positive effect of peer influence. Adolescents in the prosocial feedback condition donated significantly more to the group after feedback from their peers;" (Hoorn, et. al., 2016, p. 95). The authors of the study concluded, "... our study provides support for the view of adolescence as a period of vulnerabilities, but also a period of opportunities for social learning and adaptation." (Hoorn, et. al., 2016, p. 90).

Additionally, a meta-analytical study conducted in 2013 claimed that adolescence is a period of time when social approval and esteem are of great importance, and a reorientation of priorities occurs. Opinions of peers and social rewards become a highly relevant social behavior model (Wentzel, et al., 2014). "Our findings support the notion that social acceptance by peers

should not be ignored in discussions of cognitive development and academic success” (Wentzel, et al., 2014, p. 174).

These studies are not alone; numerous studies provide evidence for the view of adolescence as a time of strong susceptibility to peer influence, both positive and negative. Adolescence can be a prime time of opportunities for implementing positive social training and fundamental social change. “Teenagers who vandalize a bus stop with their friends could instead be encouraged by their peers to be prosocial” (Hoorn, et al., 2016, p. 98).

Although many parents will admit to the feeling of having less control over their teenage son or daughter, a study conducted by Chen, Dornbusch, and Liu (2007) concluded that although parents do not feel as if they have much control over their teen in general, parents actually play a prominent role in their teen’s peer choices. Although the feelings of parental involvement may decrease overall, parents continue to strongly influence whom their teenager chooses as their friends (Chen, et al., 2007). This study acknowledged the tremendous role peer influence plays on the typical teenager. In addition to confirming the effects of that influence, it further stated that if there is one area where parents can strongly influence their teen, it is in the area of peer relationships. “Our findings are consistent with the social contextual perspective that parents actually shape adolescent social environments by their direct influence on adolescent peer affiliation” (Chen, et al., 2007, p. 840).

It is vital that positive peer influences surround teenagers. Though most research on this topic involves teens of typical social, emotional development, and intellectual capabilities, those with intellectual, physical, and or emotional disabilities must not be disregarded. Understanding how peer influence affects those with disabilities is necessary to develop positive and inclusive

peer groups and provide opportunities for prosocial behaviors to naturally occur within the community of students with disabilities.

Social Acceptance and Students with Disabilities

Understanding the crucial role peer influence plays in a typical teen's life is only part of the equation. Influence only occurs because acceptance is such a high priority. Little research has been conducted on how students with disabilities perceive their social status within the high school hierarchy. However, understanding how students with disabilities feel about their place within the school community is key in understanding how those who work with these individuals can improve their overall educational experience. By understanding how students with disabilities perceive social acceptance (within the high school setting), educators can begin providing these students with equitable opportunities to engage in the communal high school experience.

In 2018, a study by researchers DeVries, Voß, and Grebhardt asked, "Do learners with special education needs really feel included?" The purpose of this study was to discover if special education students in an inclusive school actually felt included, or despite a school's best efforts, were students still struggling to feel as if they fit in? Students were divided into two categories: those with special education needs and those without. Students with disabilities were defined as individuals with hearing, visual, mental, and or physical disabilities. DeVries, Voß, and Grebhardt (2018) proposed that even in schools that strive to be inclusive, students in special education feel socially and emotionally excluded. Their research was based on the hypothesis; "While inclusion in schools is an agreed-upon international goal..." (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). "Significant numbers of disabled children and

youth are largely excluded from educational opportunities for primary and secondary schooling,” (Peters, 2003, p. 1).

To gather the information necessary to answer this question, the authors of this study used questionnaires. Students were given both a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ). Students completed the questionnaires of their own accord. Students were asked to complete the questionnaires at the end of sixth grade and again at the end of seventh grade. The study consisted of 407 students; 48 of the students were identified as having special education needs. All the students surveyed attended a self-proclaimed inclusive school. According to the study, students with special education needs had an academic self-concept significantly lower than that of their peers without special education needs. Students with special education needs also felt feelings of lower inclusion on an emotional level. No significant differences in emotion were observed based on the student’s gender. The relationship between the SDQ and the PIQ showed that students with a higher SDQ score perceived themselves to be less included in the general education classroom. However, positive academic perceptions did increase as students aged from sixth grade to seventh grade. The authors concluded that students with special education needs do have lower academic self-concept and lower self-perception than their peers of typical development (DeVries, Voß, & Grebhardt, 2018).

A second study (Wendelborg & Kvello, 2009) about the perception of social acceptance of those with disabilities included perceptions held by the parents of children with disabilities. In 2009, a study was conducted to examine the connection between school relationships and friendships during leisurely activities as well as the parents' observations of social acceptance and formed friendships among their children with disabilities (Wendelborg & Kvello, 2009).

This study determined disabilities using the following four categories: physical disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, and other. Eighty-five children with disabilities, ages 11- to 13-years old, and their parents took part in this study. The authors hypothesized that classroom participation and social participation in leisure time positively influenced the perceptions of social acceptance and peer intimacy, while the other variables like the student's degree of intellectual or physical impairments, time spent in the special education classroom, and time spent with a special education teacher or paraprofessional were likely to have a negative impact on social acceptance and peer intimacy of the student with disabilities (Wendelborg & Kvello, 2009). This was a longitudinal study involving the parents of children born with disabilities between 1993 and 1995. Parents were asked to complete surveys about their perception of the amount of inclusion their child received in 1999, 2003, and 2006. After an in-depth look into the lives of these children, the study concluded, "Educational arrangements may obstruct the opportunities of children with disabilities have for participating and interacting socially during leisure time and may further have a negative impact on their perceived social acceptance and peer intimacy" (Wendelborg & Kvello, 2009, p. 143).

These studies provided valuable insight for those who work with or care for students with disabilities. Even with careful planning and the best intentions, students in special education programs and their families often feel left out of the critical social experiences and milestones typically developing students enjoy. Educators must begin to recognize where the educational system is falling short for students with disabilities, especially when it comes to their social development. It raises the question: How can those in special education create spaces where students with disabilities feel peer acceptance and social inclusion? With purposeful planning,

can integrated extracurriculars, those that include both typical students and students with disabilities, provide the space students in special education are seeking?

The Effects of Extracurriculars on “Typically” Developing Youth

The topic of extracurricular activities in schools has long been a subject of discussion in the educational world. Merriam-Webster defines extracurricular as “not falling within the scope of a regular curriculum *specifically*: of or relating to officially or semi officially approved and usually organized student activities (such as athletics) connected with school and usually carrying no academic credit” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). This is the definition that will be used to explore the idea of extracurricular activities throughout this literature review.

While most schools take pride in their extracurriculars, they also are often the first thing to go when budget cuts are made. The budget for the drama club will often be eliminated in favor of new technology for the science department. The purpose of this paper is not to debate the importance of science over drama or vice versa, but rather to explore the benefits extracurricular activities provide to students and make the case that the opportunity to engage in these activities should be available to all students. The research that has been conducted has largely used students of “typical” development as their research subjects. Typically developing children are those who achieve specific developmental milestones within an average time frame as compared to other children of their same age. “Developmental milestones are specific skill attainments occurring in a predictable sequence over time, reflecting the interaction of the child’s developing neurological system with the environment” (Dosman, et al., 2012, p. 561). This model of skill formation is often referred to as normal or typical development and is used to monitor a child’s developmental progress.

In 2003, Bartko and Eccles published a paper comparing the characteristics of adolescents who participate in organized clubs versus those who do not. Several of their findings were of note.

First, for academic performance, the School and High-Involved adolescents reported the highest grade point averages. Looking back at the individual activity measures, these two groups also showed the highest mean involvement in both homework and school-based clubs. The Uninvolved teens reported the lowest mean GPA and reported the lowest involvement in homework and school clubs. (Bartko & Eccles, 2003, p. 237)

The authors concluded their study by claiming that the more constructive and organized activities a student is involved in, the healthier the student is psychologically and the better behaved he or she is in general (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). In addition to a higher GPA, all of this creates a strong case in favor of students participating in extracurricular activities and for schools providing the means for them to do so.

Several additional studies have been conducted researching the relationship between extracurricular involvement and student emotional health, goal attainment, and long-term success. As recently as 2017, a study published by Forgeard and Benson discussed the effects of participating in extracurricular activities in high school and how that participation is beneficial to the individual when transitioning to college. The authors of this study believed that extracurriculars provided students with age-appropriate opportunities involving skills like increasing performance, developing independence, creating an identity, and growing personal relationships. Their research findings show that developing these skill sets in high school makes an easier transition to college and adulthood compared to students who develop them after high school or perhaps not at all (Forgeard & Benson, 2017).

One extremely in-depth study concerning the relationship between extracurricular activities and adolescence even went so far as to examine the associations between the type of extracurricular activity and its effect on students' feelings of school attachment and GPA. In their study Eccles, with her partners Barber, Stone, and Hunt, (2003) measured typical high school extracurricular offerings individually. For example, the GPA and feelings of school attachment of students who participate in a performing arts program were studied separately from the GPA and feelings of school attachment of students who participate in an after-school sport. A significant finding in the study showed that participating in high school sports or performing arts resulted in a higher GPA and a feeling of greater attachment to one's school. The study found that participating in team sports promotes positive academic outcomes. Those in sports liked school better compared to those not involved at both the 10th and 12th-grade levels. Additionally, participants in 12th grade received a higher than expected GPA (Eccles, et al., 2003). Their findings for the performing arts yielded similar results, including students observing a more fulfilling school experience and a higher GPA (Eccles, et al., 2003). The research also included student government, school spirit, and academic clubs. All resulted in similar outcomes of better GPAs and greater feelings of school attachment when compared to students who did not participate in any extracurricular school activities. The conclusion of the study is hard to dismiss.

Participation in prosocial activities predicted lower rates of increase in alcohol and drug use, as well as lower levels at both grades 10 and 12; participation in performing arts served this same function for boys. Furthermore, each of these results held true when social class, gender, and academic aptitude were controlled. (Eccles, et al., 2003, p.872)

In contrast to the benefits for students who participated in extracurricular activities, this study also highlighted the negative impact participation in sports could have on the student when

the sport was taken away. The study found that when a student was no longer able to participate in the sport due to the sport no longer being offered or the student being cut from the team, the student suffered. The study stated "...those youth who saw themselves as jocks in the 10th grade and were no longer playing sports at 12th grade reported among the highest levels of depressed mood" (Eccles, et al., 2003, p. 880). This finding once again argued the need for students to not only be involved in extracurriculars but, if at all possible, to stay involved.

Thoroughly investigating the effects of extracurricular activities on typically developing students finds the outcomes to be overwhelmingly positive, further investigation focuses attention on students with disabilities. Questions to be explored include: Does being involved in extracurriculars provide the same long-term benefits for students with disabilities? Is there a case to be made for students with disabilities to have more opportunities to participate in high school sports, performing arts, school spirit, government, and academic clubs?

The Effects of Extracurriculars on Youth with Disabilities

Though the research involving the effects that extracurriculars have on youth with intellectual or physical disabilities is scarce, what has been studied is relevant to the overarching question of the necessity for students with disabilities to have the opportunity to participate in these activities along with their typically developing peers.

One literature review by Vinoski, Graybill, and Roach (2016), broached the question of whether students with disabilities receive the same benefits from extracurricular activities as those of their non-disabled peers. In this study the authors included individuals with a variety of intellectual, physical, and or social-emotional disabilities. They hypothesized that students with disabilities miss out on the benefits extracurriculars provide, including enhanced life skills, recreational pursuits, career paths, and social connections. The review mainly relied on two

previous studies. The first, a survey conducted by Mahoney, Harris, and Eccles (2006), which examined individuals ten years after high school graduation and determined that those who participated in extracurricular activities earned a higher wage and had greater attainment of their educational goals. The second, a study by Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillen, and Brent (2001), concluded the amount of extracurricular activity participation over the high school years predicted the long-term benefits of educational success and college attendance. After researching the benefits of extracurriculars for typically developing students, Vinoski, Graybill, and Roach examined 400 different IEPs and determined that only 11.3% of students with disabilities participated in extracurricular activities. This paper argued that millions of students with disabilities miss out on the educational, social, and emotional benefits that can only be attained by participating in an extracurricular club or sport. This is compared to 75% of students without disabilities (Vinoski, Graybill, & Roach, 2016). One of the most significant findings of the review is the conclusion that encouraging students with disabilities, through recruitment, to participate in clubs and activities with their non-disabled peers provides them with opportunities to practice leadership skills like planning, communicating, and decision-making. When students with disabilities participate in these clubs, they receive the same benefits as their non-disabled peers. Other positive character traits like self-determination and goal setting can be developed in extracurricular clubs and sports (Vinoski, Graybill, & Roach, 2016).

A short article by Grace (2006), discussed the experiences of a special education teacher, Linda Cohen, who has been in the profession for thirty years. Cohen was particularly concerned about her seventh-grade student Jason who had “significant learning delays and communication challenges.” Jason rarely interacted with his classmates. However, Cohen noticed a marked

improvement in his classroom relationships after participating in an inclusive after-school club.

Cohen states,

After Jason started going to the after-school activities, he had more in common with the other kids. Before that, he was very resistant to accepting help and to making friends. He would stare at other kids, and he didn't get social cues. But the after-school program leveled the playing field. (Grace, 2006, para. 13)

Though few studies have examined the overall benefits of extracurricular activities for students with special needs, some have researched these effects on students when participating in very specific clubs. A recent study specifically examined the impact of students diagnosed with ASD or ADHD, ages five to seventeen, and their participation in an after-school MineCraft club. After participating in the club, 53.5% of the students reported they felt that the club presented them with opportunities to make friends, play with others, socialize, and gain confidence in their communication skills (Hobbs, 2020). One parent surveyed about the club even commented, “My child has always struggled in school. Coming to Minecraft Club enables him to feel clever. He enjoys helping the younger children and feels important” (Hobbs 2020, p. 32).

Overall, students with disabilities encounter fewer opportunities to develop the social skills many typically developing children take for granted, which is why engaging students with disabilities in extracurriculars is essential to the overall health and well-being of students with disabilities. The research proved that providing ample opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their peers in a safe and welcoming environment must become an educational priority.

The Benefits of Organized Interaction between “Typically” Developing Youth and those with Disabilities

When Li and Wang studied the Special Olympics Program in China in 2013, the aim of their research was to “...examine the effect of volunteering for Special Olympics Games (SOG) on the attitudes of volunteers towards the inclusion of people specifically with intellectual disabilities.” (Li & Wang, 2013, p. 515). A guiding question of their study was: Can attitudes about the inclusion of individuals with special needs be changed or altered through organized programs like the Special Olympics? (Li & Wang, 2013). According to this study, the answer is, “Yes!”

The study conducted by Li and Wang consisted of 100 participants ages 18 to 25. All the participants were from the same university in Southeast China. None of the participants were majoring in special education or any other related field of study. 37 of the participants were male. 63 were female. 50 of the students surveyed volunteered to participate in the Special Olympics Games (SOG), and fifty did not. The Mental Retardation Attitude Inventory-Revised (MRAI-R, Antonak & Harth 1994) was used to evaluate students’ attitudes of inclusion towards people with intellectual disabilities. The study consisted of two groups: a controlled group and an experimental group. The MRAI-R questionnaire was administered by researchers three different times to the experimental group and once to the controlled group. The experimental group completed the questionnaire once before working in SOG, once one week after volunteering in the SOG, and once four weeks after volunteering in the SOG. The controlled group completed the questionnaire one time at a separate assembly. The study concluded that female participants’ attitudes about inclusion were better overall than their male counterparts. However, both male and female participants who were part of the group that volunteered with SOG had improved

attitudes about the inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities. The study deduced that positive attitudes about inclusion could be increased even after one week spent interacting with individuals with intellectual disabilities (Li & Wang, 2013).

Of all the studies researched for this literature review, the study by Li and Wang arguably makes the strongest case for integrated extracurriculars. Although their research focused on changing attitudes about individuals specifically with intellectual disabilities, additional research demonstrates that this information can be applied to people with all types of disabilities. With planning and effort, negative stigmas about those with disabilities can be changed. In addition, individuals with disabilities can experience the benefits and rewards that accompany participating in extracurricular activities. With administrative and school support students with disabilities can have the same opportunities to develop social skills and leadership qualities; they can gain practical skills in managing projects and strategic planning. The possibilities are endless when one recognizes the importance of an inclusive environment and equal opportunities for all.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide secondary schools with an outline of ideas to create an extracurricular inclusive club, giving students with physical and intellectual disabilities the opportunity to engage in programs and activities with their non-disabled peers. Activities promote social interaction and provide opportunities to develop leadership skills, manage projects, and achieve common goals.

This curriculum is designed for educators who work with students with disabilities or general education teachers who desire to support an inclusive club that promotes leadership skills for both typical students and students with disabilities. Access to the curriculum could be provided through a professional development conference or simply presented to individual teachers who have a desire to create an inclusive program. Approval from school administration would be necessary to implement this curriculum. The meeting plans below assume that the students have a general location for a meeting place within the school. A small monetary budget is necessary to complete some of the activities described in this curriculum. A small fee could be charged to students who participate in the club if a budget through the school or community is not available. A supervising teacher will need to be designated to provide guidance for the leadership team. Additional adult support in the program may also be necessary to help facilitate and supervise the activities. The full curriculum consists of 80 meeting activities organized under nine different themes: Getting to Know You, Fall Festivities, Working Together, Giving Back, Physical Fitness, Random Acts of Kindness, Exploring other Culture, Exploring the Outdoors, and Lasting Friendships.

This curriculum would provide enough activities for the club to meet two to three times per week following a typical 9 month school calendar. Organizers should think of the curriculum

as a list of ideas from which they can choose their favorites or use as a starting point to implement their own plans. A preview of six activities provided with this curriculum is detailed below.

Program Name: PALS (People of All Learning Styles)

This extracurricular club could meet as often as desired as determined by the leadership team. However, a suggestion of no less than two times per month is recommended, as it is difficult to form meaningful relationships without consistent and frequent interactions.

The ideal leadership team for this club and curriculum consists of both general education and special education students in grades 9-12. The team should meet at least twice after school during the first or second week of school to discuss plans and ideas for the PALS club for the upcoming quarter. Being a part of the leadership team gives students with disabilities the opportunity to develop and practice management skills rarely present in other clubs or activities designed for students with disabilities. As part of the leadership team, the students with disabilities should work together with their typical peers to complete tasks like determining what activities the club will host, how the activities will be funded, how many adults will be needed to support the activity, who these adults might be, and what supplies need to be gathered in order to make the event or activity a success.

The club activities presented in this curriculum include an outline of the leadership skills the students on the leadership team will have the opportunity to develop and practice with each selected activity. The students with disabilities should be considered the “drivers” of the club programming, while the general education students involved should take on a more supportive role, making suggestions, pointing out possible pitfalls, and assisting in the organization of the activity when necessary. A new leadership team of students with disabilities should be chosen

once every quarter to give more students the opportunity to be in a leadership role. A rotation of general education students could also take place if there was high interest from the general education population to be a member of the leadership team. However, the club might be run more effectively by a more permanent presence of general education students who are thoroughly invested in the club. The curriculum could be used as written or could be used as an outline or list of ideas that could be implemented any time during the school year. The leadership team should continue to meet one to two times per week, depending on how often the club meets, to gather supplies and plan for upcoming activities.

Each PALS activity is designed to last approximately 60 minutes and meet immediately after school. Students on the leadership team will need some time before the start time of the club to bring the necessary materials to designated meeting locations. This curriculum is based on a typical school calendar. If possible, once per quarter the PALS group should participate in a field trip. A field trip provides the leadership team with an event that requires a more significant amount of organization and pre-planning than the regular PALS activities.

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR PALS PROGRAMING

SEPTEMBER: Getting to Know You

OCTOBER: Fall Festivities

NOVEMBER: Working Together

DECEMBER: Giving Back

JANUARY: Physical Fitness

FEBRUARY: Random Acts of Kindness

MARCH: Exploring other Cultures

APRIL: Exploring the Outdoors

MAY: Lasting Friendships

Six Sample Lessons of PALS Programming

THEME: Getting to Know You

PALS Activity 1: Let's Get to Know Each Other Game

Location: Classroom

Supplies: Computer, SMARTBoard or similar device, Internet access, Kahoot program, Students must have access to individual technology (Chromebooks or iPads).

Leadership Team Prep Work: Collect and make a list of at least two facts about every individual in the PALS club. Then, work together to create a Kahoot Quiz about the students. A sample question would be:

Who has a cat named Princess?

1. Amy
2. Bart
3. Chris
4. Dan

Description of Activity: Students use Kahoot to answer as many questions correctly as they can about their classmates. During the activity, general education students on the leadership team may choose to read the questions out loud so those students with visual impairments and reading disabilities can fully participate. General education students may also be paired with students who have significant needs and help them answer the questions on their devices. After playing the game the leadership team reviews the correct answers with all students, so they are able to learn more about their classmates.

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Interviewing: Students ask questions of their peers to get answers to the quiz questions.

Recording: Students record the answers provided by their peers.

Organization: Students organize the information gathered and format it into a Kahoot quiz.

Public Speaking: Students explain how the game is played to the members of the club.

Technology: Students utilize technology to complete this activity.

PALS Activity 2: Outdoor Scavenger Hunt

Location: Meet in the designated meeting location to hand out scavenger hunt lists and pencils, then head out to the school grounds to find items on the scavenger hunt list.

Supplies: Scavenger Hunt List, Sharpened Pencils, Clipboards

Leadership Team Prep Work: Choose an appropriate scavenger hunt and make enough copies for as many teams as you anticipate participating. Be sure to also gather all necessary supplies.

Description of Activity: Students form teams of four or five and head outside to search for and check off items on their scavenger hunt list. Students do not need to physically bring the item back, but take a picture with their phone, if feasible, and place a checkmark next to the item once they have seen it. Set a specific time and meeting place for students to return to once they have completed their scavenger hunt or they have run out of time. When students return to the designated area students can compare their lists. It is important to set up clear boundaries for this activity and have teachers supervising to make sure students do not wander off. Below is a sample scavenger hunt list, there are several free and printable scavenger hunt lists online, and leaders should ultimately choose a list that best describes items they could find on their specific school grounds.

Stick

Feather

Squirrel

Spiderweb

Flower

Worm

Pinecone

Rock

Acorn

Butterfly

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Decision Making: Students decide what items to include on their scavenger hunt list depending on their school grounds and the possibility of locating certain items. Students determine the scavenger hunt teams when considering the members of their club.

Planning Ahead: Students obtain copies of the scavenger hunt list, gather clipboards and pencils for the activity. Students determine the boundaries for this activity.

Communication: Students communicate the rules and directions to their fellow club members.

PALS Activity 3: Outdoor Tie-Dye

Location: Students meet in the designated classroom area to obtain supplies and receive instruction. Once students have the necessary supplies students meet outdoors in a designated area to participate in the tie-dye activity. It is recommended that the area be grass, if at all possible, to avoid dying any cement that might be on school grounds.

Supplies: White T-shirts (Students can be asked to provide their own white T-shirts, however, several extras should be on hand for students who forget or are unable to do so.) Notes, reminders, and e-mails should be sent home several days before the activity to ensure as many students as possible bring in their T-shirts. Several Tie Dye Kits (preferably the kits that provide squeeze bottles of tie-dye for easier application.) Several hundred rubber bands, Medium to small-sized plastic garbage bags (at least one per student.) Washing directions printed on a small card (at least one per student) Pre-printed cards with student names. Stapler.

Leadership Team Prep Work: The leadership team creates reminders to bring a white t-shirt complete with the date the tie-dye activity will be taking place. The notes are sent home with students two to three times at least one week before the activity and one day before the activity. The leadership team creates and prints cards with washing instructions and cards with the names of all the students who will be participating. The supervising teacher gathers and purchases the necessary supplies for the activity.

Description of Activity: Once the students have their supplies they go to the designated location. Once at the location students begin twisting their t-shirt and tightly wrapping rubber bands around the twisted areas to ensure the best results. When the t-shirt is sufficiently twisted, and bound, students lay their plastic garbage bag on the ground and place their twisted t-shirt on top. Students then use the squirt bottles of tie-dye to color their t-shirts different colors. When the shirt is adequately colored, the student turns the plastic garbage bag inside out around the t-shirt and ties it shut. Students receive a card with wash instructions and a card with their name on it. Both cards should be stapled to the plastic bag.

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Budgeting: For this activity, students purchase supplies, determine the number of people doing the activity, and purchase or arrange for someone else to purchase the materials. Students determine the budget for this project before purchasing the materials needed.

Communication: Students inform club members about the upcoming activity before it occurs. The leadership creates a way to inform the club members that they need a white t-shirt for the activity. The leadership team creates a notecard with washing instructions for the students to bring home.

Planning Ahead: Identify an appropriate outdoor space to complete the project and create a backup plan in case of poor weather. Purchase and gather supplies and communicate important information ahead of the activity.

PALS Activity 4: Game Day

Location: Classrooms

Supplies: Several different types of games. Board games and card games. Examples: Uno, SkipBo, Phase 10, Sorry, Trouble, Jenga, Apples to Apples, Regular Decks of Cards for games like Go Fish.

Leadership Team Prep Work: Designate certain classrooms to host specific games. For example, card games will be played in Mr. Smith's room. The team makes signs of what games are in what classrooms, tape signs outside the classroom doors, or alternatively, hand a list of the classrooms and what games will be hosted in that classroom to each student. Ensures there are enough games for all the students to participate and place games in the appropriate classrooms.

Description of Activity: Students meet in several different classrooms and engage in board and card games of their choice. Students who need extra support can have a general education student partner to assist them in the gameplay. General education students model patience and good sportsmanship during game time. Teachers let students know how much time they have to play the game. Warnings of ten minutes and five minutes left of playing time may be helpful in getting students to end the game appropriately and transition to the next activity.

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Room Planning: Leadership determines which classrooms will host which games. Furniture within those rooms is arranged for ease of gameplay. Students should take into account the space needed for students in wheelchairs.

Planning Ahead: Students determine the games they desire to play, gather those games by borrowing them from teachers or other resources. Students in leadership make signs for the classrooms letting club members know which rooms are hosting which games.

PALS Activity 5: Cookie Decorating

Location: If possible, using the school cafeteria or kitchen area would be preferable if not possible several classroom locations would suffice.

Leadership Team Prep Work: The leadership team determines if any students in the PALS program have food allergies applicable to this activity. If allergies exist alternative ingredients are provided to allergy-prone students. The team determines the number of supplies needed for the activity. For example, how many cookies will each student be allowed to decorate? This will determine the number of supplies needed. Once all supplies are gathered items are divided up into individual serving sizes among small plastic containers. This will make the application of the activity much easier and more sanitary.

Supplies: Pre-baked, plain sugar cookies (shape and size can be determined by the leadership team) Frosting (several different colors divided into small plastic containers.) Sprinkles (several different varieties divided into small plastic containers.) Plastic knives, Plastic tablecloths, any other candies or cookie decorating supplies the team chooses and can be purchased within the budget.

Description of Activity: Students meet in the designated area and the leadership team hands out supplies. Students have a set time to decorate as many cookies as the leadership team previously decided. Each table of students has students in special education and students in general education to help form and build relationships while they are decorating cookies. Once cookies are decorated students eat their cookies.

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Budgeting: An estimation of the number of participants as well as the supplies needed for that number of participants is necessary. Create a budget to purchase supplies and arrange for the supplies to be purchased.

Room Planning/Working with Administration: This activity would work best in a kitchen or cafeteria area. Work with the school administration to secure the cafeteria for this activity if possible. Set up space for minimal mess and optimal interaction between students.

PALS Activity 6: Bowling Field Trip

Location: Meet in the classrooms to announce groups and give instructions. The main activity will take place at a bowling alley.

Leadership Team Prep Work: The leadership team must first get permission from the school administration for the field trip. The team determines the best bowling alley for their field trip based on location, cost, and accessibility. Once the field trip is approved and the location is decided, the leadership team obtains the bussing necessary to transport the students from the school to the bowling alley. The team decides how to cover the cost of the trip, is there a school budget for such events, can funding be obtained through programs like the Special Olympics, can

the team ask students' parents to fund the trip? These answers will vary greatly depending on the school where the program is taking place. Once funding is determined, the leadership team creates a school-approved permission slip, collects the slips, and records the names of students who have permission to attend the event. Place students attending in groups of four or five depending on the bowling alley and how many players each lane holds. Groups are announced on the day of the field trip before getting on the bus. The leadership team is in communication with the selected bowling alley to be sure all necessary accommodations are made.

Description of Activity: Students meet in classrooms and are assigned their bowling groups. Students proceed to the bus and are transported to the bowling alley. At the bowling alley, students get shoes if necessary and go to their assigned lanes. Students bowl together as long as time permits. Students return to the bus and head back to the school.

Leadership Skills Required for this Activity:

Working with Administration: The leadership team works with the school administration to secure the appropriate transportation for the event and goes through the proper channels to obtain permission for the club members to leave campus.

Budgeting: Students in leadership determine the overall cost for the field trip and decide how to cover the cost of the event. Options include charging each club member a small fee to attend or if club dues were collected at the beginning of the year, determine if there is enough in the budget to do the field trip without charging more?

Working with Outside Agencies: Students contact the bowling alley to reserve space and clearly communicate what the event is and how long it will last.

Planning Ahead: Students create permission slips for student attendance. All the steps mentioned above will need to be done in advance of the field trip.

Organization: Students ensure there is enough adult presence, as well as organize student members into teams, and assign them to lanes at the bowling alley.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this review with application emphasis was to examine how extracurricular activities affect students with disabilities. From the review, it is apparent that the effects of extracurricular activities on the general student population have been widely studied. However, it is also clear that there is limited research on how extracurricular activities impact students with disabilities. From the research presented one can conclude that involvement in extracurricular activities has an overall positive influence on an individual. In fact, some studies showed the positive effects of extracurriculars can carry well into a student's future resulting in an overall better quality of life. If this is true for students of typical abilities and development one can hypothesize similar outcomes for a student with disabilities.

To come to this conclusion, this review studied the development of the adolescent brain, how social and peer acceptance affects students with and without disabilities, and how extracurricular activities affect students with and without disabilities. In addition, questions were raised about the necessity of peers and peer groups to the development of students with disabilities. This report proposes a path to educators, guiding them in creating an environment where positive peer interactions lead to social and emotional growth for students with disabilities. It offers an example of how to implement a peer-focused curriculum in a high school setting, providing both typical students and those with disabilities positive peer-related experiences.

Ultimately, and one could argue most importantly, this review discussed the benefits of general education and special education students engaging together in a unified extracurricular environment. While research on student extracurriculars is ever expanding, little about high

school extracurriculars is changing. Unified clubs do benefit students with disabilities and have the ability to change negative attitudes and perceptions about individuals with disabilities in the general community or environment. There is no better time to focus on the research about extracurriculars available and begin making positive changes to special education programming.

Professional Application

In the application portion of this review, six sample activities for a unified club were presented. This application exists in hopes to inspire more unified clubs in our public and private secondary educational settings. Recognizing the importance of providing students with disabilities the opportunity to engage in extracurriculars is only the first step in making more unified clubs a reality.

Next, educators must bring it upon themselves to go to their administration with both the research and a plan to develop a unified club in their school building. Not only do unified clubs create long-term social and emotional benefits for people with disabilities, but students without disabilities have the opportunity to meaningfully interact with students from whom they are often segregated. Unified clubs can break down the barriers of stigma and preconceived notions regarding certain groups of the human population. With less division and more understanding, an overall better school community is a predictable result. The application segment of this review provides a framework in which students with disabilities have the opportunity to form and advance their leadership, planning, communication, budgeting, and organizational skills. Skills that are arguably necessary for any individual to thrive independently.

Limitations of the Research

When I first considered research to study for this literature review it was my hope to research the specific topic of the theatrical arts and the possible benefits theatre provides for

students with disabilities. However, there was limited research available on this topic. Still interested in pursuing research regarding extracurriculars and specifically integrated clubs, I chose to broaden my research to extracurricular activities in general examining the benefits of participation in extracurriculars for students of typical development and students with disabilities.

Implications for Future Research

Along with the need for additional research specific to the inclusion of all students in theatre and the arts in general, more research is needed to create integrated programs of various varieties in public or community education. Research regarding the accessibility, availability, and funding of integrated clubs could help generate more integrated clubs in schools and communities. Future research regarding specific extracurriculars and the advantages students with disabilities acquire through participation in those activities is a research topic yet to be explored.

Conclusion

At a recent school board meeting in the area in which I live students from the two district high schools were asked to present on a new club that was formed. The students enthusiastically spoke about how the club was created to listen to ideas and concerns regarding the different groups represented within their high schools, and how the club welcomed everyone. One of the board members had the wisdom to ask how many students with disabilities were represented in the membership numbers of the club. The answer was zero. One of the young women present stated there was a member of the club who “has a brother with autism.” The adult leader of the club then came up to the mic and in a somewhat defensive manner emphasized the fact that “*All*

students were invited to participate.” The board member wisely responded that sometimes to purposefully include our students with disabilities it is up to us to, “go the extra mile.”

It is time for school administration, teachers, parents, and students to go the extra mile to ensure individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to develop the skills necessary to live rich and meaningful lives. These opportunities include the chance to socialize with peers outside of their special education classrooms and work in a positive environment toward a common goal.

Eventually, we may see the day when the term “integrated” is not a necessary adjective to describe an after-school club including students with and without disabilities, but instead, it is simply called a club. As work continues to make our schools more inclusive perhaps students with disabilities will have the opportunity to participate in any school offered extracurricular of their choosing.

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