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IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN
GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
MICHELLE ZIDLICKY

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IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN
GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

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MAY 2022

APPROVED

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I would like to thank my boyfriend and daughters for allowing me to continue my education. Having my oldest daughter in special education makes me want to better education for all students. Thank you to my family and friends for always being there and rooting me on to keep accomplishing my dreams.

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Abstract

This literature review aims to inform inclusive education and why it is crucial for all students. Inclusion is based on students' academic and social-emotional success from learning with general education peers from both general education, special education teachers, and support staff. Inclusion in education helps students with disabilities be able to learn in the same classroom as general education peers. It provides opportunities for staff to collaborate as team members to best support students. Studies included looking at inclusion and how it has evolved in education. It views teachers' attitudes and supports that staff needs to help inclusive education work. Lastly, it views general education students' perspectives of working with special education peers and if inclusion lowers general education peers' academic scores. Inclusion supports students with disabilities' needs and goals by letting them be included in education. Teachers need more professional development training on how to differentiate instruction and allow time to collaborate with supporting staff. The literature completed looks at all aspects that are important to include and how to make it work successfully for all involved correctly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 is a modified version of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (“Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act,” 1975; “Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act,” 2004). A portion of IDEA highlights the importance of LRE and inclusive education is wrapped around the idea that all children should learn together, no matter the student’s differences. When inclusion is correctly implemented, students with disabilities have a more significant positive impact. Inclusion ensures that students with disabilities can have equal opportunities for learning in the general education setting using the same curriculum as other peers (Francisco et al., 2020). Students need extra support from other staff members such as paraprofessionals and general education and special education teachers. Inclusion is not only about academics. Inclusion is based on academic, physical, and emotional support too. General education teachers and special education teachers need to collaborate to decide the tools students may need to help them be successful in class. Inclusion helps students learn how to live non-discriminatory society (Sulwymanov, 2015). Non-discriminatory society is when people can be non-bias and able to support others regardless of their status. Non-discriminatory societies mean to include everyone no matter the person's identification, disability, or ethnicity. Teaching all students this would help with the more significant community they live in. Students with disabilities, families, and educators want all students to feel included in school and school activities with friends. Students benefit from having access to the general

education curriculum. When the curriculum has the correct modifications and accommodations that teachers could work on together, students can succeed and learn in a positive quality environment (Fransisco et al., 2002).

Teachers want to have more support so that students with disabilities have the proper needed support. Many teachers feel that having in-depth professional developmental training could help understand what students with disabilities need and how to appropriate support. For example, having professional development on how to differentiate, prevent behavioral problems, and be able to monitor classroom rules and routines (Ali, 2020). Teachers do not feel as individual education plans are easy to understand or do not know enough about them to help support the correct needs (De Fonte and Barton-Artwood, 2017). Supporting students' learning gap is one of the main concerns that general education teachers have. Finding time to collaborate with other teachers can be hard to do when there is not much extra time during the day. Teachers favor inclusion when support is provided to help the students with disabilities (Desombre et al., 2002). The other aspect that influences teachers' perspective of inclusion is the significance of the student's disability. When support is not given or the disability is severe, teachers' attitude towards inclusion is more pessimistic. When teachers can build relationships with students with disabilities, it can help teachers learn to be more versatile in differentiating material and behavioral plans. Also, working one-on-one with students will help teachers understand where students are at (Anaby et al., 2020). Teachers who have professional training on inclusion have more of a positive attitude toward inclusive

education (Vaz et al., 2015). Having as many hands on deck to support students' education is best for students and teachers (Sliva & Morgado, 2004). Students with Individual Education Programs (IEP) have many vital accommodations and modifications.

Being able to support students with disabilities' social-emotional needs, education, and academic needs is crucial for students. Not all students have the same social-emotional needs. Each student must be getting the appropriate interventions based on their individual needs. Teachers and support staff can use various intervention strategies such as concrete classroom skills and school-based strategies. Concrete classroom interventions target the social or behavioral skills right in the classroom, such as modeling or structural play (Vlachou et al., 2016). Students need to be provided with opportunities to help their personal development. Students with disabilities must be included even if they need the modifications or accommodations to work as a group member. This sometimes correlates to the individual education plan and can help students learn lifelong skills (Holt et al., 2017). This literature review will focus on the importance of inclusive classrooms and how it benefits teachers and students with disabilities.

Rationale

Having support from both teachers ensures shared responsibility for the student's learning and allows students with social-emotional awareness. "The acquisition of appropriate social skills is considered crucial for a person's development and personal-well being" (Vlachou et al., 2016, p. 79).

Prime learning time for these skills is when students have time with peers the same age as them. One way teachers share the responsibility is through social-emotional awareness. Students with disabilities often need to learn self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, and how to view their future selves. Self-awareness pertains to recognizing one's own emotions. Self-awareness includes understanding the emotions and skills on how to regulate them. Self-management includes managing emotions and behaviors to help achieve goals. Social awareness is when students can understand others' emotions and how to show empathy to others. Relationship skills are learning to build relationships with friends, appropriate ways to work in groups or teams, and how to handle conflicts. Responsible decision making would be how to make good choices about ones-self and in social situations. Future self is the skills students need to learn to be successful in the future. It is also important to view their strengths and challenges so they can work through them and have the support of their teachers. When teachers understand students' strengths and deficits, they can better help them in the classroom. Students with disabilities need to have time with same-aged peers in inclusive classrooms to build these skills.

Definitions of Terms

The important definitions of this paper are as follows:

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Board of education must provide free and appropriate education to all children with disabilities and the right to a due process of law (Francisco et al., 2020).

Inclusive Education: providing to all students, including those with severe disabilities, equal opportunities to receive effective educational services, with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighborhood schools, towards preparing all students for productive lives as full members of the society (National Center in Educational Restructuring and Inclusion 1995 p. 21).

Individual Education Program (IEP): to provide FAPE for individuals with disabilities, schools and the team must develop and implement an IEP for each individual with disabilities, including goals, accommodations, modifications, individualized and appropriate for each individual student (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 7).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Educating children with disabilities with regular children in a general education classroom is as appropriate. Children with disabilities can be removed from that environment if students' learning needs and accommodations cannot be met in the general education classroom. (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 8)

Collaboration: Collaboration has been defined as “a professional relationship between two or more coequal educators, who share the responsibility, accountability, and resources” (Friend & Cook, 1990, p. 24).

Special Education: Special education is a distinct place where students with disabilities or diverse learners can learn regardless of the setting designed individually for each student. Special education teachers implement individualized learning needs for each student that is not done in the general education classroom (Francisco et al., 2020)

Social and Emotional Needs (SEN): social and emotional skills are appropriate social skills that are crucial for a person's social development and well-being. These skills are essential for academic development, social inclusion, participation, and successful transition to adulthood (Valchou et al., 2016).

Propinquity: an interpersonal attraction between two people or a kinship two people have with each other.

Statement of the Topic

The statement of the question is to define inclusion and how it is incorporated in mainstream schools, teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, and the benefits of inclusion for academics and social/emotional well-being.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

When locating literature for this thesis, searches of the ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and EBSCO MegaFile were conducted for publication from 2010 to 2022—then narrowed by reviewing published studies from peer-reviewed journals focusing on the inclusion of special education students. The peer-reviewed journals address the guiding question: What are the importance and critical points of inclusion for students with disabilities? Keywords used in searches were “inclusion,” “benefits for including special education students,” “how to support teachers with students with disabilities,” and “social-emotional support for students in the general education classroom.” The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on inclusion for special education students in three sections: defining inclusion and how it is incorporated in mainstream schools, teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, and the benefits of inclusion for academics and social/emotional well-being.

History of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The education of students with disabilities has evolved. The Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act in 1975 required students with disabilities to be educated inclusively with general education peers (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required schools to provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and justify any special education services outside the general education classroom (Magiera &

Zigmond, 2005). Many co-teaching models have been developed. General and special education teachers work together in general education classrooms to support at-risk students and students with disabilities, although challenges in meeting their needs still exist (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Walther-Thomas, 1997). In 2004, the law was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, highlighting Response to Intervention (RTI) as a solid approach for identifying students for special education services (Zirkel & Krohn, 2008). However, Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2012) cautioned that RTI should not be used solely for special education placement considerations. Instead, it should become a system where all students are supported with instruction that matches their needs.

The Importance of Inclusion

What is inclusion? Who is responsible for ensuring all students have inclusion in public education? According to the National Center in Education Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) (1995), inclusive education is:

providing to all students, including those with severe disabilities, equal opportunities to receive effective educational services, with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighborhood schools, towards preparing all students for productive lives as full members of the society (p. 21).

Students with disabilities benefit from having access to the general education curriculum and classroom (Fansicso et al., 2020, p. 238). In addition, many court cases have helped

shape special education laws and inclusion in classrooms in the United States. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has ensured the following: all students are equal and are eligible for Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), the right to due processing, the rights of parents to be involved with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and the use of least restrictive environments (LRE) (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 238). Without these laws, special education students would not be allowed to be in general education classrooms like they are today (Fansicso et al., 2020, p. 238).

Many teachers feel they are not fully educated to have special education students in the classroom. “Most general education teachers are not fully aware of special education or provisions for inclusion” (Fansicso et al., 2020, p. 238). Suppose the curriculum is being modified from a collaborative standpoint of the general education teacher and the special education teachers. In that case, students should be able to complete the curriculum that is being asked of them. When the curriculum and standards are modified and adapted to students with disabilities, students can have positive academic performance. However, for inclusion to be successful, teachers need to collaborate on the best practices for each student. If inclusion is not working, it can be due to the lack of resources and the quality of the current educational program. For inclusion to work, students' individualized goals on the student's IEP need to be clearly stated, meaningful, and realistic. Students also need physical and emotional inclusion (Fansicso et al., 2020).

Inclusion is a term that was first used in the early 1900s and is still used today (Odom et al., 2011). Inclusion does not only refer to the physical placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, but it includes the idea that students with disabilities can be a part of the larger society and community (Odom et al., 2011). Odom et al.'s (2011) study viewed how inclusion has worked for young children in preschool classrooms. The study included 142 children with mild to severe disabilities from the age of 48 months to 54 months old. These children were in inclusive preschool classrooms in North Carolina and Indiana. The results showed that individualization is a part of having quality inclusion and positively affects children's developmental cognition, communication, and motor skills. In addition, as of 1986, children with disabilities from age three and older were able to be in the least restrictive environment in the general education setting.

The National Education for Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) explains that high-quality inclusion includes students having a sense of belonging, positive relationships with friendships, and development and learning opportunities. To have successful inclusion, collaboration with teachers is vital. Odom was a part of the research done by Lieber et al. (1997). The research outlined seven critical components for collaboration. They include joint participation in planning, shared philosophies, shared ownership of responsibility for all children's communication, professional roles, stability of relationships, and administrative support. Another critical component includes working with other resources such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical

therapists, and special education teachers. Teachers should have resources for professional development on inclusion strategies, time to collaborate, and time to communicate with colleagues. Collaboration would help teachers and staff correctly meet the individual learning needs of their students. The first step in ensuring quality education is prioritized early care and educational practices that must be customized so that every child with learning or behavioral disabilities can reach their full potential. Collaboration would help with the quality of making a program that would work. Schools should also look at the ratio of children to caregivers, the caregivers' qualifications, compensation, the institution, the curriculum, and the physical environment (Odem et al., 2011).

Stiefel et al. (2018) studied whether students with disabilities felt included in the general education classroom. This study composed a survey asking five questions to general education students and students with disabilities on their feelings of inclusion. The questions focused on if students felt welcome, bullied, harassed, known by staff, or if they felt included in school activities. Researchers picked these questions because they wanted to make sure students with disabilities felt included in all aspects of schooling. "To be sure, 'feeling included' is a multidimensional aspect of the learning environment, reflecting engagement, safety and respect, and communication" (Stiefel et al., 2018, p. 108). The first part of the study took the survey and gave it to general education students and students with disabilities. Both groups reported low percentages of feeling included and some harassment and bullying. However, the students with disabilities were less

likely to feel welcome and more likely to report bullying and harassment than their general education peers.

The second part of the research took the survey results and narrowed them down by only using the data from students with disabilities. First, students were categorized as an emotional disturbance (ED), other health impairment (OHI), and Learning Disabilities (LD) and then into groups according to the following characteristics: gender, race/ethnicity, home language, English Learner Language (ELL), free and reduced lunch eligibility, age and disability classification, or service setting. Scores were much lower in all categories based on whether students with disabilities felt welcome, bullied, harassed, known by staff, or if they were included in school activities for students.

The third part of the researchers divided the students by their disability label. Results showed that low-incidence disability students felt more included in the general education classroom. The last part divided students by their academic achievement. Based on that information, there were no differences in proficiency based on test scores. Researchers examined how feelings of inclusion are different between students with and without disabilities. The results of the Stiefel study (2018) showed that students with disabilities felt slightly less included with their classmates but felt more included by their teachers and in-school activities. Students with disabilities frequently reported feeling excluded because they are often pulled out for services, have a different teacher than the general education students, or have observable differences such as physical impairments. Also, students with disabilities have poorer relationships with peers than general

education students. Students with emotional disturbance felt the least likely to be included out of all students with disabilities. Having additional support, such as seeing a school counselor, could help with the development of appropriate school behaviors so that students with emotional disturbance could feel more included (Stiefel et al., 2018).

Serving students with disabilities in the mainstream setting is also a goal for other countries around the world along with different special education program requirements. Inclusion in the study of Whitburn (2017) showed how students with disabilities in Australia and Spain personally felt about the type of education and social skills students were receiving from their school. The participants in Australia were between the ages of 13 and 17 and had impaired vision of different severity. Students in Australia wanted to feel “normalcy.” Academically bright students wanted to be able to take the standardized tests but were told no because they were in special education. Many students felt like they were pretending to be normal so that, on the surface, peers acknowledged them as so. Having normalcy for students with disabilities helps schools with the inclusion of all. Unfortunately, the school avoided special education programming, making it harder for students to develop friendships with general education peers.

When students have a personal support paraeducator, it can interfere with students having a connection or isolation from peers. “Policy categorization through their enrollment in the program bestowed upon them special education traditions that kept a tight leash on their level of inclusion in a couple of interconnected ways” (Whitburn, 2017, p. 490). This school made students with disabilities feel that inclusion was not

crucial to the school district. Students were faced with their disability label over being able to be included.

The 23 students in Spain who participated were between 12 to 19 years old. Students in the schools were divided into two groups. In one group, teachers would include them in the whole group instruction. In the other group, students were forced to work on different materials. Students who were given different levels of instruction felt ignored during lessons. Some disabled students felt this was a concern; others shrugged it off. One student with mild intellectual impairments said she was unhappy about working on different resources than her peers. She wanted her teachers to give her the standard resources, even if she failed. "Social inclusion was unequivocally the main indicator of inclusion to all participants, and many reported being supportive- sometimes challenging- friendships" (Whitburn, 2017, p. 491). The students with disabilities in the study used the term "normal" to describe inclusion. Students want to be able to be equal to peers of the same age. Students with disabilities do not want to be seen as different; they want sameness and "normalcy."

Goodfellow's study (2012) is based on inclusion in the school environment. He looked at the students' views of self-portrait, social space, and learning space. Students in this study felt excluded or "dumb" because of their learning disabilities. The students in the study reported that teachers/staff did not pick students with disabilities for the student of the month because they did not achieve academic excellence like their general education peers. These students felt bullied because of their disability label. When

students viewed the word imagine in the school hallway, one male student felt like it was a more negative space. “For him, this photograph symbolized escaping a negative social space, bullying, through creating an imaginary world” (Goodfellow, 2012, p. 71).

Another way students with disabilities felt excluded was because they had a green locker in the mix between yellow lockers. It made the student feel that she was standing out because of her disability. She said it made her feel lonely, just like how the locker was the only green one in lockers full of orange. Another student described himself as a blowfish that is made of paper mache. He felt “different,” just like the blowfish in the hallway.

Goodfellow’s study (2012) mentions concepts of “space” and “place;” space is one’s own space, and the place is somewhere to belong and become attached to it. The school offered a place of experience. “Exclusion is not inherent to the special education classroom or curriculum; it takes root in material and social geographies that undermine the participants’ intellectual capacity or social status within the school” (Goodfellow, 2012, p. 74). Students also referenced the learning materials they received that their peers unmatched. The different materials made learners feel weak or had a deficit. Students can feel excluded or different when given different materials to work on, leading to behavioral issues. Students can be excluded by peers or by themselves.

Inclusion can be fostered in the social and educational climate that is created by the educator, which allows students - with and without disabilities - to seek out accommodations that are most suitable for their

learning style and also demonstrate an empathic awareness to the student's needs. (Goodfellow, 2012, p. 77)

Idol (2006) focused her study on inclusion in eight schools, four elementary schools (A, B, C, D), two middle schools, and two high schools in Austin, TX. The study focused on how inclusion was implemented in schools and how each school provided for students with disabilities. They gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. Idol stated,

“Inclusion is when students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program. This is different from mainstreaming when students with disabilities spend a portion of their school day in the general education program and a portion of their day in a separate special education program.” (Idol, 2006, p. 78)

Out of the four elementary schools, two did not have inclusion, but one of them began planning how to implement it in the next year. Another one of the schools was revisiting their school inclusion to improve on a plan. The last school had all students with disabilities in the general education classrooms 100% of the time with supportive services and a consulting teacher to help out. The administration for the schools wanted students with disabilities in the general education classroom with grade-level classes.

General Education teachers surveyed in the Idol (2016) study felt as though special educators or paraprofessionals would be in the classrooms to help. Teachers could rate how they did with instruction adaptation, curriculum modification, and student

discipline with classroom management. Teachers felt like they were able to make curricular adaptations for students with disabilities. When teachers were asked to report their attitude about teaching students with disabilities, some teachers were willing to try to accept inclusion, and others were very much in favor of inclusion. “Attitudes towards inclusion tended to range from staff being willing to accept and try inclusion to being very much in favor of inclusion” (Idol, 2006, p.83). Most educators across the schools indicated this. Teachers felt like they did a good job collaborating with colleagues. Only two teachers out of the four schools thought that students with disabilities should be in self-contained special education classrooms. Overall, the impact of including students with disabilities in the classroom was not thought to be harmful to other students. The schools in this study saw that general education students had improved behaviors towards students with disabilities because of inclusion. Teachers felt that schools should have more professional development opportunities for inclusion and more support in the classrooms to use this method and training for instructional assistance. Teachers also wanted to have more mainstreaming instead of inclusion for students with more serious emotional problems.

In taking steps to make inclusion happen, some fundamental decisions of whether the students will succeed in the classroom and what supports, accommodations, or modifications must be made based on the student with disabilities' individualized plan. In the research done by Wolfe and Hall (2003), they primarily looked at the Cascade of Integration option. The Cascade of Integration method helps with the inclusion of

students with disabilities by making accommodations to the general education curriculum to help students succeed in learning in the general education classrooms. General education teachers and special education teachers collaborate and pre-plan how to teach individual students. General education teachers should focus on the unit plan and what they want the students to learn. The special education teacher takes that plan and adapts it to the student with disabilities IEP. Can the lesson expectations help with cognitive skills, motor skills, communication skills, or social skills? What material do the students need, are there time requirements, or is there any pre-teaching that needs to occur? Together the teachers look at what adaptive equipment a student might need if there needs to be a teaching assistant present, material adaptations, or co-teaching that will occur. Teachers will often collaborate to ensure that the student is successful. The special education teacher would determine whether the unit plan aligns with the student's IEP goals.

In the case study that looks at the Cascade Integration, teachers took the student's IEP and the learning plans to align them for the student. Each day was mapped out on a spreadsheet to the activity and how it can align with the IEP goal. For example, students will work in groups on a map activity. Group activities support the student's IEP goal as they need to work on initiating conversations with peers. The spreadsheet then breaks it down to who teaches and supports the student and how adaptations are made. In addition, it could help with progress monitoring for the special education teacher. "The social integration focus of inclusion negates the opportunity for the student with disabilities to receive instruction in content areas" (Wolfe & Hall, 2003, p. 56).

Suleymanov (2015) research looks at the essential aspects that should be considered when using inclusion education in schools. The integration process is to have students with disabilities fit into the general education classrooms and school environments. Inclusion means making provisions and adaptations to the curriculum, adapting teaching methods, modifying assessment techniques, and accessibility arrangements. “Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve education for all” (Suleymanov, 2015, p. 4). Inclusive education requires teaching to respond to different student needs and weaknesses. This way, all students can be in all aspects of the classroom process. Suleymanov (2015) broke down his research into three crucial reasons to have inclusive education. First, educational justification makes teachers tailor lessons and learning to students with different needs. Not all students are the same, and some have different weaknesses and strengths than others. The second justification is social. Inclusive education supports diversity and how to have a non-discriminatory society. Diversity helps students and staff change attitudes toward diversity and help be accepting of others. Lastly, economic justification; it is cost-effective to have students in the same place instead of different schools needing different things. Having general education teachers and special education teachers collaborating in one school is best to make inclusion work. The school framework should accommodate all students no matter their disability, physical, intellectual, social,

emotional, linguistic, or any other conditions. All students can benefit from the general education pedagogy.

IDEA has pushed for students with disabilities to be educated appropriately and placed with children who are not disabled. Also, it requires that students only be removed from the general education environment when they cannot learn the material being taught after there have been services and aids given to help accommodate the student. If it is not appropriate for students with disabilities to learn in their general education classroom, they can meet those needs in a special education classroom. The student with disabilities' parents and educators work together to deem what is appropriate for each student.

School districts are often trying to balance the act of what the student should be getting along with what the parents feel that their student should be getting. Parents have had court cases where they feel as if their child should be in the general education classroom even though the student is not appropriately able to learn there. Also, the opposite, parents feel that students cannot learn in the general education classroom and want them to have their classes in the special education classroom. Sometimes the social benefits of inclusion outweigh the help of the student having academics. Schools need to ensure that students with disabilities get all the accommodations, supports, supplementary aids, and services they should get in the general education classroom. There has been a drive for inclusion for students with disabilities since the start of special education in 1975. The traditional schooling that consists of rules, subjects, classes, single teachers, lessons, and testing might not be what is best for all students. Inclusion in some countries

has policies in place that say that the general education teachers have responsibility for all students in their classroom and are also responsible for the lessons, educational skills, standards, and qualifications as teachers. “For instance, there is a common call for collaboration even though there is confusion about what is meant by the term and little robust research into its effective delivery and impact” (Rix, 2020, p. 284). School districts, administrators, and teachers all need to be on the same page regarding the implementation. Collaboration could help with the unknowns of inclusion and could best help make sure that all are on the same page.

To strengthen inclusion in education it needs to start with the lawmakers and the language used when writing laws. Another thing that would help inclusion is how it is used in policies, lawmakers, and the language researchers use within education (Rix, 2020). The different interpretations are often confused and put colleagues at odds with each other. Depending on administration, inclusion will look different in each school as all administration has different views on how inclusion works. There is not one single way that works for all students regarding inclusion. The educational system is based on standards, and off of them, they build curriculum, tests, and boundaries consistency and certainty. If we want to change what inclusion looks like, we need to work together to make a system that will work for all.

Teacher’s Attitude Towards Inclusive Classrooms

Collaboration has been defined as “a professional relationship between two or more coequal educators, who share the responsibility, accountability, and resources”

(Friend & Cook, 1990, p. 24). De Fonte and Barton-Arwood's study in 2017 looked at the importance of teacher collaborations and how it helps with teacher accountability. They met with 26 teacher candidates and looked at their perceived collaboration and any worries about collaboration. Working with students with disabilities in the special education and general education class takes more work and effort to ensure students get what they need. When teachers shared their ideas about inclusion, there were three primary reasons they feared teaching special education students. They are time management, content knowledge, and communication about special education students and how they can best serve them. When it comes to collaboration to help inclusion, teachers feel it is hard to find time to have productive conversations about special education students. Most of the limited time comes down to the amount of paperwork, grading, and activities the teachers engage in. Another main concern is the learning gap of the students in the general education curriculum. Teachers also feel that they do not understand or know enough about IEPs.

The methods used in Desombre et al.'s study in 2002 done in France showed how to support social and emotional needs (SEN) of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. "Specifically, we showed that the more social support they received regarding their attempts to include students with SEN, the more positive the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education" (Desombre et al., 2002, p. 17). This team conducted two studies, one study had 262 participants, and the other had 314 participants. The study had 262 participants and was conducted in the spring of the 2018-2019 school

year. The participants were sent an email with a 10-minute survey on the topic of inclusive education. The survey results showed that teachers were more favorable to inclusive education if there was social support for the teachers. The second study, with 314 teachers, was conducted during the fall of the 2019-2020 school year. The survey explored the link between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and the teachers' attitudes towards including students with disabilities. The most significant influence on teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities is the severity of disability. Teachers would have positive attitudes about inclusion and supporting students with disabilities if they had better support, could meet students' social/emotional needs and were able to alleviate some stress. Teachers want to be supported and guided in professional developments about inclusion. "Well-designed professional development programs are critical for teachers to successfully cope with the requirements of educational growth and improve their instructional practices" (Ali, 2020, p. 1).

Ali's study looked at how schools can do professional development (PD) for teachers to help support inclusive education. Teachers feel that it is essential to look at class size, the learning environment, and the resources and additional support they need to support inclusion for students with disabilities. Two hundred and eighteen teachers from Egypt were sent a 35-item questionnaire to help understand their training needs for inclusion. The results showed that teachers felt they needed more PD to prevent behavioral problems for special needs students and monitor classroom rules and routines. Teachers also wanted more training on differentiating learning disabilities from language

and communication disorders. Ali's study also investigated how teachers wanted the delivery of the PD, which was face-to-face seminars or morning workshops. Ali provides an in-depth framework for PD on inclusive education based on the top five topics educators specified they needed the most. He gives a five-day training for three hours a day, divided into two segments. The first segment is focused on understanding effective strategies to meet student educational needs and how to manage inclusive education. The second segment focuses on developing professional and practical skills to meet the needs and work inclusive education. Teachers should be able to use the framework to have adequate knowledge in teaching methods, scaffolding instruction and creating IEPs, classroom management, and identifying and meeting the needs of students with disabilities and any general knowledge teachers may need (Ali, 2020).

The Group for Optimizing Leadership in Delivering Services created a study that Anaby (2020) helped with that looked at the fundamental roles of all school staff in schools in Canada. Anaby et al. (2020) looked at three schools, two in the metropolitan area of Quebec and one in a rural area just outside of Quebec. School staff completed a fourteen-question survey to see their current roles in school and the ideal roles they should play. Teachers also looked at several positive aspects of their current positions. The questions had open-ended responses that were coded and analyzed. The first phase of this study was completed in an elementary school. It inspected the actual and ideal roles of the staff and where skills they needed to improve on for working with special needs

students who are integrated into the mainstream classrooms. Staff also viewed the positions that needed to improve.

The survey discovered the school staff's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Common themes identified were: task adaptation, offering individualized support, being available to students, and providing students with direct backing (Anaby et al., 2020, p. 333). Teachers felt they could be task adaptable, be available for students, and provide direct support. Building relations helped staff connect with students academically and personally and be versatile in different behavioral strategies. Staff also felt it was most beneficial to work with students individually to help with academic needs. Teamwork was identified as a strength in communicating about students as a school team and collaborating with parents about students. School staff felt that they did a good job creating a safe and welcoming environment for students, including implementing behavior charts or a place where students could go and have a quiet space. Employees felt that improvement would consist of having an additional team to help create a higher staff-to-student ratio and more time to collaborate on lessons. Also, staff wanted more professional development opportunities in working with students with disabilities and the opportunity to have better communication with additional support staff such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, special education staff, and speech therapists. Co-teaching was another possible method that could help address the needs of students with disabilities (Anaby et al., 2020).

Werner et al. (2021) conducted a study in Israel to find the correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. This research also viewed teachers' knowledge of the policies and the level of support they received from the school. The teachers' self-efficacy primarily detected their ability to provide scaffolded academic instruction and a positive learning environment and how they help their students learn. Three hundred fifty-two participants worked as general education teachers or special education teachers. Teachers can pick between public education or special education in Israel, regardless of their training. Teachers were given a questionnaire to gauge their attitudes towards inclusion, sense of self-efficacy, knowledge of the inclusion policy, the amount of school support they receive about inclusion, and the teachers' demographics. The study showed that teachers had positive attitudes concerning their functional and professional roles. However, they did not have positive attitudes about inclusion and the efficiency of this model. Teachers also had below-average attitudes towards students with disabilities in an inclusive setting, although they had high levels of self-efficacy when teaching students with disabilities.

Teachers who worked in special education had lower views of inclusion than teachers in the general education classrooms. However, 21% of teachers attended training on inclusion. Reviewed was the teachers' knowledge of inclusion policies and perceptions of the school support. Teachers also rated their attitudes towards inclusion and common beliefs about its efficacy (Werner et al., 2020). Overall, teachers felt that knowledge of inclusion policies for students with disabilities is inadequate.

Another study conducted by Vaz et al. (2015) reviewed teachers' attitudes towards including students with disabilities. This study was conducted in Western Australia with 74 primary school teachers. The researchers looked at the teacher's age, gender, teaching, self-efficacy, and training. Vaz et al. (2015) then extended it to 250 participants who taught at the primary school level. The results showed that less than half of the teachers had attended professional development training that year. Most of the participants had been teaching for between 11 and 30 years. The study also showed that male teachers and teachers who were 55 years or older had more of a negative attitude towards inclusion. It also showed that teachers who had low levels of self-efficacy in their teaching skills also had negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. However, teachers who did have professional development training had a positive attitude towards including students with disabilities. "There appears to be a broad consensus that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are critical in implementing the ambitious goal of inclusive school and for these strategies to be successful" (Vaz et al., 2015, p. 7). The study also shows that the severity of the disability can play a role in the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Teachers need to have more professional development on pedagogical content knowledge and the specific disabilities and conditions of students with disabilities.

Van Steen and Wilson (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 50 different studies examining the variation in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and teaching students with disabilities. Their review showed that teachers mostly have a positive attitude towards inclusion in mainstream classrooms. "These attitudes are likely the result of the complex

interplay of various demographic and cultural factors” (van Steen & Wilson, 2020, p. 9). Studies have been inconsistent and show that teachers have a neutral or negative attitude towards inclusion. Ultimately, it depends on the participants' demographics on how they feel about inclusion. Also, when they can incorporate culture, it is the most beneficial for interventions that are used for inclusion. Cultural factors are a product of societal or historical factors that shape the attitudes toward the inclusion of some teachers. For example, some countries see that the individualization of students is essential and has a positive aspect of inclusion. Therefore, teachers should have more preparation classes and opportunities for working with students with disabilities.

What factors help with academic achievement for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Silva and Morgado (2004) conducted a study with the following two questions: what factors impact the academic achievement for students with disabilities and what contributes to the academic failure of students with disabilities. Seventy-six completed surveys came back, and teachers highlighted aspects under the teaching approach, school climate, curriculum design, student characteristics, and out-of-school variables. The teaching approach looked at expectations, techniques, feedback, teaching strategies, and skill development. Having teacher-student interactions and building relationships is an important focus that helps all students have a positive learning environment. Classroom context is also essential. For example, ensuring differentiation in instruction, slowing down, wait time, and using individualized teaching for students with disabilities and learning students' learning styles.

School climate is the second critical approach. School climate includes teacher collaboration, resources teachers use, the training teachers receive, and students' school attendance. "Co-operation between all of the education support services and families is seen as a factor that is crucial to students' academic achievement." (Silva & Morgado, 2004, p. 210). The third important factor is the number of support teachers receive and the program's design. Schedules need to be adaptable for students' educational needs. The fourth factor is any academic support that students need, such as intervention strategies, prior knowledge, support, and the student's involvement in education. Lastly, it is essential to look at students' out-of-school environment, parents' involvement, family climate, and students' attitudes. The teachers also mentioned the importance of leadership in the school and professional development to help the inclusion of students with disabilities.

In Canada, inclusion has been incorporated in schools since the 1970s (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994). Brackenreed sent 269 teachers a questionnaire. It looked at the stressors of teachers, which included the administration, support, student behavior, classroom, parents, and professional and personal competency. The top five factors related to the professional competency and lack of training, student behaviors, access to support, parent expectations, and the level of understanding of the student's disability teachers received. In addition, teachers were concerned about not appropriately addressing the needs of the students, for example, not

adjusting unit plans and having them aligned with the IEP and finding resources or additional materials to help with modifications and accommodations of lessons.

Teachers also felt that they lacked professional development training on inclusion to meet students' needs. Also, they were not well prepared before the student joined their classroom. “Additionally, 80% of teachers reported that managing the child’s interpersonal relationships was a source of concern” (Brackenreed, 2008, p. 140). On the other hand, teachers felt that building good relationships with students and their families was easy. Overall, the teachers liked inclusion, and it seemed that it benefitted students with disabilities.

Weiss et al. (2018) conducted a study to view teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills for teaching inclusive classrooms. The study took place in Germany, where students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities are allowed to be in inclusive educational rooms or attend special schools for their needs. The study focused on conversations with 20 teachers and 20 principals who work closely with special education or inclusive classrooms. The 40 staff members were then split into smaller groups to have discussions based on the research question, what skills, knowledge, and attitudes are necessary to teach students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities (Weiss et al., 2018). The discussion groups were guided by a moderator who helped guide the questions that were structured around the research question. The participants were then able to discuss the topic, share ideas, and contribute to others' answers.

Weiss et al. (2018) study showed that teachers' skills, knowledge, and attitudes to teaching students with moderate to severe disabilities are broken into four categories (Weiss et al. 2018). The first category is teaching and school life; this creates learning opportunities by differentiating materials, lessons, and assignments, giving structure in the classroom such as routines, having knowledge about intellectual disabilities, managing time, and developing quick ideas. "Successful differentiation was seen to be based on multiple sets of materials that students could use at any time, again preventing idling" (Weiss et al., 2018, p. 844). The second category is cooperation with different actors; this would include other professionals that would see the students. Cooperation includes collaborations with various professionals (special education teachers, psychologists, school counselors, physical therapists, occupational therapists) and negotiating roles and responsibilities. "Here again, cooperation ability means negotiating a common core of agreements, strategies, and goals and balancing tensions between the partners" (Weiss et al., 2018, p. 845). The partnership also shows leadership, compromises to help involve support systems with the different professionals, cooperation with parents, and counseling abilities. The third category is the professional ethos and dealing with students. Examples include setting boundaries, focusing on the positives, being open-minded and accepting, and using humor and situations comedy. Lastly, the fourth category is strain, coping, and reflection, which is taking care of a teacher's health, keeping calm, reacting flexibly and spontaneously, making decisions, and reflecting on one's work.

Weiss et al. (2018) considered all that information and made four strategies teachers need to teach students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. The first strategy is differentiation, and individualizing requires further training to help adopt different learning approaches and learn how to create diverse learning materials. The second strategy is strengthening leadership and counseling skills for teachers to help with collaboration with professional staff and parents. The third strategy supports teachers' balance between closeness and distance to the students and focuses on the positives. Lastly, the fourth strategy is that teachers need support to take care of their own mental and physical health.

Supporting Students in Academics, Peer Relationships, and Social/Emotional Needs

Social skill needs that arise in students with disabilities can be very different. Many of the students' social-emotional needs (SEN) are pretty diverse. For example, some students have problems following directions, staying attentive, being aggressive, and withdrawing from peers. Valchou et al. (2016) conducted interviews to view the types of social skills that special education teachers taught, the approaches and strategies implemented, and any effective strategies when implemented. The study took place in central Greece, and researchers interviewed forty special education teachers. Each special education teacher had seven to 16 students with SEN needs between seven to 13. The majority of the students spent time in the mainstream classroom and the resource room two to six hours a week. Others spend more than six hours in the resource room a week.

Overall, the study showed that students' SEN were in peer relations, assertion, self-management, compliance, and academics (Vlachou et al., 2016). There were many different strategies special education teachers could use to help teach the needed social skills. Naturalistic strategies (on the spot) were a way to teach the skill in the classroom during playtime, learning activities, and group discussions. For example, if the student were to get into an argument or fight at playtime, teachers would be able to jump in and appropriately teach that skill to the student. The environmental arrangement was another strategy. Examples of this would again be in the classroom but would be from the classroom's social environment, routines, and provided materials. Discussion is another strategy that targets social skill teaching. Teachers use a variety of intervention strategies, including concrete classroom and school-based strategies. Concrete classroom and school-based strategies such as in-class behavioral skills, structured play, modeling wanted behaviors, playgroups on the playground, empowerment strategies, classroom support, and school approaches such as community-based and family responsibility (Vlachou et al., 2016). Unfortunately, many teachers in this study could not provide the social skills students needed because of time constraints, lack of knowledge, and interventions. Students need to be provided with social skills to help their personal development. "The acquisition of appropriate social skills is considered crucial for a person's development and personal-well being" (Vlachou et al., 2016, p. 79).

Brown et al. (2011) conducted a study that looked at students in the 9th-12th grades and how they portray working with and having a friendship with students who

have physical or intellectual disabilities. There were a total of 347 questionnaires that were returned for processing. The results showed that most students would prefer working with students who have an intellectual or physical disability from a distance, such as giving them a pencil to borrow or assisting them, instead of having a social role with them, such as a friendship with the student. Students were less than likely to pick a student with a physical disability for activity in physical education class. Students were asked to describe personal feelings about working with peers who have disabilities in the questionnaire. Students were more open to working with a classmate with a physical disability than a student with an intellectual disability. Typically developing peers want to have a peer who can help with the project over one who will need help.

The study showed that students were worried about their grades and did not want it to affect their grades if the student with intellectual student disabilities did poorly. They felt that a student with a physical disability was still intellectually able to help out and do their part of the assignment. When students were asked if they would have a friendship with students with intellectual or physical disabilities, most of the students did not want to have a friendship. Students felt like they would have to be more of a babysitter than a friend. Students worried that students would not be able to do things they were interested in due to limitations on the disabled child. Inclusion could be successful as long as there are efforts and opportunities for students to work with students with disabilities. "If inclusion efforts focus instead on achieving respect, tolerance, and fairness, interventions

might be directed toward enhancing understanding of disability accommodations, human rights, and good citizenship” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 330).

It is common for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to isolate or not be able to recognize social situations socially. A study conducted by Bossaert et al. (2015) researched the companionship, intimacy (affection such as support and love), and reciprocal friendships of middle school students who are typically developing and their peers who have ASD motor-sensory disabilities. Researchers found that students with ASD or motor-sensory disabilities have a more challenging time with friendships, intimacy, and reciprocal friendships. Participants were between the ages of 12 and 13 years old. One thousand four hundred ninety-four students in seventh grade participated in this study. The participants were typically developing students, students with ASD, and motor-sensory disability students. All of the participants are in inclusive/mainstream classrooms. This study showed that students with ASD and motor-sensory disabilities had no significant differences from typically developing students. However, female students reported higher companionship, intimacy, and support in their friendships than boys.

Results also indicated that students with ASD or motor-sensory disabilities had reciprocal relationships with peers who are of typical development. ASD students did have a lower report of intimacy in their friendships. A quarter of students with ASD and one-fifth of students with a motor-sensory disability did not have one reciprocated friendship (Bossaert et al., 2015). This study is essential to research as it showed that

students with ASD can have friendships and understand others' emotions, thoughts, and feelings.

Participation can be more difficult for students with complex communication needs and physical disabilities than typically developing students. Raghavendra et al. (2012) created a study based on the participation and social networks of students with complex communication needs (CCN), physical disabilities (PD), and typically developing peers (TD). There were three main research questions researchers wanted to be answered. Are there patterns for students with physical disabilities and without complex communication needs, the social networks of children with PD with and without complex communication needs, and the relationship between school participation and social networks? Participants included 39 students between the ages of 10 and 15 who were observed for four hours at school and interviewed once school was over to share their views of a social support network.

School participation was measured by the inclusion and engagement of activities, types of support in academic settings, and communication support. Social networking is the group of peers students communicate with or any person they need or may want to include daily interaction with. Raghavendra et al. (2012) broke the results of the study into three groups. First, the classroom included inclusion in activities for students with CCN 74% of the time, students with PD 86% of the time, and TD 97% of the time. Of the time doing the same activities as peers. The second was the inclusion of students in the same classrooms; students were included CCN 83% of the time, PD students 89% of the

time, and TD 94% of the time. Lastly, the level of engagement for the group was CCN at 69%, TD at 83%, and TF at 88%. The CCN group provided the most support in the classroom. The outcome of the number of support students received was split into three categories—first emotional support. Second, instrumental support (whom students would ask to help find something if lost). Third informational support (whom students would go to if they did not understand something) showed that all students receive emotional support more from peers and friends than from school staff. Mixed results for instrumental support with CCN having 43% from peers and friends and 49% from school staff. PD students had 54 % from peers and friends, and 45% from school staff, and TD students had 51% from peers and friends and 48% from school staff. Lastly, all student groups would go to peers and friends first for informational support.

Students with disabilities need to have time to build friendships with peers in the general education setting. The main question Holt et al. (2017) wanted to understand is the friendship in students with disabilities across different school settings. The study took place in four different school settings, two mainstream schools and two special schools in southeast England. Students in this study were students between 11 to 17 years old and had one or more disabilities. Schools had split the special units into two sections, one for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum (AS) and one for students with social-emotional or mental health diagnoses. In the first part of the study, students were shown how to use a camera and then were given one, so they could take pictures of what their friendships and leisure activities looked like. Many students took photos of their

friends and identified the individuals in the photos as friends from school. Some students in the AS unit did not take many photos of their friends. Instead, they took pictures of family, pets, and other things. “Friendships at school did not seem to be essential for some young people, however” (Holt et al., 2017, p. 1367). Some AS students did not talk about friends unless they were prompted by the researchers questioning them. AS students would then talk about friends or best friends, but many suggested they did not have friends outside of school. Students also communicate with students in cyber-space. as it is a preferred way of communication with others. Students need time and space to have meaningful occurrences to build friendships with peers. When students share classes with the same peers, they can build friendships by having time to sit and share interests, traits, and differences.

Siperstein et al. completed a study in 2007 for the Council for Exceptional Children, which researched youth’s attitudes towards the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities (ID). They randomly sampled 5,837 seventh and eighth-grade students from different areas of the United States. The study was conducted to see if students had contact with students with ID and if students thought that students with ID should participate in academic and non-academic classes, relationships, and social interactions. Twenty percent of students have contacted students with ID (Siperstein et al., 2007). Students learn about students with ID through secondary sources such as movies, books, parents, and teachers. Students expect that students with ID would not be able to learn in the general education classrooms. They felt the teacher’s attention would

mainly be on the ID students instead of them. Although, 77% of students were okay with inclusion because they can be accepting of others. Students did think that students with ID could make friends but would be more prone to say hello to them in school than to hang out with them outside of class. Students would help students with ID, and loan them a pencil but not work on a project or want to be on a team. Students felt like students with ID could play sports but not necessarily with students who did not have a disability. “Youth expect that inclusion will positively affect them personally, but also expect a negative effect academically” (Siperstein et al., 2007, p. 452).

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often have a hard time with social interactions. The study done by Kasari et al. (2016) found that students with ASD are often in social skills learning groups to help them learn social skills and communication skills. Students are better off learning social skills in a school setting rather than in an outside resource. The school environment is where students lack specific social skills, and they have a hard time applying what they have learned to social situations. “There are two theoretical explanations of how children connect: propinquity, which is important for students to connect, and homophily, which shares common characteristics, background, and common interests” (Kasari et al., 2016, p. 171).

Kasari et al. (2016) study consisted of 148 students with ASD in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Students were split into SKILL or ENGAGE interventions. The social skills group approach (SKILLS) is a didactic type intervention. First, the teacher models, and then the group practices the social skills. “This approach is

more often used with typical peer models chosen because they have good social skills" (Kasari et al., 2016, p. 172). SKILLS targets one skill that is taught interactively, followed by an activity. Students were given homework after the activity and free time to practice the skill. Staff praised students for the learning that they had done and were given a reward from the treasure chest. ENGAGE was the other intervention that researchers investigated. ENGAGE consists of peer engagement and acceptance. Students used shared interests within the group to help with the interactions with peers. Together, the teacher and students established a daily schedule. Students were able to engage in activities that had conversational exercises, structured games, storytelling, free play, and music. ENGAGE encouraged students to take leadership of their groups while the teacher only supervised them. Students started well, but the interactions stopped when they could do an activity independently.

Students in the SKILLS intervention demonstrated engagement with their peers not in play. The data from this study showed that students learn better from adult-led didactic social skills learning with peers from all different grades. It was more effective for peer acceptance for students with ASD. Overall, students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms have more opportunities to interact with peers and experience playing with their peers (Kasari et al., 2016).

Another way to see if inclusive education is beneficial is to look at the academic success of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom, most of the time, the students in special education classrooms. Cole et al. (2021) studied if more inclusive

education placements had better academic outcomes than students in a less inclusive placement. The study examined fourth-graders in 2014 through eighth-graders in 2018. Students were from Indiana and in inclusive classrooms 80% or more of the time and less than 80%. The Indiana State Test of Educational Process was this study's main component. It separated students into groups based on students in the inclusive classroom 80-100% of the time, 40-79% of the time, and 0-39% of the time. Students were separated based on their primary disability, standardized reading test scores, state testing in language arts and math scores, student attendance, gender, or if they have been expelled or suspended, and if they received free and reduced lunch. Cole et al. (2021) then made parallel groups that had matching variables such as the same primary disability, gender, race, and if they were on free and reduced lunch.

Results from the state reading test showed that the sixth-grade inclusive classrooms scored 15 points higher than non-inclusive, and the seventh grade had 27.32 points higher for the inclusive classroom over the non-inclusive. Math scores showed the same higher numbers. Inclusive sixth-grade classrooms had 19 points higher, and the eighth grade had 34 points higher. The results showed that inclusive classrooms are beneficial for students.

If nothing else, the study shows that more students can and should be included than presently are in our schools. More rigorous monitoring of the district, school, classroom, and student factors and characteristics that

interact in predictable ways to influence this process should be undertaken. (Cole et al., 2021, p. 223)

The research that Cole et al. (2021) did was beneficial in helping understand that inclusion is beneficial for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are excelling in inclusive classrooms and should be allowed to be there to learn.

A study conducted by Huckstadt and Shutts (2014) viewed how preschoolers evaluated children with disabilities and if they were more favorable to typically developing students. Participants were between three and five years old and from four different preschools. The preschools were well-funded and served higher social-economic families. Two of the preschools had inclusive classrooms, and the other two did not have inclusive classrooms. Students were interviewed one on one by the experimenter in a quiet room. Students were tested at the beginning and middle of the school year on three different tasks to see if students were willing to be friends with an unfamiliar child with and without disabilities. Students looked at pictures of children who did and did not use wheelchairs. Students were asked if it would be acceptable for children with and without disabilities to violate a social norm. To adapt this to preschoolers, students had three choices of smiley faces they could use on two of the tasks.

This study showed that typically developing students would befriend students with disabilities. It was not below the midpoint for this task on the rating scale. The children were neither positive nor negative about having a friend in a wheelchair. The student's preference for picking a student with disabilities was the same as choosing a

typically developing peer. Also, students did not like typically developing peers or students with disabilities who violated the norms. These results show neither negative nor positive effects of inclusion in this setting.

Rujis' study in 2017 viewed if students with special educational needs (SEN) impact typically developing peers' academic performance. Dutch students between the ages of 11 and 12 in secondary schools were the participants. The studies focused on three primary strategies. Rujis (2017) viewed this age group because students can pick their courses in secondary schools. The first data he collected showed the results of students with SEN and typically developing students in these courses. Some of the courses had students with SEN and others did not, which showed no effect on students' test scores. These results showed that it does not matter if SEN is in the courses. Students did well on the exams. The second strategy studied the school fixed effect, which includes students with SEN, characteristics of students, the types of student needs, gender, and ethnicity. Dutch schools can reject a student who has SEN, so this plays a part in the student's scores. The results showed that the state scores were not affected in the inclusion of students with SEN. The third strategy viewed the neighborhood variation because it looks at the students with SEN in neighborhoods as schools cannot control who lives in what neighborhoods. Therefore, students with SEN percentage might be higher in some school neighborhoods. The outcome of the third strategy is that students with SEN that live in different neighborhoods are small and almost insignificant to say that it affects student achievements in schools. This study shows that the three strategies

used to see if SEN students made a difference in student achievement are deficient to not having any impact.

The literature review shows that students with disabilities can be successful in mainstream general education classrooms. Students do not disrupt other general education peers' learning and can learn many life-long skills. Academic success can be supported by being grouped with students so students with disabilities can learn skills from peers. Socially, emotionally, and academically students with disabilities can learn many of those skills from peers to help them be successful.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

The term inclusion has been in education since the 1990s. Students with disabilities should only be removed from the least restrictive environment (LRE) when students cannot learn from the curriculum, even if the accommodations, modifications, or supports are not working (Blankenship et al., 2007). When inclusion is correctly implemented, students with severe disabilities have equal opportunities for learning in the general education setting using the same curriculum as other peers (Fransico et al., 2020). Inclusion also includes physical and emotional support. Unfortunately, many regular education teachers do not know special education laws or how to appropriately implement Individualized Education Programs (IEP) to the fullest extent. When inclusion is not working in schools, it is sometimes because of the lack of resources available for students with disabilities (Fransico et al., 2020; Goodfellow, 2012).

Inclusion helps students learn how to have a non-discriminatory society (Sulwymanov, 2015). This helps students see the importance of including all people no matter their disability; unfortunately, students with disabilities do not always feel welcome or included in their schools. Inclusion consists of being a part of the learning environment, engagement, safety, respect, and communication with staff and peers (Stiefel et al., 2018). When several teachers collaborate, it can be challenging to determine the duties and responsibilities of each teacher (Rix, 2020). However, most

teachers support inclusion and involve students with disabilities in their classrooms (Idol, 2006). Students with disabilities want to feel equal to other typically developing peers.

Students with disabilities often feel excluded from the school environment, activities, learning opportunities, and friendships (Goodfellow, 2012; Whitburn, 2017). Students need teachers to collaborate to ensure students receive the best learning experience with the correct accommodations and modifications required to succeed in the classroom (Wolfe & Hall, 2003). Individualization needs to start in the preschool classroom with students who have disabilities (Odom et al., 2011).

Teachers ensure that inclusion is happening in schools. To support this, teachers need to have enough professional development to help inclusion be successful in schools. For example, professional development can include time management, content knowledge, laws on special education and individualized educational plans (IEP), behavior management, and social and emotional awareness (Ali, 2020; De Fonte and Barton-Arwood, 2017; Werner et al., 2021). Communication and collaboration are a considerable part of inclusion that teachers need to be able to carry out. Teachers need to communicate with supporting staff so they can understand students' needs or get help understanding how to accommodate students with disabilities. Co-teaching could be a way to help incorporate collaboration (Anaby et al., 2020). Teachers have a positive outlook on having students with disabilities in their classrooms and want inclusion. Teachers would prefer students with disabilities who severely disabled (Werner et al., 2021; van Steen and Wilson, 2020; Vaz et al., 2015). Building a relationship with

students with disabilities can play a crucial role in whether students succeed in the classroom or not. Knowing students with disabilities and their unique needs can help with differentiating instruction and creating a safe classroom environment. Leadership and school administration play essential inclusion roles for the schools (Brackenreed, 2008; Silva and Morgado, 2004; Weiss et al., 2018).

Staff can teach inclusion in both social and academic skills for all students.

Students with disabilities must learn these skills in a school setting. Having appropriate social skills is a life lesson crucial for development and personal-well being (Kasari et al., 2016; Valchou et al., 2016). Students need to be able to learn about friendships and how to express and understand thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Bossaret et al., 2015).

Interventions can be taught to students with disabilities by special education teachers, counselors, or school staff by having teachers set routines and daily schedules. Also, the encouraging play would help with the social skill building that many students need (Kasari et al., 2016)

Teaching students how to share an interest with others could help build friendships with students who may typically not have a chance to do so outside of the classroom. Many typically developing students would rather not be friends or do academic activities or projects with students with disabilities (Brown et al., 2011; Huckstadt & Shutts, 2014). They would instead help them from afar. Exclusion from students and staff does not help with the inclusion of students. On the contrary, it often makes them feel excluded from the school community. Students with disabilities are able

to build friendships when given the right skills, so when students are excluded from groups, it does not support their academic or social development (Raghavendra et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2017). Although, some students with disabilities are okay with not having close friendships with other students.

Inclusion also teaches students how to be accepting of others and helps build cultural awareness for all students. Inclusion in classrooms does not interfere with academic learning or take attention away from students when done correctly (Siperstein et al., 2007). Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms excel in academics (Cole et al., 2021). It also helps students who have lower-achieving academics get more help from extra support staff. Overall, when there is inclusion in classrooms, there is no academic regression or negative impact on students' learning (Ruji, 2017).

Implications for Professional Application

Inclusion is an essential topic for all involved in schools. Teachers need to be able to teach students with disabilities appropriately. Professional development (PD) for inclusion needs to be done to help teachers understand the many possibilities for inclusion. This includes behavioral interventions for students, differentiating lessons, and modifications that need to be made for students, also having PD on how to read IEPs and ways to support students' social-emotional wellbeing. Teachers need to be able to have time to collaborate to ensure that students' needs are being met effectively and included in all aspects of the school community. Inclusion can help develop students as teachers can help positively support academics and the social and emotional well-being of all.

Having a classroom community helps with inclusion and building important relationships with students will strengthen how students respond to teachers and peers. It also could look at the difference in support for inclusive classrooms with having different staff collaborating and working with all students. Inclusive classrooms are what is best for students so they can grow socially, emotionally, and academically, to help with communication, motor skills, and cognitive skills that students need. Inclusion is important for all teachers, staff, administrators, all students, parents, and lawmakers. Inclusion sets up success for all students to learn lifelong skills needed to be successful in the communities. Teachers benefit from inclusive classrooms by collaborating and having others to help make sure IEPs are being implemented.

Limitations of the Research

There is much research done about inclusion around the world. History is important for inclusive education to show why inclusion is vital to education and why students with disabilities deserve to be included. Just a few studies look at the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Studies show that typically developing students can learn in inclusive classrooms without distractions or test scores being affected. Social, emotional, and inclusive classrooms are another thing that needs more research. Another couple research questions that could be researched is how are general education classrooms collaborating to make a classroom more inclusive or how to positively building a classroom community and ensuring that all students have a safe place to learn.

Implications for Future Research

Inclusion is a complex topic—many different views on inclusion and how districts, teachers, policymakers, and parents define inclusion. Research should be based on how one can use policies to have guidelines to follow to make inclusion best for all. Teachers, students, parents, school administrators, and districts need to know what they need to implement to ensure that all students can learn. Inclusion is not only for teachers and administrators to worry about. Parents and lawmakers should ensure that students with disabilities are in the least restrictive environment.

Future research should be done in classrooms where inclusion is being done with the support and collaboration of many teachers to see what is being implemented and how we can best support all teachers. This research could help spark professional development ideas across schools to help ensure inclusion is being done correctly. When inclusion is done correctly, many schools would want to know this information to best support students with disabilities and themselves.

Research should also be done to see if there are effects on state standard unit classroom testing with inclusive classrooms. This would make a difference than looking at state testing scores that are only taken once and many special education students do not take. Unit test scores could show from unit to unit if students can learn in inclusive or exclusive environments. Doing this research could help understand if it makes a difference or not academically for all students.

Conclusion

Studies have shown that inclusion is appropriate for students with disabilities if the teachers can collaborate and support staff. Suppose teachers were able to be taught effective ways to incorporate inclusion in their classrooms. However, many teachers do not feel like they are well prepared for special education students and the modifications, accommodations, and any social-emotional needs that the student might need. Studies have also shown that having both special education and regular education students together in an inclusive classroom could help students with disabilities learn from their classmates without disabilities. Therefore, the studies included in the literature review show that inclusion is beneficial for all students to learn in inclusive classrooms. The studies also show that individualization is a part of having quality inclusion and positively affects children's developmental cognition, communication, and motor skills.

With the help of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), inclusion in schools can only become more effective with all of the leg work they have done to ensure that students with disabilities are included in classrooms. Teachers need to collaborate effectively with all supporting staff to ensure that students are getting the best education based on their individual needs according to their IEP goals, accommodations, modifications, and needs. Lesson plans should be tailored to what the students individually need and help support their learning positively. Special education teachers and general education teachers should work together to accommodate the needs best. Parents, educators, government officials, and advocacy groups for students with special

education need to work together so that all students are ensured to learn in inclusive classrooms. Having teamwork will benefit students for years to come.

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