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INCLUSION IN THE MODERN-DAY CLASSROOM: IDENTIFICATION OF  
BENEFITS, RESERVATIONS, AND METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION

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

BY  
CARLEY DYER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

INCLUSION IN THE MODERN-DAY CLASSROOM: IDENTIFICATION OF  
BENEFITS, RESERVATIONS, AND METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Carley Dyer

August 2022

APPROVED

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## Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to my past, present, and future students. The world is such an amazing place when everyone is equally different. Never let anyone get in your way, never give up, and never let anyone take your joy. The world may not be built with inclusivity, but I soon hope society learns your value and how much they can grow from including you. Inclusion is not a trend; it is proven to be beneficial for all.

## Abstract

This thesis investigates some of the most apparent benefits of creating an inclusive classroom. Inclusion is a vital part of development for students with special education needs, but also directly benefits their general education peers and teachers as well. Some of these benefits are peer learning, forming connections with peers, and preparing the students for post-secondary life. This thesis also takes time to identify some of the areas that inclusion can have some perceived setbacks for both educators and students alike. Identifying these negatives are crucial for the advancement of inclusion, as it is necessary to know what areas need to improve in the future. A couple of the most common perceived setbacks are the teachers' perceived abilities as well as lack of training to address those shortcomings. Additionally, it is perceived that students struggle with development opportunities and lose motivation. There are also a multitude of time constraints that both teachers and students face. Lastly, this paper addresses some methods for implementing inclusivity into the classroom, as well as improving current inclusionary tactics, such as creating awareness, establishing uniform training programs for educational professionals, and identifying methods to best serve the educational needs of the differently-abled students.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is a vital part of development for students with special education needs. But one may ask what the direct benefits of establishing an inclusive classroom setting are. It allows for them to learn from their general education peers (Klinger et al., 1998; Kretzmann et al., 2015; Murray-Seegart, 1989; Schmidt et al., 2002), form connections amongst their peers (Klingner et al., 1998), and helps better prepare them for post-secondary life (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). There are also some perceived drawbacks to an inclusive classroom, including teachers being unwilling or unprepared (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009), students losing motivation or development opportunities (Klingner et al., 1998), and time-constraints (Shanker, 1994). After all the benefits and drawbacks are identified, the next step would be to identify what it takes to create this inclusive classroom setting. Creating awareness of the problem itself is a vital first step, but after that, creating a consistent and successful training plan for educational professionals, as well as establishing proven methods to provide students with the most beneficial education possible.

### **Background**

Inclusion is the method by which individuals feel included within a group, but creating an inclusive environment can be uncomfortable when starting. A way for people to ensure that they can remain comfortable is to be exclusionary towards new and uncomfortable situations and people. Being exclusive keeps at bay people who may challenge the way of life that people have created and, in doing so, creates a wall that can be difficult to break down. The term for this is social exclusion or social marginalization.

This form of exclusion can be found across many disciplines, including sociology, psychology, politics, economics, and education (Peace, 2001).

Social exclusion hurts everybody, but primarily the individuals who are being excluded suffer the most. The most common way that these people are affected by social exclusion is being deprived of fully participating in society in terms of the social, economic, and political life of the society in which they live (Young, 2000). These people become alienated from the rest of "normal society" and begin feeling outcast and unwanted. When people are pushed away, they become less productive members of society due to not being included and having to exert extra effort on fitting in, rather than focusing on contributions.

The best way to fight social exclusion is to be more inclusive as a society. When people are uncomfortable with individuals outside the immediate groups that they associate with, it is easy to recoil and become unfriendly or unaccommodating to that individual. Uncomfortable feelings may arise due to differences, including race, skin color, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, social class, and many others. Most often, the uncomfortableness stems from being unaware of the differences between oneself and other individuals as well as overcoming social barriers. These uncomfortable feelings can be either subconscious or selective, but with both, the solution is the same, and that is exposure to people from all different walks of life and educating oneself about the differences and how to overcome them. Ignorance is not always a taught mechanic, but beating it is (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Our world is not built for people who struggle with social skills, who are significantly behind grade level, have big emotions, or are anything outside of the

"normal." I want the world to view differences as essential needs in the classroom where my students not only learn from their general education peers but that general education peers adapt, learn, and create a welcoming environment for all. Learning should be happening from all angles. Spreading awareness and inclusivity is the first step in this process.

### **Definition of Terms**

Inclusion is such a broad topic that can look like many different things depending on the setting, whether that is in the community, at school, or at home, the state you live in, and the value that the company, person, or group has. Below are some definitions of inclusion as there is such a range. Gary Peltier (1997) defines inclusion as, "Inclusion involves keeping special education students in regular education classrooms and bringing in support services to the child, rather than bringing the child to the support services" (p. 234). UNESCO (2017) defined inclusion as "the process of overcoming the barriers limiting the participation of all learners" (p. 7). While James Meindl, Diana Delgado, and Laura Casey (2020) give a generalized definition of inclusion, saying, "Inclusive education programs can be broadly defined as those which accommodate all learners in a mainstream classroom" (p. 1).

Typical peers are students that are considered normally abled and are the general population of the average student base. These students are the peers of non-typical students in an inclusive classroom setting and play a key role in the success of the inclusive classroom itself. Without these students willfully and fully participating in the process, the differently abled students would see the benefits of the program and would almost certainly not develop as well as they would on their own otherwise.

Another term that needs to be talked about is Least Restrictive Environment, also known as LRE. "The concept of LRE means that students with disabilities will be educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible based on individual needs" (Byrd & Alexander, 2020, p. 73). This is one of the principles that drive inclusivity in the classroom. This exposure to differently-abled students is theorized to be beneficial in many ways to normally abled students and creates opportunities for them to learn ways to interact and develop with someone that thinks, behaves, and acts differently than themselves. On the other hand, this gives differently abled students the opportunity to learn and develop in a way that they feel included and accepted.

Peer learning is another term that is important regarding inclusion, as it is an important method in which students grow in the classroom. Peer learning is when students interact with one another to learn and reach their academic goals. Some of the ways this can happen are through student-led workshops, study groups, peer-to-peer learning partnerships (or study buddies), and general group work. Not only do teachers have to be on board for inclusion to be successful, but the typical peers need to be equally involved. These students can make or break the efforts to be inclusionary. If they resist the change and exclude the students in question, the environment will suffer, and a teacher that may be fully involved in the process may not be able to overcome that obstacle.

Evidence-based instruction is a methodology that is supported by research and documented practices rather than subjective case studies and theorization. These are the methods of teaching practices that are effective in any classroom, whether it be in-person, online or in some form of hybrid model. Some of the things that this utilizes are retrieval strategies, utilizing background knowledge, activating prior learning, quizzes, pre-testing,

as well as closing and review strategies. All of these have been shown through time and trial that they positively impact the way students learn and the level of their success. In today's schools, inclusive environments emphasize cooperative and coordinated practices among educators to inform better teaching for all students (Leko et al., 2015).

### **Context**

For us to understand how important inclusivity is in today's modern classroom, it is crucial to understand how inclusivity has evolved throughout time and identify how things have improved.

According to The Anti-Defamation League (2005), in previous years, children who were born with disabilities brought their families a large amount of shame and guilt. They even put children into institutions that were dedicated to housing children that were no longer wanted by these families. While the institutionalizing of these children has long-since tapered off, students with disabilities were excluded from the public education system deep into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Duncan, 2015).

To combat the exclusion of special needs students, the federal EHA, or Education for All Handicapped Children Act was approved in 1975. This act required public schools to guarantee a free and accommodating education to all students with disabilities. This is the beginning of modern inclusion efforts, as now public schools began to accommodate students, regardless of their educational requirements.

The EHA was the first proverbial crack in the dam, as activists began more heavily lobbying throughout the 1980's. The next, and possibly most crucial, piece of legislature was passed in 1990. The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, ensures that there is equal access and equal treatment for people with disabilities in many different

areas of public life. During this time, the EHA was reauthorized and renamed many times before landing on its current iteration, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004. These acts, coupled with other acts driven by inclusivity, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), are integral in assuring that individuals with disabilities are given the same levels of inclusion in the public education environment.

In today's educational climate, the next steps are still being worked on. Slightly more than half of all students with disabilities are included in general education settings for at least 80% of the day (Snyder, de Brey & Dillow, 2016). While this number is leaps and bounds improved from previous years, and prior to the 1970's wouldn't have been thought possible, there is still improvement to be made. As both general education and special needs students benefit directly from inclusion, steps to bring the number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms for longer hours of the day should push as close to 100% as possible. To get there, the necessary accommodations for education professionals and students need to increase as well.

### **Research Gap**

One of the most notable things regarding the research of inclusivity in the classroom is the frequency at which new research is occurring. In recent years, more and more research has been conducted and that provides us more and new opportunities for advancing our views about the subject of inclusivity. However, one gap of research that could be further addressed could be the effects of inclusivity on primary and secondary education in the United States of America. Much of the most recent and relevant research conducted has been done in Europe and Asia, which while having its own validity and usefulness, may not prove to be as relevant as research conducted in the United States.

### **Research Question**

To properly give a perspective on the research going forward, the question I would like to address is what are the direct benefits of implementing an inclusive general education classroom in primary and secondary education, and what is needed to create this environment in the most accessible way? This question will help guide us to addressing the research gap posed earlier and identifying new research that will be required.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Search Procedures**

In order to identify solid pieces of literature for this thesis, searches were conducted primarily among LibSearch, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR & EBSCO MegaFILE. The years were widely scoped, but were cut off in 1980, and there was no cut off for recency. The list was narrowed by identifying only studies that conducted primary research about the specific topics that they were discussing. Primary keywords that were searched include “Inclusion,” “Autism,” “ASD,” “Learning Development,” “Special Education,” “Educational Development,” and “Disabilities in Education.” All these articles were picked in the effort of serving the three sections of this chapter: Benefits of Inclusion in Education, Common Difficulties with Inclusion, and Methods of Implementing and Improving Inclusionary Efforts.

### **Benefits of Inclusion in Education**

The core of this thesis is to understand how implementing inclusion into classrooms serves as beneficial for both students and educational professionals alike. Once the benefits are identified, it is essential that they are utilized in improving the academic experience of differently-abled students, as well as constantly striving to identify new benefits to improve efforts in the future.

#### **Peer Learning**

One of, if not the biggest, benefits of inclusion is the experience and learning that takes place when students of different abilities and backgrounds work together.

Kretzmann et al. (2015) conducted a study on peer engagement for children with autism



spectrum disorder. They utilized a randomized, wait-list-controlled design that was implemented during recess at four different elementary schools. The immediate treatment group consisted of 13 elementary school students with ASD; two of which were female. The wait-listed group contained 11 students with ASD; four of this group were female. All children with ASD were fully integrated in the general education program. Analyses revealed that time spent engaged with peers was significantly increased for the immediate treatment group and maintained that level when the follow-up was conducted. Staff that were responsible for the immediate treatment group showed increased behaviors aimed at improving peer engagement for children with ASD compared to playground staff at the wait-listed sites. These improvements were not maintained during follow-up.

These results suggest that brief intervention can be beneficial in increasing peer engagement for ASD children in inclusive settings, but continued support of playground staff is likely needed. Essentially, their findings show that when students with different abilities are exposed to their typical peers and their general education environment, it facilitates awareness and the development of social skills and problem-solving skills for the student with different abilities. In inclusive environments, the typical peers start to learn about acceptance, appreciation, and diversity (Kretzmann et al., 2015).

Peck also discovered that inclusion "reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness" (Peck et al., 1992, p. 54). To come to this conclusion, the researchers performed a survey of 125 parents and 95 teachers that were participating in programs that integrated children with disabilities into regular preschool and kindergarten classes. What they found was that both parents and teachers of typically developing children felt that their children were gaining a diverse array of

benefits because of their involvement in the integrated program. Additionally, data further indicated that common anxieties about integration, such as teachers being unable to provide quality instruction and attention to the typical children, were not perceived to be problems in these programs. The results are being utilized to analyze the rationale for broadening the process of integrated programs and the benefits of mainstreaming for all children (Peck et al., 1992).

Non-typical students benefit from an introduction to typical student environments and educational content. In fact, studies have shown that students with disabilities make progress when exposed to grade-level content when given the support and accommodation needed (Taub et al., 2017). To come to these conclusions, the researchers followed a framework they noted as the OTL framework, or Opportunities to Learn framework. They claim that following the process of creating the intended curriculum and enacting the curriculum for both general and non-typical students, and then assessing the curriculum post facto, allows for easier analysis of the integration of non-typical students into the general student population.

Inclusion is not only important for students with different abilities but also for students without disabilities (Klingner et al., 1998). The researchers took a group of 32 students with and without learning disabilities that had participated in both the pull-out method and an inclusive classroom environment. They provided questions that assessed the student's perception of both methods, and to ascertain which model was most conducive to academic learning and social benefits. They also proceeded to ask the students for reasons for their answers. The results from the research were mixed, but still yielded some interesting information. Both learning disabled and non-learning-disabled

students enjoyed when other students taught them information, and the opportunity to teach other students' information. Both groups of students felt that there were vast social benefits to inclusive classroom settings. However, while students were able to see the direct benefits of an inclusive classroom, they preferred the pull-out method at a slightly higher rate when asked directly. The researchers also state that self-esteem and feelings of self-worth increase because students with disabilities are less likely to be identified as "slow" by their peers or to feel stigmatized (Klingner et al., 1998).

Having typical peers and peers with different abilities in the same classroom facilitates peer teachers. This concept is when typical students teach students with different abilities by seeing a need and helping their peers out without an adult demanding it. The same concept is reversed as students with different abilities teach their typical peers a new way to see life by slowing down and celebrating the small things. This, in return, allows the environment to be inclusive and shows all students how to accept one another in their respective abilities (Klingner et al., 1998).

Cooperative learning, which is when the teacher steps back from leading the classroom and takes on more of a supporting role, is another form of peer learning that teachers can enable. "When using cooperative learning, the teacher steps away from the role of classroom leader and becomes a guide, supporting student initiative to take a more active role in the learning process and share responsibility for learning with their peers" (Schmidt et al., 2002, p. 137). This same article proceeds to say that peer tutoring has shown consistently positive results for students, including students with high-incidence disabilities who demonstrated significant gains in reading abilities (Schmidt et al., 2002). Non-typical students make significant progress on their academic goals when they are

given an inclusive classroom to thrive in. Schmidt et al. (2002) read and analyzed related literature to the instruction of reading in inclusive settings. They found that although students who struggle to learn to read have difficulties that spread across many different areas of reading comprehension, most educators believe that the key to the remediation of a reading problem is cognitive strategy instruction (Schmidt et al., 2002).

Through peer learning, the exposure that typical students gain is also beneficial to their development. Murray-Seegert (1989) found that nondisabled students learned to be more tolerant of others. She also found that these students demonstrated more positive feelings about themselves after spending time helping classmates with severe disabilities. Fostering an inclusive environment helps everyone become more well-rounded, as well as being a more tolerant and compassionate person.

### **Forming Connections**

A positive that might seem obvious but can't be overshadowed is the number of connections that can be formed between typical and non-typical students. A benefit of inclusion is that students with disabilities are spending more time with their general education peers, which allows for genuine friendships to form. Additionally, students in their general education classroom are less likely to miss out on key lessons and grade-level curricula. By having an inclusive classroom, you are teaching your students that being different or having different abilities is not a bad thing (Klingner et al., 1998).

### **Ownership of Development**

Inclusive classrooms allow teachers to see all the aspects that their changes affect their students and can foster a feeling of possession in the setting that they create.

Through all of this, general education teachers are more likely to take ownership and

responsibility for all their students rather than dump them in the special education classroom (Klingner et al., 1998).

Meindl et al. (2020) aggregated a large number of data sources and analyzed different ways to increase the engagement of students who have autism in inclusive classroom settings. They broke down the problem into a set of challenging areas, suggested strategies to combat those areas, and the expected outcomes that were pulled from empirical data sources. One of the major takeaways was that children with developmental delays make progress when exposed to grade-level content when given the necessary accommodation and support to learn the content. Teachers feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when their students succeed, and the results of the changes the teachers make contribute to that (Meindl et al., 2020).

### **Post-Secondary Preparation**

Inclusive classroom settings prepare both typical and non-typical students for life past schooling. Inclusion is beneficial for everyone but having an inclusive classroom prepares all students for the real world. Learning from one another in a safe and controlled environment allows students at a young age to accept everyone regardless of their differences (Klingner et al., 1998). UNESCO (2017) says that "Building a common understanding that more inclusive and equitable education systems have the potential to promote gender equality, reduce inequalities, develop teacher and system capabilities, and encourage supportive learning environments" (p. 13). Starting inclusion at a young age not only prepares students for the real world but also paves the way to improving the quality of education.

Helmstetter et al. (1994) conducted a survey of high school students without disabilities who developed relationships with peers with severe disabilities. One hundred sixty-six students described a variety of experiences but showed positive patterns in their responses. These positive responses reported a feeling of self-worth related to helping others, an increased sense of personal development, and increased tolerance of the behavior and appearance of other people (Helmstetter et al., 1994). All these positive responses allow for students to become better, well-rounded individuals ready for their lives after their education.

### **Common Difficulties with Inclusion**

While it's important to know what the benefits of an inclusive classroom are, it is also crucial to understand where inclusion can provide some difficulties. Once these shortcomings are understood, educational professionals can move to lessen and remedy the problems entirely to create an environment that is inclusive for all students of all different ability levels.

### **Maintaining Attention**

One of the most common challenges that instructors will face when trying to create an inclusive classroom is arranging the education in a way that is attention-grabbing and maintains the students' interest (Meindl et al., 2020). One of the best ways to combat this issue is teaching through inquiry and encouraging students to ask questions. These two methods are typically regarded as some of the best practices to promote higher student involvement in classroom activities (Meindl et al., 2020). Keeping students' attention will ensure that students reach their academic goals without alienating other students in the process.

## **Low Student Motivation**

Keeping students motivated is another challenge that instructors will have to overcome to maintain an inclusive classroom. A method that has shown great success in keeping students inspired is known as task interspersal. Task interspersal is spreading easy tasks intermittently throughout the instruction of more challenging material (Benavides & Poulson, 2009).

Benavides and Poulson conducted a survey of the performance of a group of three children with autism. They did this by analyzing the performance of matching-to-sample tasks. They established a baseline of mastery for the tasks required to test the children to identify progress. The matching tasks include identical and non-identical animals, letters, numbers, and shapes. They found that once the students were introduced to interspersal and interspersal/low-density reinforcement (IDL), all three students outperformed their baselines relatively significantly (Benavides & Poulson, 2009).

The primary reason that this method is so efficient at keeping students motivated is the fact that they crave the positive responses they receive when they achieve either easier or more difficult tasks. These students are seeking the chance to access opportunities to be praised and find success. This form of positive reinforcement creates a very straightforward form of motivation (Pitts & Dymond, 2012). Pitts and Dymond conducted research on high-probability versus low-probability request sequences. High-probability requests are an easy task that an instructor would present to an individual that they would do consistently on their own. After this, the instructor presents a more difficult task that the student wouldn't normally enjoy. This is known as a low

probability request. This is a form of scaffolding that is commonplace, especially in a special education setting.

Compliance with low-probability requests generally increases when preceded by a series of high-probability requests. They investigated the effects of high-probability request sequences, with and without programmed reinforcement, on the compliance to low-probability requests using a reversal design with three students with autism. What they identified was that high-probability request sequences were most effective in increasing compliance, reducing compliance latency, and task completion time when they were implemented with programmed reinforcement (Pitts & Dymond, 2012). Students are more motivated when they find success at tasks and building their confidence to move on to harder tasks is crucial. To make inclusion a beneficial practice for all involved, students need to be provided with an academic structure that keeps them involved and motivated. Otherwise, the uninspired students will create a drag on both the teacher and the classroom.

### **Lack of Training and Resources**

One of the struggles with inclusion is the amount of training and resources required to create a positive, welcoming working environment. It even starts as high as the teacher's belief in whether they can be fully prepared to perform in an inclusive setting. Some mainstream teachers do not support the inclusive model of teaching because of their lack of training preparation for teaching in inclusive settings (Ross-Hill, 2009). Ross-Hill surveyed 73 regular mainstream teachers from three public elementary and secondary schools in rural southeastern United States. These teachers all participated in the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Classrooms or STATIC. Ross-Hill



found that most teachers support the practice of inclusion in a general education classroom. They also found that in some instances, teachers will have a more neutral consensus towards the practice of inclusion as it relates to a teaching assignment, especially when different grade levels, subjects, or types of inclusionary practice (Ross-Hill, 2009).

Teachers feel that thorough training is necessary to even begin the process of moving towards inclusivity. Even after completing a course in inclusionary practices, teachers stated that even though the course was helpful, they would need more support when it comes to instructional strategies and understanding different abilities (Ross-Hill, 2009). Even when trained, teachers feel ill-equipped to accommodate the needs of these unique learners.

In fact, many mainstream teachers feel inadequately prepared to meet the multifaceted needs of the child with different abilities in an inclusive environment (Majoko, 2016). Majoko interviewed 21 regular primary school teachers regarding social barriers and the enabling of inclusion in mainstream classrooms, specifically amongst ASD children 6-12 years old. These interviews were conducted in Zimbabwe. The results showed that along with feeling inadequately trained to be fully inclusive, teachers also felt that social rejection, communication impairments, and behavioral challenges interfered with the integration of ASD students into a mainstream classroom. A teacher who feels unprepared to handle the task of accommodating a wide spread of learners is going to hinder the progress of creating an inclusive learning environment (Majoko, 2016).

### **Decrease in Growth of Typical Students**

Some people worry that creating an inclusive environment will take away from the learning of typical students. Klingner et al. (1998) state that individuals fear there will be a decrease in growth or performance because students with disabilities will take up too much of the teachers' time. This resistance to inclusion affects the mindsets of those in positions to implement change. By being resistant to change, these teachers are effectively gatekeeping inclusion for non-typical students.

### **Wide Variety of Needs**

Another challenge that inclusion faces is the wide variety of needs within one classroom. Jones and Fredrickson (2010) conducted a study to identify the differential profiles of behaviors that would be able to predict successful inclusion into mainstream education for ASD children. They utilized multiple regression analysis based upon behavioral ratings from parents, teachers, and peers. What they found was some evidence for differential profiles predicting peer acceptance and rejection. When students were rated to have comparatively high levels of shyness by their peers, those students were predicted to experience social rejection from comparable students. Parent-rated highly sociable behavior also differentially predicted social acceptance, finding that students with high-levels of prosocial behavior predicted acceptance in comparable students, but low-levels were predictive for students with ASD. In summary, they proposed that these findings suggest that schools should seek to strengthen social skills programs by introducing ASD awareness among general education pupils to utilize peers' apparent willingness to discount characteristics such as 'shyness' (Jones & Frederickson, 2010).

According to Jones & Frederickson (2010), children with autism can struggle with academic success even when they have average or above cognitive skills because they have challenges socially. Students with autism or developmental cognitive delays require much more support when learning, like transitions, hygiene needs, social needs, sensory needs, and OT needs. These extra needs can be an obstacle that some teachers can't push themselves past. Although some school staff can see the benefit of collaboration with general education teachers and special education teachers, it does not overshadow the lack of planning time or collaboration time needed to make inclusion work (Majoko, 2016).

Byrd and Alexander (2020) say that "These spaces consist of an ever-increasing body of students with special needs, ranging from learning and/or behavioral challenges and sometimes with linguistically and culturally varied backgrounds as well" (p.73). Byrd and Alexander conducted their study by recounting the experience of a group of individuals and their experiences. They took 83 special education professionals and interviewed them over a two-year period. They took every fourth interview at random to utilize for their findings. These interviews were conducted both in person and via Skype. The questions were based on the differences between special education teachers and general education teachers and how general education teachers could more successfully work with students with special needs. The results of the study showed three broad categories that would determine the success of a general education teacher. They are core knowledge, key dispositions, and essential skills (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Not only do the students have a wide variety of needs, but the educational professionals that are necessary for a successful classroom also have a variety of needs as well.

## **Unwilling Teachers**

Another common hindrance to an inclusive classroom is teachers being unwilling to make accommodations that would be required for non-typical students to be able to participate fully. Most general education teachers are willing to include students with disabilities in the physical context of their classroom: however, they are less willing to make specific modifications in their instruction, use of materials, or environment (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991).

Schumm and Vaughn conducted a study amongst general education professionals to determine their perception of desirability and feasibility for adaptations for mainstream students in their general education students. They conducted the survey through 25 elementary level teachers, 23 middle school level teachers, and 45 high school level teachers on a list of 30 items on a Likert scale utilizing the Adaption Evaluation Instrument (AEI). The results found were relatively expected, as teachers rated desirability higher on average for every single item on the list. The average desirability rating was 6.35 with a mode of 7, while the average feasibility rating was 4.84 with a mode of 5.5. This means that, on average, teachers see an inclusive environment as positive when it comes to many different avenues, but they find that the feasibility of implementing the practices is less favorable (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991).

Damore and Murray (2009) conducted a study surveying 118 special education and general education teachers from urban elementary schools regarding their beliefs on collaborative teaching present in their schools. In the first section of the survey, teachers' perceptions were assessed, and data showed that while 92% of teachers thought some form of collaborative teaching practices were present in their schools, only 57% said they

were using the practice in their classrooms. In a similar vein, 26% of teachers thought that all three of the mentioned forms (consultation, collaborative team teaching, and team teaching) were active in their school, but only 3% mentioned that they utilized them in their own classroom. This shows that they feel that they see the practices are being utilized, but they aren't willing to use them nearly at the same rate. In summary, not only are some teachers unwilling to create an inclusive environment because of all the difficulties presented, but some teachers are also unaware of how little collaboration is happening in the first place (Damore & Murray, 2009).

### **Time Constraints**

Many educators cannot get the work they need to get done in the allotted time we are given. Schmidt (2002) says, "Most elementary school teachers devote several hours per night to planning lessons and constructing classroom materials, and few have the time for regular collaboration with their colleagues on instructional problems" (p. 8). Leading professionals have conducted surveys and have found that teachers have concerns about the workloads that students with disabilities will bring. In conducting this research, it has been established that many educational professionals have concerns that teachers will devote too much time to dealing with children with disabilities, and that will take away from their ability to teach effectively (Shanker, 1994).

According to Kauffman et al. (1998), most teachers lack the time and training to work effectively with generally low achieving students. In addition, many teachers feel that creating an inclusive environment demands too much from them when they are already overburdened and overworked, with no real tangible resources or incentives. Hollowood et al. (1994) investigated the use of teacher and student time. Participants in

the study were six students with severe disabilities and 12 students without disabilities. They utilized a causal-comparative group design. Group one consisted of six students with severe disabilities enrolled in four classrooms in grades 1, 3, and 4. Group 2 consisted of each student from group 1 matched with a randomly selected student without a disability in their respective grade level. Group 3 consisted of six students randomly selected from grades 1, 3, and 4. Compared to groups 2 and 3, group 1 required more instructional time from the teachers, which is expected. While the three groups had a comparable amount of time in instruction, the amount of engaged time from group 1 spent less time actively engaged than groups 2 and 3. Essentially, what we see is that the students with disabilities on their own take more time to be properly instructed, but once they are assimilated with their general education peers, we see that they no longer fall behind in terms of instruction (Hollowood et al., 1994).

### **Different Professional Educational Standards**

General education teachers and special education teachers get different training and education as they get their degrees. This makes inclusion tricky as general education teachers do not have the same knowledge that special education teachers have. This is also looked at the opposite; general education teachers have training that special education teachers do not. One of the big differences between special education teachers and general education teachers is the paperwork. Special education teachers have a caseload on top of the classes they teach. The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium have spelled out four areas in which general and special education professionals have different experiences. They are content, pedagogy, students with disabilities, and contexts (INTASC, 2001). They utilize these four areas to analyze and

compare the general and special education teachers and provide a structure to articulate the differences. From these four areas, they also have derived ten principles that the organization feels could be a template for creating a uniform educational standard across the United States for both general and special education professionals (INTASC, 2001).

### **Methods of Implementing and Improving Inclusionary Efforts**

While we identify what the benefits and setbacks of implementing inclusion into a classroom can be, we also should identify what it will take to install inclusion in the classrooms once we move forward. Catering to the students' needs, and helping teachers feel adequately supported are key in establishing a culture of inclusion that will support student success for the long-term.

#### **Pull-Out vs. Push-In**

To create a classroom that is inclusive, you need to have some methods that facilitate the changes necessary. The Pull-Out method is where students who participate in small groups for instruction leave their general education classroom at a set time to receive instruction from a special education teacher (Klingner et al., 1998). This method is very beneficial because it allows for peer learning and the forming of connections while also allowing for non-typical students to receive the specialized education that they need to achieve their academic goals.

The opposing method of the Pull-Out method is the Push-in model. This method is when the special education teacher goes into the grade level class and co-teaches with the general education teacher. This allows for more adults in the room for all students and provides an inclusive environment. One student stated that he preferred the push-in model as, in the past, his friends would make fun of him by calling him names for leaving the

classroom (Klingner et al., 1998). This method proves beneficial because the non-typical students aren't alienating themselves from the typical students and create an easier environment for the professional staff to work in. Not only is the workload slightly easier for the general education teacher, but it also provides an easier format for the special education teacher as well.

Someone unfamiliar with implementing inclusion may wonder which of the two methods would be the most effective. A study was done with 32 students about the push-in and pull-out model of inclusion. Within the study, there were 16 students with learning disabilities and 16 without a learning disability. According to the results, "Inclusion was viewed by many students as beneficial and preferable, particularly by those who could handle the more difficult work in a general education classroom. Many students with learning disabilities perceived that they got enough assistance with their learning and made more friends with the inclusion model" (Klingner et al., 1998, p. 156).

### **Providing Students Choices**

A method that could prove beneficial for students in creating an inclusive environment is providing choices for students in their academics and throughout the course of their day. Meindl et al. (2020) states, "Among some of the effective evidence-based instructional strategies that could be used for improving motivation of students with autism in inclusive classrooms are: providing choices throughout the day, interspersing tasks during instruction, and using Active Student Responding techniques" (p. 3). Giving choices allows the student to feel in control of their education and provide some control of their daily lives which increases motivation.



Warren et al. (2021) conducted a survey to identify the perspectives of the students that are participating in resourced provision. They took five students on the autism spectrum between the age of 9-11 years old and conducted a qualitative survey with them. They surveyed the students about their everyday experiences, including transitions between special education settings and mainstream settings. Additionally, six educational professionals that interacted with the students through the program were interviewed.

What was found that students and staff alike emphasized the importance of friendship and interactions with peers, support and how it was provided, the tension for both students and staff between structured and unstructured periods, and student and school identity. The school that contained the participants implemented changes to the daily transitions in line with student responses that resulted in positive impacts on performance for both students and staff (Warren et al., 2021).

### **Creating Awareness**

Another way that inclusion can be improved is through spreading awareness of the differences in your classroom. According to Meindl et al. (2020), "Some of these benefits include improved understanding of individual differences, increased cooperation skills, and increased respect for all members of a community" (p. 7). Showing students that all students learn, look, and act differently from a young age creates a sense of community and normalizes those differences. Williamson (2014) conducted a study that included 29 students, 12 of which were boys and 17 girls, in an inclusive, 4<sup>th</sup>-grade classroom setting. Within the 29 students, five of those students received special education services. The study was conducted as Action Research, which essentially is voluntary participation in the study on the part of the student. Williamson distributed questionnaires at three

different points throughout the five-week educational period, notably at the beginning, middle, and end of the period. The results of the study were as expected, as the more students were exposed to and given a chance to learn about disabilities, the more accepting they became. Students' perceptions of disabilities started less than neutral but progressed to above neutral by the end of the period. As the program progressed, students became more interested in the content and participated at higher rates (Williamson, 2014).

Hsiao (2022) conducted a study that looked at how interaction projects affected the attitudes of general education students regarding disability and inclusion. Twenty-five students that were interested in pursuing a teaching career were enrolled in a course that gave them the opportunity to interact with adults with disabilities. The students participated in an assessment before and after the course, and that data was analyzed through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses showed significant statistical change. The change showed that the students felt more comfortable with prospects involving interactions with individuals with disabilities (Hsiao, 2022).

### **Scaffolding and Accommodations**

There are many strategies that are used to ensure inclusion, such as scaffolding, classroom organization, clear ground rules, consistency, appropriate classroom curriculum, acknowledging students' individuality, and educating students on differences and how their language matters. Tobin & McInnes (2008) conducted a study upon evidence from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade classrooms where teachers were able to differentiate their methods of instruction in many ways for student benefit. These teachers offered tiered work products, expert tutoring, and other additional support. Instruction included general

best literary practices, including shared reading, writing, and guiding reading. What was found was that these opportunities improved students' time to understand core competencies, as well as improving upon skills and understanding of the curriculum (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). While this didn't take place in a special education setting, it does show that given opportunities to learn differently than the status quo, students can excel in many ways.

### **Planning Time and Training**

One way that inclusionary efforts could be improved is by ensuring that teachers have access to proper preparation. This could simply be making sure that teachers are allotted prep time and are able to utilize it consistently. This could also be by creating training programs that allow for teachers to learn and develop their own skill sets to better serve their students and inclusion. Baker-Ericzén et al. (2009) conducted a study examining a modularized inclusion training program that was provided to 1,298 diverse early childcare providers. These could be center-based, family home, and license-exempt settings. These providers were given training that focused on different areas that could improve the capacity for accommodation for students with special needs. The areas in question are Introduction to Inclusion, Respectful Accommodations, Positive Behavioral Support, and Partnering with Families. Before and after the training was conducted, the providers were surveyed on their perceptions regarding the areas, and the data was aggregated. What was found was that providers showed a significant positive change in total attitude toward an inclusionary environment, as well as their perceived competence in their ability to be able to create it (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009). While this study was conducted amongst childcare providers, the data can easily be translated to a special

education situation. When providers are educated and feel confident in their own abilities to succeed in their goals, they are in a much better position to be inclusionary and successful in that effort. If teachers are given proper training and access to ample resources, they will be more confident in their ability to create a positive, inclusionary environment and will be able to expand their classrooms to be inclusionary.

Walker et al. (2021) accumulated existing research to summarize findings on paraeducator-delivered interventions supporting students with ESN in inclusive school settings. They found a total of 47 studies that fell into the groups of K-12 public schools, students had IDD, interventions were delivered in an inclusive classroom setting, and an experimental single-case research design was used.

What they found was that paraeducator training effectively increased the performance of the paraeducators in their intervention efforts with the students. The effect on the paraeducators in terms of improving implementation fidelity was considered to be large to very large. It was also shown that a large to very large impact was made on these students that were affected. Essentially, this research shows that training not only positively impacts the educational professionals that are learning but also impacts the students with a similar effect (Walker et al., 2021).

### **Creating Common Language**

To have a successful inclusive environment, you need to have the same common language. A common language can be viewed as using the same definitions and ways to explain specific topics such as inclusion. Another way common language can be used is by coming up with a vision of how inclusion is going to work in your setting. These can be common goals, how the environment is going to be set up, rules for inclusion, and a

successful plan of action. Another reason to determine and have the same common language is to be consistent for all students. As we know, students with different abilities need repetition to learn new topics, and having the same common language allows for students to get that repetition and consistency. UNESCO (2017) says, "A culture of inclusion and equity in education requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs among senior staff at the national, district and school levels" (p. 24). UNESCO (2017) also says that "Engage teachers in developing a common language of practice that assists individuals in reflecting on their own ways of working, on the thinking behind their actions, and on how to improve" (p. 36).

## CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### Summary of Literature

This section will briefly summarize the review of literature that is given in chapter two of the thesis. In order to summarize the literature review, we will be looking at this section through the lens of the guiding question of the thesis, which is: what are the direct benefits of implementing an inclusive general education classroom in primary and secondary education, and what is needed to create this environment in the most accessible way?

Integration of differently abled students into a general education classroom, or direct inclusionary efforts, provides students with ASD an increased level of peer engagement. When in a recess setting, these students were able to maintain these increased levels with the assistance of playground staff. Without the assistance of staff, the levels returned to beginning levels. In addition, staff that were involved with the students who have ASD demonstrated higher levels of behaviors aimed at improving peer engagement for students with ASD (Kretmann et al., 2015). When students with disabilities are integrated into regular classroom settings, parents and teachers of students identify that students gain a diverse array of benefits due to their participation in the integrated program (Meindl et al., 2020; Peck et al., 1992). Creating an inclusive curriculum and enacting the curriculum for both general and non-typical students and then assessing the curriculum post facto allows for easier analysis of the integration of non-typical students rather than identifying and analyzing data separately (Taub et al., 2017). In an inclusive setting, when both general education students and non-typical students are responsible for teaching curriculum to each other, both sets of students enjoy

when they receive information from the other group and also enjoy the opportunity to teach information to the other group (Klinger et al., 1998; Murray-Seegart, 1989; Schmidt et al., 2002). Non-typical students express experiencing increased senses of self-esteem and self-worth due to the fact that they are less likely to be identified as slow by their general education peers (Helmstetter et al., 1994; Klinger et al., 1998; Murray-Seegart, 1989; Schmidt et al., 2002).

While teachers are generally in favor of inclusion, these same teachers have a more neutral mentality toward implementing inclusion, meaning that teachers like inclusion in theory, but practicing it seems more daunting (Damore & Murray, 2009; Majoko, 2016; Ross-Hill, 2009; Schumm & Vaughn, 1991). When students are viewed as shy or reserved by classmates, those students are more likely to experience rejection from similar peers. ASD students being viewed as less shy or reserved are still more likely to be socially rejected (Jones & Frederickson, 2010). Teachers feel that they have a wide variety of professional needs to succeed in implementing an inclusive classroom: core knowledge, key dispositions, and essential skills (Byrd & Alexander, 2020; Walker et al., 2021). Teachers are aware that inclusion is present in their school but aren't fully aware of what practices are being implemented or aren't implementing the practices themselves (Damore & Murray, 2009). Teachers feel that they simply cannot complete the amount of additional work that is necessary to implement an inclusive classroom. The suspected workload of preparing for non-typical students creates concerns for the average general education teacher (Hollowood et al., 1994; Kauffman et al., 1998; Schmidt et al., 2002; Shanker, 1994). As paraeducators develop their skill sets with additional training programs, they are likely to see improved performance in terms of intervention

performance, and students are likely to also improve in their academic performance (Walker et al., 2021). When schools implement programming changes that cater to the vocalized needs of students, they are likely to see improved performance from both students and staff alike (Warren et al., 2021).

When students who have developmental delays are exposed to grade-level content, they are more likely to make progress when given the necessary accommodations (Meindl et al., 2020; Tobin & McInnes, 2008). When students are given opportunities to learn in an environment that is supportive and provides positive reinforcement, they are significantly more likely to outperform their educational baselines and more likely to complete more tasks to receive encouragement (Benavides & Poulson, 2009; Pitts & Dymond, 2012). Low probability tasks are more likely to be complied with if partnered in succession with high probability tasks. High probability tasks also increase compliance, decrease compliance latency, and task completion time (Pitts & Dymond, 2012). Differently abled students are more likely to be less actively engaged in the classroom than their general education peers when they are being instructed on their own, but when they are assimilated into a general education classroom, they actually improve in terms of time instructed and engagement (Hollowood et al., 1994). Subjecting general education students to new information about students with disabilities, their mindsets improve as more information is received, and they even become more interested in the content as a whole, as well as increasing participation rates (Hsiao, 2022; Williamson, 2014). When non-typical students are presented with a dynamic program in regards to the method of instruction, the students see a decreased amount of time to understand core competencies, as well as improve upon skills and understanding of the curriculum (Tobin



& McInnes, 2008). Offering childcare providers with educational programs has shown to have a significantly improved attitude towards creating and maintaining an inclusive environment (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009).

### **Limitations of the Research**

In order for the research that was utilized in this thesis, it was necessary to keep the scope wide enough to find relevant research but also narrow it to find research that was only topical for educational settings. All research that was found and used involves an educational environment with differently abled students. It was important to keep this consideration at all times due to the nature of the topic of inclusion. Where this became difficult at times is a majority of educational research that has been conducted in the past was geared toward a general education setting. While this does make sense in the scheme of things, it makes researching a topic in the special education field a little more difficult.

Past that, the next key limitation was the research that was geared towards inclusionary elements of special education. Again, as one would imagine, this limitation narrowed the field of usable research and made it necessary to identify and utilize research that lies significantly back in time.

As researchers continue to delve more into the realm of inclusion, we should see improvements in the research that can be done. But by identifying the shortcomings that we see in the research, we can see that there are limitations to what we can learn now and what literature is available to review.

### **Implications for Future Research**

For us to do better as educators and researchers, we need to identify what some

areas of future research could be considered. Some areas that researchers could focus their future efforts on could be as simple as conducting case studies about the implementation of inclusionary efforts for differently abled students in a general education classroom. Having more recent and more definitive research that can show the benefits of inclusion efforts in the modern-day classroom can assist with implementing inclusion in more classrooms.

Another area that could be researched in more depth could be the impacts of inclusion on both general education students and differently-abled students. The students are obviously the most important benefactor of inclusionary efforts, so if we could understand how inclusion affects them in more depth, we can understand what we need to do to make inclusionary efforts more effective, not only in terms of implementation but also in terms of long-term effects.

Another interesting area of potential research could be studies into the mentalities of both students and educational professionals before and after participating in an inclusionary classroom environment. This would be beneficial to research because we would be able to gather mentalities regarding inclusion efforts from the people that are directly involved with them. In addition to identifying attitudes surrounding inclusion from before and after participation in the environment, there is the ability to compare the attitudes as well. This could show the changes in attitude and, in turn, create a basis for demonstrating value in increasing efforts further.

### **Implications for Professional Application**

In order for professionals to take steps to improve from this research, some of the shortcomings that we've seen from the professional aspect of inclusion need to be

mentioned and addressed. Some of these are educational standards, training, creating acceptance, and preparation.

### **Educational Standards**

One thing that was made clear through the research that was conducted is the fact that in many cases, educational professionals have different standards of education for their students, whether that be by state, district, or individually as teachers. In order for inclusion to be something that is easily implemented in a standard way across the country, educational standards need to be reevaluated to include students from a multitude of different abilities. Once this is done, the students will benefit from having a clear and consistent education, and educators will benefit from having a clear standard to uphold in regard to teaching their students. Additionally, once standards are established and enforced consistently, educators' mindsets in regard to implementing inclusionary efforts could improve.

### **Training**

Once educational standards are established, you can easily identify what some of the shortcomings of educational professionals will be, as well as how to adapt to students' needs as well. In order for training to be most effective, we should apply the educational standards that are created with inclusion in mind to the training efforts. Not only will creating the end goal with a consistent measurement in mind improve the education of the students, but the standardized training efforts will improve the education these students receive as well. Along with this, creating a common language that is introduced and established as an official language can help serve all teachers in communicating effectively with one another.

## **Creating Acceptance**

The thought of working with differently-abled students can, unfortunately, serve as a hindrance for some educational professionals. Some general education professionals can be averse to diving into fully inclusionary efforts as they can see them as an additional difficulty they will need to navigate in their daily professional lives. In order to improve as educators, we need to fight the stigma that differently-abled students are harder to work with, and creating education standards and implementing proper training regiments could serve as serious boons in that effort.

## **Preparation**

The final area that will be discussed is preparation. All of the other areas are great, but if teachers aren't given the proper time to prepare and implement all of the improvements that have been established, then it will be an ill-fated effort. At the end of the day, educational professionals are the people who are implementing all of the changes that would be made, and without a well-prepared workforce, inclusionary efforts may suffer, and in turn, so may the students.

## **Conclusion**

Creating an environment for inclusion is something that will be a continuous effort for the foreseeable future. Changes won't happen overnight, and significant changes will take a tremendous amount of effort. That being said, educational professionals are generally in the education field for the right reasons and are willing to put in the effort to do what is best for their students. At the end of the day, everything teachers do for their students, and if we truly wish to create a place where students of all abilities can come together and learn while being included in

all aspects, then not only teachers, paraprofessional, administration, school board members, students, students' guardians, and all educational support staff will need to continue to press forward and lead the efforts for inclusion.

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