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# Analyzing the Social Benefits of Inclusion for Students in Special Education

Margo LeMahieu
*Bethel University*

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ANALYZING THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS IN SPECIAL
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MARGO LEMAHIEU

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ANALYZING THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

MARGO LEMAHIEU

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Program Director's Name: Katie Bonawitz, Ed.D.

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Abstract

Inclusive education has been on the rise in recent years. Now more than ever, students with and without disabilities are in the same classroom, learning together, and creating positive relationships with each other. Inclusive education has not always been this prevalent, and there are still barriers that make it challenging for students with and without disabilities to experience inclusivity. When the barriers to inclusive education can be overcome, teachers have a big responsibility to ensure students are getting the best experience in the inclusive classroom. With the proper training and support, teachers are able to provide students with what they need to be successful, and this will help the students transition into adulthood. The literature review sought to analyze the social benefits of inclusion for students in special education. The research found was promising, but future implications could look further into the experience of the student's transition to adulthood and what the students thought was beneficial in the inclusive classroom.

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**CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

**Research Rationale**

The belief that students with and without disabilities should be in separate classrooms is becoming a norm of the past. Now in education, inclusion is something that is practiced throughout the nation. Ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general education classroom has been a process that has proven to be inconsistent and slow, but students with a range of disabilities now participate in inclusive settings (McLeskey et al., 2011 as cited in Carter et al., 2015). Students with disabilities benefit from being in the general education classroom, and the social benefits are one of the most important outcomes of inclusion. Although inclusion is becoming more common in schools across the nation, there are still barriers and differing opinions on this topic. The barriers need to be overcome in order for students with disabilities to access the inclusive classroom.

In a critical assessment of the literature on the approach taken for promoting inclusion for students with disabilities, Koller and Stoddart (2021) found that the focus of schools is on "fixing" the student and making them more socially apt to be a part of the inclusive classroom. This is done primarily through the use of social skills groups aimed at increasing the student's ability to interact with their peers without disabilities. Although social skills groups can be a positive intervention for students with disabilities, the focus should be more on the student as an individual and how the student learns best (Koller & Stoddart, 2021). This is only one of the barriers that could potentially make it difficult for a student to access the general education classroom.

Breaking down the barriers and making inclusion more accessible for every student with a disability is not an easy feat. Teachers in the general education classroom need the right

support to ensure students with disabilities are gaining the social skills needed to be successful and create meaningful relationships with their peers without disabilities (Ashby, 2012). When teachers in the general education classroom have abundant knowledge and support materials, the teachers are able to cultivate interactions between students with and without disabilities and create a sense of belonging in the classroom. Another essential topic when analyzing the social benefits of inclusion is the strategies inclusive classroom teachers can use to foster social relationships among students with and without disabilities in the classroom.

## Definitions of Terms

The important definitions in this thesis are:

### Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD)

A child with EBD exhibits one or more emotionally based characteristics based on sufficient duration, frequency, and intensity that interferes significantly with educational performance to the degree that special education is needed (McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

### Inclusive Education

The presence of positive social contact/interaction between these children (students with special needs) and their classmates (peers without special needs); acceptance of them by their classmates; social relationships/friendships between them and their classmates; and the pupils perception that they are accepted by their classmates (Edwards et al., 2019).

### Individualized education plan (IEP)

A legal document that is developed for each student who receives special education services in the United States (Farrand & Deeg, 2020).

**Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities**

Students with mild to moderate disabilities have an intelligence quotient in the range of thirty five to 70. Students with mild to moderate disabilities are able to manage personal care, but may have difficulty with communication skills. They have basic literacy and numeracy skills (Nota et al., 2019).

**Partnering for change (P4C)**

A tiered model for teaching that is inspired by Response to Intervention. P4C uses collaboration, coaching, and competency development delivered in a real context (Anaby et al., 2020).

**Persistent challenging behaviors**

Behaviors in children that result from not being ready for school and/or having social-emotional delays. Persistent challenging behaviors can lead to negative impacts on the children's educational development in school and life-long consequences (McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

**Response to intervention (RTI)**

A high-quality, tiered approach to teaching that uses evidence-based instruction, graduated supports, and capacity building approaches to support teachers (Anaby et al., 2020).

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**Research Question**

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The three topics will answer the question: what are the social benefits of inclusion for students in special education? Once the barriers are broken and teachers have what is needed to support students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom, the social benefits can be analyzed. The focus of this literature review will be on the barriers that keep students with disabilities from being a part of the inclusive classroom, what general education teachers can do to foster social

relationships among students with and without disabilities in the classroom, and how inclusion in school impacts students with disabilities in adulthood.

**CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will address the barriers that make it difficult for students with disabilities to attend the inclusive classroom and receive the social benefits of inclusion. The barriers directly align with how school staff can collaborate to support students with disabilities in an inclusive environment. Lastly, the literature review will discuss the benefits of inclusive education for students with disabilities in adulthood.

**Barriers to Inclusion**

There has been a growing trend in recent years of school districts practicing inclusion in classrooms because of policy developments and implementation (Mamas et al., 2020). While most school districts practice inclusion for students with disabilities, barriers are still present that make it challenging for students to be a part of a general education classroom.

***Student Outlook***

A prominent factor that has a strong influence on developing inclusive education in schools is the attitudes of the school community, including its students and teachers (Polo Sanchez et al., 2018). How teachers and students without disabilities perceive students with disabilities affects the value of inclusion in a school setting. When the social position of children with disabilities is known to be poor, it leads to hardships in providing an inclusive classroom experience as well as maintaining positive social relationships (Benstead, 2019).

Students with disabilities are also at risk of being bullied or excluded from social groups (Berchiatti et al., 2022). Research from Berchiatti et al. (2022) shows how the student-teacher relationship affects the student's social status and the correlation to bullying dimensions in children with disabilities. Children with disabilities have a harder time creating social relationships with peers and may struggle with social skills. Hardships the children face create a

domino effect which leads to children with disabilities struggling to make friends, and ultimately experience bullying. Berchiatti et al. (2022) found it is imperative for teachers to cultivate a feeling of acceptance and an inclusive environment of students with all abilities in the classroom in order to combat bullying behaviors. Giving the students with and without disabilities a chance to interact with each other and foster meaningful relationships is the first step toward creating acceptance.

Noggle and Stites (2018) conducted a study on the benefits of inclusion for three typically developing students. According to Noggle and Stites (2018), "The development of friendships is an important variable in the developmental trajectory of all children, regardless of perceived or measured ability level" (p. 512). Much research has been done on the benefits of inclusive education for children with disabilities, and not much focus has been placed on how children who are typically developing benefit. Using observations and interviews with parents and teachers, the researchers were able to discover the children "made social gains and demonstrated improved perceptions of peers with disabilities after participating in respective programs" (Noggle & Stites, 2018, p. 511). To supplement the observations and interviews, artifacts were collected and observed including: communication reports between the teachers and parents, progress reports, and informal assessments.

Once the data was collected from the observations, interviews, and artifacts, two major themes were found in the study: the social growth of the children who were typically developing and the positive change in how the children who were typically developing viewed peers with disabilities (Noggle & Stites, 2018). Each of the three students made gains in the first theme, social growth. The students improved in self-regulation skills and one student in particular began using words to resolve a conflict instead of being physical. Another area of social growth shown

in one of the students was patience. The student allowed for more wait time while waiting for the peer with disabilities to respond and also had more desire to share with others. One of the notes between a parent and the teacher showed that one of the students who was typically developing increased in confidence levels throughout the study. By the end of the school year, students were engaging with one another instead of practicing parallel play.

The second theme that came from the study was the positive change in the way the peers who were typically developing viewed peers with disabilities (Noggle & Stites, 2018). One of the students learned that it was possible to play a game with a peer who was non-verbal. The second student questioned the ability of the peers with disabilities, but did not make any judgments. The third student seemed to acquire a greater understanding of peers with disabilities, which was shown in the mother's report to the teacher. In the report, the child talked about the peer with a visual impairment and said the peer had nothing wrong. This study provided insight into how peers who are typically developing acquire positive outcomes from being a part of an inclusive classroom with peers with disabilities. The social growth and positive outlook allow for inclusive classrooms to be a reality. Although the study from Noggle and Stites (2018) showed positive results, some hardships and barriers need to be overcome in order for students with and without disabilities to be a part of an inclusive classroom and create meaningful relationships with each other. In inclusive education, the perception tends to be on the celebration of diversity in relation to needs and characteristics (Felder, 2021). This perception, however, can be misconstrued if not properly integrated into the inclusive classroom to create an understanding among all of the students and the student's peers.

Edwards et al. (2019) conducted a literature review on how students with disabilities, specifically physical impairments, were perceived by peers in an inclusive classroom. First,

articles were examined in search of an explicit definition of social inclusion. One article by

Koster et al. (2009) defined inclusion through three components based on peer perspectives:

positive interaction, peer acceptance, and friendship. The three components were the basis for the

Edwards et al. (2019) literature review, as this specific definition allowed the researchers to look

at the peer-related parts of inclusion. Edwards et al. (2019) sought to answer the question "What

is known about how peers without special needs (PWSN) perceive social inclusion of students

with physical impairments (SWPI) in mainstream classrooms based on Koster et al.'s (2009)

framework, and what factors influence their perception?" (p. 300).

Edwards et al. (2019) conducted a literature review which found children without

disabilities preferred to interact with other PWSN unless the SWPI was younger, at a similar

developmental stage, and could complete classroom tasks as proficiently. When looking at peer

attitudes and acceptance, the researchers found if the PWSN had a previous relationship outside

of school with the SWPI, more positive interactions and relationships occurred between the two

in the classroom. This was also true if the students had similar interests (Edwards et al., 2019).

Social pressure showed a negative impact on the interactions between PWSN and SWPI. Two

studies researched by Edwards et al. (2019) showed PWSN assumed if they accepted a SWPI

into the academic task, it would yield a negative consequence like receiving a lower grade or

being teased by other PWSN.

From the findings above, Edwards et al. (2019) suggested "providing positive

reinforcement and reducing opportunities for negative consequences may enhance peer

interaction and acceptance" (p. 314). As a result, Edwards et al. (2019) decided to explore the

third factor, friendship. Both of the researched studies consistently suggested it was essential to

match the demands of classroom tasks to the needs and abilities of SWPI. The two studies

Edwards et al. (2019) researched indicated this lowered the chances of PWSN feeling the need to protect the SWPI. Matching demand and ability can also foster positive friendships with equal roles from each child.

Another important study from Nota et al. (2019) looked into an intervention program which sought to promote school inclusion of elementary students with intellectual disabilities. The study used an intervention program created for one hundred and fifty two Italian typically developing (TD) elementary school students. Nota et al. (2019) looked at the positive and negative social behaviors occurring in a natural classroom setting between TD students and peers with intellectual disabilities.

The intervention program sought to give TD children the correct knowledge of classmates' disabilities and how it affects the classmates ability to participate in classroom activities, along with strengths and weaknesses (Nota et al., 2019). It also aimed to improve TD children's abilities to look into ways to include classmates with intellectual disabilities and enhance participation. The program sought to establish and support friendly relationships among the students and carry out play and study activities while teaching supportive and social roles among peers with intellectual disabilities.

The participants in the study included one hundred and fifty two students who were typically developing. Sixty eight were boys and eighty four were girls. The classmates with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities were eight boys and two girls that attended the regular classroom. Direct observation of the students was conducted by two researchers in Psychology of Disability and Inclusion (Nota et al., 2019). The researchers observed the social behaviors of the TD students and the interaction among peers with intellectual disabilities. In a natural classroom setting, three twenty- minute sessions in math, three twenty minute-sessions in Italian, and three

fifteen-minute sessions during breaks in instructional time were observed. Each child was observed for a total of three hundred and thirty minutes.

The researchers who observed the students for the study used a coding system which included the following behavioral categories: positive behaviors adopted, negative behaviors adopted, positive behaviors received, and negative behaviors received (Note et al., 2019). For the scoring of the coding system, the researchers looked at how often positive and negative behaviors were received for each child with intellectual disabilities once the observations were completed. One interesting aspect to this study was the peer sociometric nominations conducted among the class. The students were asked to nominate classmates most likely to be invited to a party (positive nominations) as well as those not likely to be invited (negative nominations). The scores were calculated based on the positive and negative nominations.

Once the observations were completed, the intervention began. The intervention used ten weekly didactic units (DU's), each using a different goal and being presented during different times in the classroom. The intervention was called, "Collaboration, help, and solidarity: Three ways to have a better time together". The participants were given variables which make people unique from one another. The disabilities looked at included vision, hearing, motor, and intellectual. The researchers investigated what peers with impairments can do, what they have difficulty with, and what they cannot do. The classmates' impairments were discussed along with possible restrictions in classroom activities and participation level were taken into consideration (Nota et al., 2019).

Several teaching strategies and methods were used during the intervention including social reinforcements, informational feedback, and modeling (Nota et al., 2019). The strategies allowed the students participating to use the target skills and behaviors being learned. Two

stories about a boy and a girl with intellectual disabilities were used as examples during the intervention. The stories provided positive examples of what the children participating had already learned in the didactic unit. The stories provided information about different types of disabilities that were appropriate for the developmental stage of the children participating in the intervention. This information was used in order to prevent misunderstanding and judgment for peers who may learn differently. The intervention also included role-playing scenarios where the children learned how to include peers with disabilities in classroom activities and encourage participation.

The results of the Nota et al. (2019) study found the day-to-day interactions between TD students and students with intellectual disabilities were more positive than before the intervention program. Students with intellectual disabilities received more positive interactions with TD peers which included eye contact, hugging, and smiling. The peer nominations also showed positive social acceptance among the students. An explanation for the positive results of this study and intervention program was giving the TD students a definition of impairment and actively participating in role playing scenarios. Having a clear understanding of what classmates with intellectual disabilities may struggle with and how TD students can help and create positive social relationships was a big factor that contributed to the positive results of the intervention program (Nota et al., 2019).

### *School Stakeholder Outlook*

The research Edwards et al. (2019) and Nota et al. (2019) conducted provided a look into the barriers that make it challenging for students with disabilities to experience the social benefits of being in the inclusion classroom with typical peers. Teachers' and other school stakeholder's perspectives on inclusion may also provide a barrier that makes it challenging for

students with disabilities to attend a classroom alongside typical peers. According to Hind et al. (2019), "Research suggests that teacher's perceptions of inclusion greatly influence both the way in which they manage their own classroom environment, and how they understand and interpret the support that is available to them" (p. 425).

Rodriguez (2021) conducted a multiple case study which looked into inclusive education through the lens of stakeholders within three schools who had students with disabilities in attendance. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions these stakeholders had on students with disabilities and inclusive education. The three schools examined had only girls in attendance and the population of the schools ranged from two hundred and fifty to nine hundred and fifty students (Rodriguez, 2021). Interviews were conducted with teachers, school administrators, and other members of the education staff. Parents and students with disabilities also participated in the interview process in order to support the validity of the study. A classroom observation protocol was used to understand and observe how students and teachers interact in a natural environment. The protocol also integrated the interviews conducted for the study.

The findings of this study separated each stakeholder's perceptions and gave an overview of the stakeholder's opinions on inclusive education. For school administrators, the main concern regarding inclusive education for students with disabilities was being able to provide adequate support needed due to a lack of specialized training for the support staff in the classroom (Rodriquez, 2021). Two of the three administrators interviewed expressed that students with disabilities should receive part of their education in an inclusive classroom, and the other part in a specialized classroom in order to receive the services the students need from an experienced teacher. The other administrator also believed students with disabilities should spend time in both

classrooms in order to be provided with academic as well as life skills. The type of disability and level of support needed also impacted the administrators' views on the amount of inclusive education appropriate.

The teacher's main concern about inclusive education was being able to adequately monitor progress for the students with disabilities and ensure the students are learning because of the fast pace in the classroom. Another concern, which mirrored the concerns from the school administrators, was not having enough specialized training to provide the students with what was needed to be successful based on the level of disability. Students who were interviewed had the common view: students with disabilities should be in the inclusive classroom with peers. The students who were interviewed had disabilities and needed some level of classroom support (Rodriguez, 2021). The parents who were interviewed also mentioned that the disability and its level of severity was a determining factor in how much inclusive education is appropriate. The parents also believed students with physical disabilities would be able to spend more time in an inclusive setting, whereas it may be more difficult for students with cognitive disabilities to do the same. The parents mentioned when their children with disabilities attend inclusive classroom settings, they build trust and confidence.

Overall, the results of the interview process and the classroom observations conducted found most of the stakeholders believed they would not be able to provide the students with disabilities with the appropriate services and support needed. The other concern was related to the success of the students in the inclusive classroom. All of the stakeholders had a common belief that education for all students was a human right and the stakeholders were in support of students with disabilities receiving an education (Rodriguez, 2021).

The outcome of this study gave a perspective on how school staff and other stakeholders view inclusive education for students with disabilities. The necessity of inclusive education to build confidence and social relationships among peers with and without disabilities was understood. However, ensuring staff are provided with tools and training necessary to give the students an appropriate inclusive classroom experience and the amount of time spent in an inclusive setting and specialized setting were the barriers that make stakeholders concerned (Rodriguez, 2021).

A lack of training for teachers who work directly with students with disabilities was a common theme in the research for this topic of inclusive education. Inclusive classrooms have been emerging in recent years, which has impacted the education and training teachers need in order to provide an inclusive experience for students (Minott, 2019). Ferriday and Cantali (2020) conducted a study which investigated school staff perspectives on inclusive education in a Scottish secondary school. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the survey design which included fourteen closed and open-ended questions. This allowed for the staff to give personal opinions as well as looking into statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Lack of confidence in teaching students with disabilities was a key finding in the study which directly correlated with the lack of training the staff received prior to teaching. In the survey, the staff were asked if any specialized training had been given that related to teaching students with disabilities. Fifty two percent of the study participants said formal training had been given, while the other forty eight percent did not receive any (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020).

The discussion at the end of this study explained how a lack of specialized training for teachers who have students with disabilities is directly related to the lack of funding available to schools to provide the training. According to Ferriday and Cantalia (2020), "with an increase in

the prevalence of pupils who have an identified disability as well as an increase in the extent to which pupils with a disability are placed in mainstream education settings, it makes sense that investments in classroom support, staff training and resources to support and facilitate learning should also increase" (p. 155). The teachers in this important study expressed that without the proper training and knowledge, they are not able to provide students with disabilities tools to be successful.

The studies from Rodriguez (2021) and Ferriday and Cantalia (2020) provided insight into the theme of inadequate or minimal training for teachers who provide services and support to students with disabilities. One of the main reasons for this is a lack of funding being available for schools in order to provide proper training. Barriers to inclusive education need to be resolved in order for students with disabilities to create positive social relationships with typical peers.

## Collaboration among School Staff

Once the barriers are broken, teachers in the inclusion classroom have a big responsibility to foster positive social relationships among students with and without disabilities (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). Collaboration among school staff is valuable when creating an inclusive environment in the inclusion classroom and will help foster these positive social relationships. To ensure that students with disabilities are receiving the social benefits of inclusion, collaboration among school staff needs to be productive.

### *Roles of School Staff*

The roles of the special education teacher and other educators have changed in recent years as inclusive education has been growing (Dovigo, 2020). It is becoming increasingly important for co-teaching to be effective among school staff. Collaboration and co-teaching is

also important for developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a student with a disability (Bhroin & King, 2020). In order to develop an appropriate IEP for students with disabilities who attend an inclusive classroom, the special education teacher and the general education teacher should collaborate with the rest of the team to look at appropriate goals and objectives which can be worked on in the inclusive classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is an important law that makes a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities across the nation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2023). Through IDEA, there is a multidisciplinary approach to creating an IEP for a student with disabilities. The team must consist of a person who is qualified in more than one discipline or profession and the involvement of the parent or two more individuals from one of these professions. Through following IDEA and the multidisciplinary team approach, the IEP for the student with disabilities will be appropriate and able to be implemented in the inclusive classroom.

According to Bhroin and King (2020), "the challenges of collaboration in the individualized planning process are widely documented with reports that individual education plans are not being used as a collaborative tool between parents, teachers, and other educational professionals" (p. 39). Each team member has an important role and something to bring to the plan to help the student be successful, especially in the inclusive classroom. If there is an effective IEP developed, students with and without disabilities will be able to interact and create meaningful relationships with each other. In order to allow each team member to give input during the IEP development process, opportunities for collaboration should be provided.

Even though co-teaching is a service delivery model that is widely used to support teachers collaborating in an inclusive classroom, research shows these teachers may need more

support in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities in this setting while using specialized instruction (Cook et al., 2021). Understanding the roles of each school staff member will help make this possible (Anaby et al., 2020). Anaby et al. (2020) conducted a study which aimed to provide clarification to the roles of school staff working with students with disabilities and to identify strategies that could be used in these roles to provide support.

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Partnering for Change (P4C) are two examples of tiered systems aimed at providing teachers and other school staff with information needed in order to provide students with disabilities adequate services and assistance (Anaby et al., 2020). However, not much information has been given to school staff on how to implement the systems. Conducting a needs assessment among school stakeholders will give a clear picture of the current and desired situation, which in turn will give a better understanding of how to carry out the systems.

The Group for Optimizing Leadership in Delivering Services (GOLDS) conducted a multi-phase study which aimed to explore the implementation process of services and support students with disabilities need to be successful. The researchers also looked at the roles of school stakeholders and how success of the services and support provided can be maximized. According to Anaby et al. (2020), the objective was to "develop, implement, and evaluate an intervention to optimize stakeholders' roles within a tiered inclusive educational model to favor the school success of children with special education needs (SEN)" (p. 328). This particular phase of the study investigated the actual and ideal roles of the educational stakeholders who are involved in implementing the tiered systems. This phase also aimed to understand the factors influencing the implementation of the systems from the perspective of the school stakeholders (Anaby et al., 2020).

Anaby et al. (2020) used a cross-sectional survey for this phase of the study. The participants were from three different public elementary schools and had three different school boards. Each of the schools included students with special education needs in mainstream classes as well as all school staff in the study. Gym teachers and other specialists, principals, and school psychologists were a part of the survey. The survey was mostly conducted by the school staff online, but paper copies were also presented. The survey was implemented by the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), which allowed the school staff to expand on the aspects of roles that are effective as well as areas that need improvement. The survey included fourteen questions: four multiple choice, three seven-point Likert scale questions, and seven open-ended questions. The multiple-choice questions aimed to "document sociodemographic information" (Anaby et al., 2020 p. 330). The Likert scale used questions aimed to identify the extent to which the school staff were satisfied with their roles, how the roles could be improved, and if the student's needs were being met in accordance with the roles of each staff member. The school staff were asked to describe ideal roles and to explain what the roles would look like. The staff were also asked to give strategies to improve the implementation of these roles and how to improve the student's inclusive classroom experience.

The main theme that came from the survey was the "request for professional services". The teachers who participated expressed the need for specialists such as school psychologists, speech and occupational therapists, and other special educators to provide additional support (Anaby et al., 2020). One of the barriers that aligned with this theme was "long wait times and lack of follow-up from a specialist" (Anaby et al., 2020 p. 336) which created a barrier when teachers were describing ideal roles. Delays in receiving services for students with special needs was also a barrier noted on the survey. Teachers expressed that if more staff members were

present to work with the students with special needs, each would be able to work individually with the students and provide more support.

Another theme presented in the survey was the need for more training and professional development for school staff. The researchers reported the need to "be better informed and empowered" in order to feel competent (Anaby et al., 2020, p. 337). The theme of teamwork and collaboration was strong in the responses. One teacher presented the idea of service providers working in the classroom alongside teachers in order to provide support to one another. The processes the school enacts need to be clearer in order for the staff to share responsibilities in the classroom and support students with special needs.  Tiered approaches like P4C encourage school staff and specialists to work together to "problem solve, identify problems early on, and try strategies in the classroom" (Anaby et al., 2020 p. 341).

The findings from the study provided insight into the opinions of school staff and actual and ideal roles. Using effective intervention strategies and tiered service delivery models is helpful when school staff understand and feel supported in each role (Anaby et al., 2020). This will ultimately better support the students with special education needs and allow them to reap the social benefits of being in the inclusion classroom. Once teachers are provided with the education, training, and support needed, collaboration with co-teachers will be more effective.

### *Collaboration in the Classroom*

Kirkpatrick et al. (2020) conducted a study which looked into how resource teachers and classroom teachers can work together in the inclusion classroom to support students with disabilities. Several teachers from a rural area in Ontario, Canada participated in this study. The teachers were from across the entire district in elementary and secondary schools. The researchers looked at three separate research questions: how do resource and general education

classroom teachers work together to support students; what are the factors that both hinder and support collaboration; and what are the benefits and drawbacks of the collaboration for everyone involved in the school community (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020)? During the 2016-17 school year, resource teachers were invited into the general education classroom to collaborate with the teacher. During instructional time, both teachers were available to assist students and to collaborate with one another. The classes varied in size and demographics, and paraprofessionals were also able to assist in some of the classrooms. Each of the classrooms had at least one student with a disability. Toward the end of the study, both teachers completed questionnaires. According to Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), the "questionnaires contained both closed and open-ended items and addressed the nature of the partnerships, the factors that supported the partnerships, the challenges faced, and the impact of the partnerships on students, classroom teachers, resources teachers, and the larger community" (p. 31).

The collaboration between resource teachers and classroom teachers revealed positive results. The most common finding was that both teachers used a strategy to pinpoint the need areas of the students with disabilities with this collaborative model through the use of separating the class into groups to work with each teacher throughout instructional times (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). One important factor to note is the time it takes to ensure these collaborations are successful. For successful practices of inclusion, resource and classroom teachers should be given an adequate amount of time to collaborate and create meaningful lesson plans along with an inclusive environment to support social relationships among students with and without disabilities.

Creating meaningful lessons and providing adaptations for students with disabilities can be a daunting task for a general education teacher to complete alone. Cook et al. (2021)

described how general and special education teachers can work together to help students with disabilities be successful in the lessons presented in the inclusive classroom. The general education teacher has knowledge in the content area instruction and the special education teacher has knowledge on how to adapt the instruction to meet the needs of the student with disabilities. The five models co-teachers could use are: team teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, station teaching, and one teach, one assist. These teaching models also benefit students who are typically developing that may benefit from a form of small group instruction rather than whole group instruction.

The first step described in the article for effective co-teaching is to determine the specific needs of the students in order to choose which co-teaching strategy will be best (Cook et al., 2021). This means looking at the student's IEPs along with the goals for the whole class. Cook et al. (2021) explained how it is important to meet the goals and objectives of the IEP, but also the specific content area standard of the lesson being taught. The co-teachers should first look at the content area standard, and then decide what the students with disabilities might struggle with in relation to the lesson in order to provide the proper modifications or accommodations.

The next step Cook et al. (2021) explained in the article is to identify professional development information that may be useful to the co-teachers when implementing the lesson and the support for the students. Using reliable resources for research is important in order to identify the most useful information. The third step in the process is to plan the instruction and decide which co-teaching model will be most useful to carry out the lesson. More than one model may be used throughout the lesson depending on what is being taught and the needs of the students. The final step is to carry out the lesson and to look back at what was successful and

what needs to be improved for next time. These steps can be used by co-teachers to deliver lessons that are successful and meaningful to students with and without disabilities.

Using specific strategies in the lessons being delivered can be beneficial for co-teachers in an inclusive classroom. According to McConomy et al. (2022), "Task analyses are useful to both teachers and students across multiple settings, including in general education classrooms for students with and without disabilities" (p. 421). Task analysis is a strategy that uses specific steps to complete a task (McConomy et al., 2022). Task analysis can be used for a wide variety of lessons in an inclusive classroom. A common lesson using a task analysis is social interactions and daily living skills. Both of these lessons allow students with and without disabilities to be successful and interact with each other in order to gain social skills. Implementing lessons using a task analysis is also an easy way for co-teachers to observe the lessons and keep track of student progress. It also ensures the students are practicing some independence through the process of marking off each task when completed. The skills the students learn through a task analysis will carry over into the transition into adulthood as well.

Another strategy that can be beneficial in the inclusive classroom is using dramatic inquiry (Farrand & Deeg, 2020). Dramatic inquiry is using drama, or role playing activities, to increase engagement and participation among students with and without disabilities. It uses active and dramatic strategies to promote inquiry learning. According to Farrand and Deeg (2020), "Dramatic inquiry is an approach that educators can incorporate into instruction to promote inclusive learning and content instruction in preschool through college" (129). It uses exploratory learning that engages the students and promotes problem solving in real and fictional spaces created in the classroom. The spaces provide opportunities for the students to experience sensory objects and materials and communicate through different modes such as songs,

movement, talk, or touch. As the students take turns playing different roles, learning and collaboration is fostered. The teacher uses the interests of the students along with curriculum guides and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals to create meaningful learning.

Teachers should provide choices and accommodations for students during dramatic inquiry in order to create a safe environment (Farrand & Deeg, 2020). An example of an accommodation for the dramatic inquiry play could be moving the class to the gymnasium to ensure there is enough space for wheelchairs. Another example would be dividing the class into smaller groups in order to ease anxiety and provide enough wait time for students who may need it. Dramatic inquiry is an effective strategy to use in the inclusive classroom to promote learning while connecting the student's interests and goals into instruction to provide the tools needed to collaborate and create meaningful relationships.

Collaboration and meaningful lesson planning for successful inclusion practice is also important in physical education classes. O'Neil and Olson (2021) discuss how to promote inclusion in the physical education setting in order to help students with disabilities "experience physical, cognitive, and social-emotional success" (p. 7). In order for positive experiences to happen, physical education teachers must be aware of what the student has mastered, what the student is currently working on, and what the student is struggling with. The physical education teachers should also be familiar with the student with disabilities IEP, although this is just a starting point. Physical educators should also have a strong support system within the school community that includes the student's parents. The support system will allow for a better understanding of the student and where modifications or adaptations may be needed in physical education classes to help ensure success.

Professional development is also important for physical educators when creating an inclusive environment in the gymnasium. O'Neil and Olson (2021) noted that many physical educators do not feel prepared when implementing inclusivity. Attending professional development training and utilizing support people, such as paraprofessionals, in the gym will provide physical educators with the help needed to make inclusivity in physical education classes possible and successful.

O'Neil and Olson (2021) explain how physical educators should promote a positive attitude in the gymnasium in order to be a role model for students and create an inclusive environment. A positive outlook should also extend into other parts of the day such as greeting students in the hallway, providing support outside of physical education classes, and having one-on-one conversations with the students. When positive behaviors are modeled, the students who are typically developing will follow and will interact with peers with disabilities in a positive way.

The development of motor skills is an important aspect of physical education classes for students with disabilities as well as students who are typically developing (O'Neil & Olson, 2021). It is the job of the physical educator to be able to provide modifications and support for the students who need it in the gym. Providing the modification and support can be an overwhelming task for some. However, attending regular professional development and utilizing the support of other support staff can help ensure success. Providing appropriate modifications during physical education classes eliminates some of the social barriers that naturally happen between students who are typically developing and students with disabilities. A feeling of empowerment ensures students will face difficult tasks and feel included among all peers.

An interesting aspect in the O'Neil and Olson (2021) article discussed the importance of implementing opportunities for students who are typically developing to experience what it is like to have a disability in order to promote inclusion and acceptance. One example of implementing opportunities would be to have the students try using a wheelchair to move around the gymnasium. When conducting activities, it is imperative for physical educators to ensure students are kind, understanding, and are able to ask questions if needed. The outlook for inclusive practices in physical education is positive and unified activities and sports are becoming popular in schools in order to promote inclusivity.

Another aspect that co-teachers collaborating in the inclusive classroom need to consider is how to help students who are deaf or hard of hearing engage in the classroom and create meaningful relationships with peers. Students who are deaf have a more difficult time being socially integrated and accepted by peers who can hear (Schwab et al., 2019). Schwab et al. (2019) conducted a study on the social participation of students with a hearing impairment and the experience in the inclusive classroom. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data for the study. The study looked at social integration, acceptance, interaction, and friendships of their students with a hearing loss compared to peers who did not have a hearing loss as either average or above average. The results found the students who were deaf or hard of hearing interacted more with other peers with disabilities and had friends in the classroom, but did not interact with a significant part of the class. The findings from the study suggest that students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to be given the opportunity to interact with all peers in the classroom and be provided with the support and accommodations needed in order to do so.

The information above provided an insight on the value of resource and classroom teachers working together to provide students with disabilities the tools to cultivate positive

social relationships among peers without disabilities in classroom and physical education activities. When teachers feel supported and feel equipped with what is needed to help students be successful, the teachers are more motivated and able to use strategies which will enhance the social experience of students with disabilities. An enhanced social experience will help the students in the transition to adulthood.

<div align="center">**Benefits of Inclusion in Adulthood**</div>

The studies presented above from Anaby et al. (2020) and Kirkpatrick et al. (2020) gave insight into the barriers and strategies to overcome the barriers related to students with disabilities receiving the social benefits of the inclusive classroom. When students with disabilities are able to be a part of the inclusive classroom and create meaningful relationships with typical peers and teachers, the students will bring the learning acquired through experiences into adulthood.

*Strategies for Success*

Inclusive education has been rising in recent years and teachers are now having to manage more challenging behaviors in the classroom (Sobeck & Reister, 2021). Even with the co-teaching methods and strategies described above, teachers continue to report feeling unprepared for managing student's behaviors effectively. McGuire and Meadan (2022) wrote an article detailing how to create an inclusive environment when students with persistent challenging behaviors (PCBs) in the classroom are present and how the benefits of creating this environment directly affect the outcomes of the students in their adulthood. PCBs can negatively affect students' school experiences and provide life-long consequences. Students with PCBs are more likely to be suspended or expelled in school because of behaviors which can lead to higher dropout rates and incarceration. Although teachers who have students with PCBs have a

challenging task, the teachers must strive to change the child's social functioning for the better by promoting a socially inclusive classroom environment.

Students who have PCBs and are not able to regulate emotions struggle to participate in the social environment of the classroom (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Teachers who create a socially inclusive environment in the classroom are better able to assist students with PCBs in overcoming hardships that come from the behaviors. It is the job of the teacher to meaningfully integrate students into the environment and make the students feel comfortable. The first way to integrate students into the environment is to establish expectations for the students related to social behaviors. Once the expectations are established, the expectations need to be maintained throughout the duration of the school year. Finally, teachers must integrate classroom activities into the classroom schedule which promote positive classroom behavior.

To promote positive behavior in the classroom, McGuire and Meadan (2022) state that the teacher should work to facilitate opportunities for the student to interact with peers as much as possible to build relationships with classmates. Times may also occur when the student with PCBs acts out or interacts with peers in an inappropriate way that may damage the relationship. When the student with PCBs acts out, it provides an opportunity for the teacher to re-integrate the student by having a discussion with the class about the child being accepted into the group again and re-establishing the social relationship between the classmates.

Teaching students with PCBs to be a part of the inclusive classroom and create meaningful social relationships with peers gives the students with PCBs the opportunity to build rapport and social skills needed in the transition to adulthood. Using the tips from McGuire and Meadan (2022) will give teachers the opportunity to facilitate relationships and social skills in

the inclusive classroom while also preparing the students with PCBs for the transition into adulthood.

While the transition to adulthood may be difficult for someone who is typically developing, it is even more difficult for someone with a disability (Davis & Cumming, 2019). A common stigma is that people with disabilities do not have a chance to be successful and may struggle because of deficits, which dooms people with disabilities to failure. Preparing people with disabilities for adulthood can lead to goal achievement and make the transition to adulthood easier (Hodkinson, 2020).

Davis and Cumming (2019) looked into strategies teachers can use to help students with disabilities, specifically Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD), be successful in the transition to adulthood. The outcomes for students with EBD in adulthood have been shown statistically to be mostly negative and only 22% of young adults with EBD live independently (Newman et al., 2009, as cited in Davis & Cumming, 2019). Identifying and utilizing effective transition strategies will allow adolescents with disabilities, specifically EBD, to be adequately prepared and supported in the transition to adulthood. The article's purpose was to give recommendations related to transitioning adolescents with EBD into adulthood and supply resources and strategies that could be useful for teachers and other school staff when transitioning students with EBD into life after school (Davis & Cumming, 2019).

Davis and Cumming (2019) found that self-determination and self-advocacy are two of the most important components that students with EBD need in order to be successful in adulthood. According to Davis and Cumming (2019), "Social skills influence one's ability to advocate for personal needs through adolescence and adulthood and are increasingly important not only to higher academic achievement, but also to attainment and retention of employment"

(p. 326). One strategy suggested was to have the student be a part of their IEP, also called the self-directed IEP. The self-directed IEP focuses on the student actively participating in the development of the IEP by the performance review, being a part of the goal setting, and asking questions.  In the self-directed IEP, the student is also able to share life goals and how to reach life goals. The self-directed IEP allows the student to take some ownership and enhance self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

Self-management and regulation training can help students with EBD be successful in adulthood by managing behaviors more effectively (Davis & Cumming, 2019). In self-monitoring, the students learn how to assess feelings and record behaviors. To self-monitor, the teacher and the student choose which behavior is going to be changed. The teacher and the student talk about how appropriate and inappropriate behaviors may be presented. The teacher will give the student the self-management system and show how to record. Both the teacher and student will record on the form to start. The teacher will praise the student for completing the form accurately and recognizing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The results of the self-management system will "help the student maintain and increase appropriate behaviors, which may lead to improved performance in academic, behavioral, and social domains in school and beyond" (Davis & Cumming, 2019, p. 326).

Another effective strategy for enhancing the social skills of students with EBD is social skills training (Davis & Cumming, 2019). Role-playing scenarios and finding alternative ways to help students with EBD control behavior outbursts is one aspect of social skills training that provides students with EBD tools needed, which will in turn, lead to higher employment rates among adolescents with EBD.

The services students with EBD receive in high school directly affects success in adulthood. Effective transition programs, being able to follow-up on former students, and providing training for teachers on transitioning students to adulthood are important factors that need to be in place in order for the students to be successful as adults. Cultivating positive teacher-student relationships is an important aspect in the successfulness of adolescents with EBD in adulthood (Davis & Cumming, 2019).

Parents of young adults with disabilities are usually very involved in the process of planning the child's transition to adulthood. While it can be a difficult transition for the young adults with the disability, it can be as equally as hard for the parents (Francis & Reed, 2018). Francis and Reed (2018) conducted a study on effective transition planning and support for young adults with disabilities and how parents can provide support in the process. Although an increasing number of young adults with disabilities attend college or postsecondary education programs, the attendance rates are still smaller than young adults without disabilities. The low attendance rates are due to a lack of effective transition planning, negative relationships between the parents and professionals, a lack of resources and support available to the young adults, and low expectations and bias (Francis & Reed, 2018). Creating an effective transition plan and starting the plan early enough can eliminate barriers to postsecondary success for the young adults with disabilities and also provide support to the parents.

For the study, interviews were conducted with twenty-two mothers and four fathers of high school graduates, who were reported to either have Autism, intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities (Francis & Reed, 2018). The interviews for the study included an array of questions to the parents that included: the parents' experience with secondary schools, how the experience was once the child graduated, caregiving responsibilities and "letting go", and

suggestions and ideas for how to yield positive outcomes for young adults with disabilities in the transition to adulthood. According to Francis and Reed (2018), "The analysis team identified seven themes or suggestions that came from interviewing the mothers and fathers: start earlier, maintain high expectations, permit choice and risk, recognize family interdependence and involvement, prioritize parent skill development and support, maximize technology, and promote inclusion" (p. 285).

The suggestion from parents for starting the transition planning earlier comes from looking at the perspective that "anyone can learn anything" (p. 286). In preschool and kindergarten, there is less of a gap between children with and without disabilities, and the outlook for starting to think about a child with disabilities future is more optimistic (Francis & Reed, 2018). Parents also suggested a guidebook or "map" that outlines services and resources available to families to start planning for the child' future before graduation. Maintaining high expectations was a theme that emerged numerous times from the interviews. The parents suggested that everyone involved in the transition planning process think of the child with disabilities as being able to accomplish anything and to be completely capable. Permitting choice and risk was something that parents brought up in the interviews as it pertained to allowing the child with disabilities to make decisions for themselves and embrace risk taking, as this is a part of life. For the theme of recognizing family interdependence and involvement, parents wanted the professionals who were helping make the transition plan to offer advice and support, but also recognize that sometimes the families may know the child with disabilities best.

The next theme, prioritize parent skill development and support, points out that parents may need to develop skills and ask for support from the professionals (Francis & Reed, 2018). Support groups with other parents were a part of this theme as well. Networking and connecting

with other families who had children with disabilities was an important aspect in the development of successful transition plans. The theme of maximizing technology brought up texting as an important factor in the young adults with disabilities being able to interact with peers while also working on communication and social skills. Skype and FaceTime are also great ways for the young adults to interact with peers while also keeping in touch with the young adult's parents. The final theme from the interviews was to promote inclusion as much as possible. Most of the parents in the interviews reported that the child struggled with inclusion in middle school and high school and were not as involved with typically developing peers. The importance of inclusion was highlighted in the study because this prepares the young adults with disabilities for the transition to adulthood and college.

The study highlighted transition planning and the outlook that parents of young adults with disabilities have as the future is being planned. This study also highlighted seven important themes that need to be addressed in order for the transition planning process to be successful and for the parents to be able to best support the young adult with disabilities in the transition (Francis & Reed, 2018). Using the themes and strategies highlighted in the section above will help the young adults with disabilities transition more successfully into adulthood.

### *Social Outlook*

When effective strategies in the inclusive classroom are used to help students with disabilities cultivate social skills and create meaningful relationships with peers, the students with disabilities will be more likely to bring what was learned into adult life.  The students with disabilities may struggle with the transition into adulthood, and it could still be hard to build a social network of people to create meaningful relationships with. Adults who have just transitioned from high school or college are less involved in formal social and physical activities

than typical peers. The lack of involvement is especially true for community-based programs, which are beneficial for the adults' health, self-help skills, social skills, and overall well-being (Loiselle et al., 2019).

Loiselle et al. (2019) conducted a study on the impact of a social circus program (specifically Cirque du Soleil) on the social implications of adults living with physical disabilities in the transition into adulthood. The authors used an exploratory phenomenological qualitative design for the study (Loiselle et al., 2019). The phenomenon of interest was the experience of young adults who have disabilities and the impact that the social circus programs have on social participation skills. The authors looked into the perspectives from the young adults as well as the parents' perspectives. A sampling strategy was used to recruit participants in the study from local rehabilitation centers and schools through advertisements and other networking. The sample size consisted of twelve young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five with physical disabilities along with one parent. The young adults in the study participated in two two-hour workshops per week over twelve sessions. The schedules of the circus program were designed to reflect real-life situations such as work schedules, social activities and outings.

The workshops took place in a community training center that was used for circus arts in order to provide the participants with a non-institutional and unique experience (Loiselle et al., 2019). There were two circus instructors who were paired up with a trained kinesiologist who took the role of community worker for the workshops. The instructors lead the participants in artistic exploration and circus skills development. The kinesiologist focused on social and life skills for the participants. The workshops were well planned out and focused on both circus skills and life skills. The participants had to abide by the rules of the workshops that included being

respectful, including others, fairness, collaboration, and cooperation. This mirrored skills the participants would need in real-life situations.

Under the category of daily activities for the participants, two themes emerged from the data: communication and mobility. Under the category of social roles, interpersonal relationships, responsibilities, and community life were the three major themes seen once the participants had completed the workshops (Loiselle et al., 2019). All of the participants showed improvement in these five areas once the study was complete. The five categories are recognized as important prerequisites needed for people with disabilities in order to be able to bring the skills into adulthood. Community based programs like the social circus program are important for young adults with disabilities to be a part of in order to learn the skills necessary to foster positive relationships and learn self help skills during the transition into adulthood.

The studies and literature review that were summarized above build on one another and lead to positive social outcomes for students with disabilities when in the inclusive classroom. The barriers and how students with disabilities are perceived in the inclusive classroom is an important topic discussed by Edwards et al. (2019). When resource and classroom teachers are able to collaborate and work together to create an inclusive environment in the classroom, as stated in the study from Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), the barriers can be broken, and students with disabilities can start to create meaningful social relationships with typical peers in the inclusive classroom. When meaningful social relationships are created, students with disabilities are able to have a more successful transition into adulthood and create a positive life (Davis & Cumming, 2019).

The research from Chapter Two discussed the barriers that make it difficult for students with disabilities to attend the inclusive classroom and receive the social benefits of inclusion.

When school staff collaborate to support students with disabilities in an inclusive environment, the barriers can be broken and the students are able to gain the knowledge and tools they need to be successful in their adulthood. Chapter three will be a summary of the literature from Chapter two, the professional application of this topic, and the limitations and future implication of the research. The conclusion will wrap up this important topic of how students with disabilities can attend the inclusive classroom to acquire the social benefits of inclusion and how this transitions to their adulthood.

**CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION**

Chapter Three will provide a summary of the literature review from Chapter Two. The summary will transition into the professional application for the research in the literature review, followed by the limitations and implications for future research on this topic. Chapter Three will end with a conclusion of the social benefits of inclusive education for students with disabilities and how the social benefits transition into the student's adult lives.

**Summary of Literature**

The literature review sought to examine the social benefits of inclusive education for students with disabilities and how the benefits transition into adulthood. Although inclusive education has come a long way, barriers are still present that make it difficult for students with disabilities to be a part of the inclusive classroom. One of the main barriers that is problematic is the way that teachers and students who are typically developing perceive students with disabilities (Benstead, 2019; Edwards et al., 2019; Minott, 2019). Students with disabilities have a harder time creating positive social relationships than typically developing peers. The students with disabilities may struggle with social skills and are at a greater risk of experiencing bullying behaviors (Berchiatti et al., 2022). To overcome the barriers to inclusive education for students with disabilities, teachers need to create a feeling of acceptance and belonging in the inclusive classrooms. Using teaching methods such as social reinforcements, informational feedback, and modeling, teachers can prevent misunderstanding and judgment between typically developing students and students with disabilities (Nota et al., 2019).

The outlook of school stakeholders is another barrier that may make it challenging for some students with disabilities to receive the social benefits of inclusive education. A lack of training for inclusive classroom teachers was a main concern in the findings from the research

provided by Ferriday and Cantali (2020). The lack of training directly correlates with a lack of funding available to schools to provide the training. With the rise in inclusive education, it makes sense to make investments in training, classroom support, and other resources to make teachers more equipped with providing a positive inclusive learning experience for all students.

Once the barriers to inclusive education can be overcome, teachers in the inclusive classroom have a big responsibility to foster positive social relationships among students who are typically developing and students with disabilities. To foster relationships, collaboration among school staff must be productive in order to provide the inclusive classroom teachers with support. Co-teaching is a service delivery model between special education teachers and inclusive classroom teachers (Cook et al., 2021). In the co-teaching service delivery model, both teachers are able to collaborate to create meaningful lesson plans, foster positive social relationships among students, and provide support to one another. Co-teaching and collaboration can be used in each subject area of a student's day, including physical education.

When students with disabilities experience the social benefits of inclusive education, the students can bring the learning acquired into adulthood. The transition to adulthood can be difficult for people who are typically developing, but can be even more difficult for someone who has a disability (Davis & Cumming., 2019). Students with disabilities should be participating in strategies and activities to prepare them. Self-determination and self-advocacy skills are two of the most important strategies students with disabilities will need as they transition to adulthood. Self-directed IEPs as well as life-skills training are effective ways to promote self-determination and self-advocacy skills among students with disabilities.

The summary of the literature from Chapter Two highlighted the important aspects of ensuring students with disabilities receive the social benefits of inclusive education and how

the benefits transition into adulthood. The next section of Chapter Three will look into the professional application of the research done in Chapter Two and how teachers can apply this research in the inclusive classroom.

## Professional Application

In order to ensure students with disabilities are receiving the social benefits of an inclusive education, educators must be given the tools and knowledge needed to implement a positive classroom environment. Berchiatti et al. (2022) found it is imperative for teachers to cultivate a feeling of acceptance in the inclusive classroom in order to combat bullying behaviors and to give each student a positive classroom experience. In an inclusive classroom, the perception tends to be on the celebration of diversity in relation to the needs and characteristics of each student (Felder, 2021). This perception can be misconstrued if the teachers are not creating an understanding among all students in the inclusive classroom. If students with disabilities are not provided with a positive inclusive education experience, the students lack the skills needed to have a successful adult life. The first step toward providing teachers with the tools and knowledge needed to implement a positive inclusive classroom environment is to provide professional training opportunities that relate to the inclusive classroom.

Professional training opportunities are essential in order for educators to gain knowledge and have access to the tools needed to create an inclusive classroom that is welcoming for students of all abilities. Inclusive education has been an emerging topic in recent years, which has impacted the education and training teachers need in order to provide an inclusive experience for students (Minott, 2019). In a study from Ferriday and Cantali (2020), it was found that there was a lack of confidence in teaching students with disabilities

among teachers. In a survey conducted for the study, it was found that about half of the teachers did not receive any formal training when it comes to teaching students with disabilities. The lack of training for teachers is directly related to the lack of funding available to schools to provide the training. The teachers in the study from Ferriday and Cantalia (2020) expressed that without the proper training and knowledge, they are not able to provide students with disabilities tools to be successful.

When there is proper funding and professional training opportunities are in place, the educators have the knowledge needed to be successful in implementing an inclusive classroom experience. Collaboration among staff is the next step in inclusivity. Special education teachers and inclusive classroom teachers can collaborate to meet the needs of the students with disabilities, foster positive social relationships among the students and their peers, and support one another in the process. The educators can also collaborate on how to make lessons in the inclusive classroom meaningful and appropriate for all students. It can be challenging for educators to incorporate IEP goals into the lessons as well as follow the state standards. The special education teacher can provide insight to the inclusive classroom teacher and they can work together to ensure each student is receiving what they need while implementing the state standards that are required. An effective way to collaborate is to utilize a variety of teaching strategies. Some of these include: team teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, station teaching, and one teach, one assist. Each of the strategies can be utilized by both the special education and inclusive classroom teacher in order to work together and ensure the students with disabilities are receiving the social benefits of the inclusive classroom.

**Limitations of the Research**

There are two major limitations in the literature review. The studies chosen for the research sought to examine a variety of disabilities and the experience in the inclusive classroom of students with these disabilities.  There are some disabilities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Developmental Cognitive Disorder (DCD) that were not examined in the literature review as a large number of disabilities exist that could be examined. One piece of information that created a gap in the research for the literature review was how teachers can overcome bullying behaviors toward students with disabilities. Acceptance is a big part of creating a positive inclusive classroom experience for students of all abilities, and research was not found on how to overcome negative attitudes that were already present.

Another limitation that was found was a lack of information about the school experience of the adults with disabilities and if they found the inclusive classroom to be positive. The insight of the adults with disabilities could be helpful in future research in order to assess how the adults felt and if they created positive social relationships with typical peers.

**Implications for Future Research**

The literature review sought to research the social benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities and how the benefits transition into adulthood. Future research could examine more about the experience of adults with disabilities and how the experiences in school prepared the adults for adulthood. The adults could provide insight into what was helpful and not helpful in school and if the inclusive classroom was a place where the adults created positive social relationships with typical peers. Research regarding the adults with disabilities transition to adulthood could be interesting to determine what could be done better in the inclusive classroom.

**Conclusion**

The literature review of the thirty one resources studied sought to address the barriers that make it difficult for students with disabilities to attend the inclusive classroom and receive the social benefits of inclusion. Breaking down the barriers and making inclusion more accessible for every student with a disability is not an easy feat, but with support from all school stakeholders along with the parents of students with and without disabilities, it can be done. The students will then be given a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as well as receiving their education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A Free and Appropriate Public Education and the Least Restrictive Environment are a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ensure that students are getting the education experience they deserve (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2023). If the barriers are not fixed, many students will be missing out on important relationships that could provide benefits in more than one way (Koller & Stoddart, 2021). Bullying behaviors can also be lessened when the barriers to inclusive education are broken (Benstead, 2019; Berchiatti et al., 2022). The knowledge and friendships that students with and without disabilities gain from the inclusive classroom will positively impact them in all areas of their lives.

Once the barriers have been broken, school staff need to collaborate to support students with disabilities in an inclusive environment and ensure the students are gaining positive social benefits. The collaboration must be effective and each school staff member who works in the inclusive classroom should work together to create the best experience for all students (Cook et al., 2021; Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). When students with disabilities have a positive experience in the inclusive classroom and create positive social relationships with their peers, students with disabilities are able to have a more successful transition into adulthood and create a positive life

for themselves (Davis & Cumming, 2019).  Educators from all over can benefit from the

research done in the literature review and help to promote a positive inclusive classroom

environment for all students.

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