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# How Inclusion Affects Students in the ELA Classroom

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How Inclusion Affects Students in the ELA Classroom

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... 3

Introduction..... 4

Review of Literature..... 6

Analysis..... 18

Application..... 21

Conclusion..... 27

References..... 30

### Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine literature based on the following question: What are the effects on the academic achievement of inclusion on regular education students, those without Individualized Education Plans or special education needs in the English Language Arts classroom? After examining and reviewing the literature on this topic, the data will be shared and used to determine if there is adequate research available and whether that research provides enough information to apply inclusion to current practice.

*Keywords:* Inclusion, Regular Education Teacher, Special Education Teacher, Paraeducator, Special Needs Student, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), English Language Arts (ELA)

### How Inclusion Effects Students in the ELA Classroom

“Disability has a history as long as humankind itself. Positive attention to disabilities, encapsulated as the field of special education, dates back to at least the middle of the 17th century when European pedants intervened with individual deaf or blind people” (Winzer, 2009, p. 1). During the 1850’s when the development of common schools began in North America children with disabilities were included in the mainstream classrooms with all students. Though it was not referred to as inclusion at the time it eventually became apparent that the idea of all children being taught together was not feasible.

Yet, almost from the outset, the founding ideology of the common school movement—all children in one classroom—quickly stumbled. When it became apparent that a common education for all students was not possible, the response was the development of special, segregated classes. Children sent into the special placements tended to show the unholy trinity of academic retardation, low intelligence, and undesirable behavior. (Winzer, 2009, p. 20)

While the term inclusion may be new, having been introduced in education only as early as the 1980’s, the idea of inclusion is much older as you note from above.

It was not until the 1990’s that inclusion was brought to the forefront of educational reform. During this time, debate arose over what inclusion meant for students with disabilities or special needs (Winzer, 2009). This continued debate brings about changes in laws and policies that continue to push schools to follow the practice of inclusion. This continued debate is one that has plagued both general and special educators alike. The need to follow policy and provide an equal education to all students as noted in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which lays out that all children regardless of ability receive an equal education in the least restrictive

environment, puts demands on educators to look for the best ways to provide for all students (NCLB, 2002). As the demand for specialized services for students with special needs grows and more and more students are being labeled as special needs the debate continues on whether or not inclusion is the most viable option for all students and not just those with special needs. “The count of students ages 6-21 with disabilities fell to a low of 5.67 million in fall 2011, but had risen to 5.83 million by fall 2014, the most recent year for which statistics are available” (Samuals, 2016, para. 2). In the United States, one in five children is labeled as a special needs student and is protected under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This means that these students qualify for specialized services and are eligible for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Samuals, 2016). With this growing number of students with special needs, the push for inclusion grows but what are the effects of inclusion on those students in the regular education classroom that do not have special needs or require an IEP.

This literature review will examine the different ways inclusion is addressed in the United States Education system and how inclusion affects those students in the regular education classroom that do not fall into the categories of the IDEA and are considered regular education students. More directly, this review will focus on the effects that inclusion has on the academic achievement of those regular education students in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. The presented research will show how student achievement is influenced when students of all classifications are integrated into a single ELA classroom setting. How has the traditional American classroom construct evolved since the early nineteenth century, so that inclusion is the focus on how inclusive classrooms can benefit or negatively affect student learning and achievement?

## Review of the Literature

### Inclusion Defined

“Inclusion is a global trend in education that requires the involvement of and collaboration between educational professionals. While educational professionals accept the educational rights of children with disabilities and the principle of inclusion - that schools should provide for the needs of all the children in their communities, regardless of ability and disability there remain significant barriers to achieving these ideals” (Hwang & Evans, 2011, p. 3). An explanation of what inclusion is, according to the website: [specialeducationguide.com](http://specialeducationguide.com), is; "The term inclusion captures, in one word, an all-embracing societal ideology. Regarding individuals with disabilities and special education, inclusion secures opportunities for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms" (Maxam, & Henderson, 2013, np). This explanation of inclusion fits the overall idea that will be portrayed about inclusion within this paper. In other words, inclusion in the classroom is grouping all students, regardless of ability or disability, in the same regular education classroom so that they can interact with each other on all levels.

In the United States, the main focus for education has been academic success for all students. Educational policies and acts that have shown support for this idea include the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA, brought into play in the in the late 1960's by President Lyndon B. Johnson, now reformed as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA signed by President Barack Obama (ESSA, 2017), which reauthorized the previously No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, issued by President George W. Bush (NCLB, 2002). Each of these pieces of legislation pushes for the academic success of all students and gives guarantees that every student receives an equal education based on their individual needs. Included are demands for students to be given high educational standards and expectations to further lead them to

academic success (ESSA, 2017). Today, in the United States, 95% of all students are educated in inclusive classrooms (Department of Education, 2013).

### **Inclusion Explored**

When students with special needs are removed from the setting of a special education classroom and are placed in the regular education classroom there are new challenges that educators face. Depending on the needs of the student and what is written in their IEP those challenges can vary. For the most severely disabled students the need for one to one assistance may be required meaning a paraprofessional will need to be hired and trained to be the one to one. This assistant will need to be able to work with the child in the regular education setting, many times without the assistance from the Special Education teacher and will have to depend on the regular education teacher. This brings up the challenge of how much time the regular education teacher will be pulled away from her other students to give time and attention to the special needs child. Also, how well equipped is the regular education classroom for that child and what special training has the regular education teacher had to be able to serve the needs of the special needs student along with the rest of her students. Specifically for ELA teachers previous training for working with students with Special Needs is not required and so most do not have any specialized knowledge training. Teachers are also already loaded with heavy demands to make sure each student is meeting certain local, state, or federal standards that they may not have enough time to work with all students, if given a student with special needs and high demands the teacher may end up taking that time away from her regular ELA students. This could impede their academic success in the ELA classroom. Sara Daren (2017) states that:

Over the past 20 years, the idea of inclusion education has faced multiple challenges.

Issues of assessment to determine student progress, academic training in special

needs for teachers and the introduction of technology into school systems, have each influenced progress. For example, an important component for inclusive education is determining how to implement classroom management for different groups of individuals in one classroom. Furthermore, developing effective instructional design methodologies presents a challenge when trying to achieve a standard in education for each student in every classroom. (para. 4)

When considering inclusion you have to take into account what inclusion looks like for students with Special Needs. In order to be considered inclusive a student has to spend 80% or more of their normal school day in the regular education setting (Dudley & Burns, 2014). According to the IDEA, students with disabilities or special needs are to be educated in the LRE or least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2015). Meaning they spend a majority or the maximum amount of time appropriate for them, in environments with their non-disabled peers. Being able to determine what the LRE is for those students with disabilities can be difficult though. Defining what the LRE is has been left broad and so is often times left to interpretation. What may be the LRE for one special education student may not be for another. Determining what effect this legislation has on those non-disabled peers has also been left to interpretation and has seen much debate.

**Advantages of inclusion.** Some of the most written about advantages to inclusion are based around the social aspect. Children are believed to benefit the most from classrooms that are inclusive. Learning with all types of students in the classroom gives those with and without disabilities that chance to interact in ways they would not had they been segregated into separate rooms. One journal article shows the perspective of students with disabilities and the advantages

they feel that inclusion provides them as noted by Bonnie Dupuis, Joyce Barclay, Sherwin Holmes, Morgan Platt, Steven Shaha, and Valerie Lewis (2006):

Students with Disabilities uniformly reported being highly motivated and fulfilled, and reported being focused and successful both academically and socially. Students with Disabilities reported better social and learning environments in inclusive settings furthering their motivation to learn and to work harder. Included Students with Disabilities reported that their learning proficiency increased with the Regular Ed Students alongside them. (p. 79)

Students have to learn about each other's abilities and adapt to an environment meant for all students. The exchange of social skills can improve student achievement and help students gain a better understanding of how differences among people can be used to work together to improve success (Daren, 2017). Inclusion can also be linked to creating a new attitude in students without disabilities, causing them to be more tolerant of others (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Inclusion can also be a positive because it creates a school culture where teachers have to work together to provide the best instruction for all students. "Collaboration requires an important amount of faith between partners and a flexible approach in lesson planning and implementation of instructional strategies" (Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016). General and special education teachers may be required to work together to help engage all students in the curriculum. Special education teachers will need to provide the general teachers with knowledge of a student's specific needs and what accommodations or modifications may need to be made to meet those needs. Co-teaching situations can help ease the demands on one teacher and provide time for teachers to meet all students' needs, both special needs and their non-disabled peers (Refice, 2006).

**Disadvantages of inclusion.** Looking at the literature on the disadvantages of inclusion in the classroom one will find a big downfall to be the lack of education and training for the general education teacher in regards to the students with disabilities. General education teachers are not properly trained and many times are not prepared to provide appropriate instruction for those students they will face with special needs (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Adding extra students to the regular education classroom can also be overwhelming for teachers that already have so much on their plates. Teachers may feel heavy demands when students with disabilities are added to their roster. The need to change their teaching to meet all students' instructional needs along with following grade level curriculum may be too much for them to handle. "General educators feel that having both students with and without disabilities in the classroom is difficult, because they are teaching students that learn from opposite sides of the spectrum" (Refice, 2006, p. 30). This creates additional stress and takes time away from their planning or instruction, which could take time away from those general education and/or special needs students. Another disadvantage is the negative emotional effect on students without disabilities because they may be uncomfortable being in a classroom with a student whose disability they do not understand. Being placed in a situation where a student may have a severe disability that can cause said student to interrupt the class with outbursts or to need extra attention, this can make it uncomfortable for the non-disabled peers; causing hesitation in learning and decreased engagement in academic success (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Peer acceptance is a large concern in terms of disadvantages. "In a large-scale study, Vaughn, Elbaum, and Schumm (1996) assessed the effects of inclusive placements on social functioning and found that students with disabilities were less accepted by peers, and the degree to which they were accepted and liked declined over time" (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996 as cited in Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 286). Students with disabilities

placed in the inclusive setting were also found to have been uncomfortable in the general education setting. Literature shows that students felt they were better served in special education pullout settings because they got more one to one time and attention from the teacher, which helped them understand the instruction being provided. These students thrive on the differentiated instruction and adapted materials and felt that in the general education setting they weren't getting those things. Not being provided with the individualized attention they need and are required to have based on the needs in their IEPs also contributed to the disadvantages of inclusion in the literature (Kavale & Forness, 2000). On the opposite end of the spectrum is the disadvantage for those students considered gifted or at a higher level of achievement than their peers. When ELA classrooms are inclusive and all students are included in the general education setting it can be a challenge to provide the needed instruction to those higher achieving students. "Moreover, when the demands of servicing students with disabilities, some severe, are added to the regular education classroom, the needs of low, average, and above-average students are often ignored" (Delisle, 1994 as cited in Daniel & King, 1997, p. 68).

***General education in the ELA classroom.*** "The 21<sup>st</sup>-century definition of literacy includes reading, writing, communicating, and making shared meaning of text" (Taub, 2019, para. 3). To look at the effects of inclusion on non-disabled students it is important to look at what the general education instruction for students in the ELA classroom looks like. The American English Language Arts classroom is generally the class where students learn literacy skills, reading, writing, literature, and more and more the use of technology for literacy related instruction (Pasternak, Caughlan, Hallman, Renzi, & Rush, 2014). The teaching of reading and English has become intertwined in education and are seen as two areas that should go hand in

hand in providing instruction to students. Robert Stevens explains what ELA consists of in today's classrooms:

Thus reading and English were conceptualized as two parts of a continuum of literacy skills including learning to read, developing fluency, developing comprehension, reading to learn information, and writing to convey information. To take advantage of the connections between reading and English and to facilitate students' ability to transfer what they learn, it is important to have one teacher teach both areas, preferably in one class. (p. 2)

ELA teachers are required to follow grade level standards for their instruction so that at the end of the year students have met those standards and are, according to the benchmarks of those standards, able to move on to the next grade level. Most of the curriculum that teachers use today is based around those standards and benchmarks and is set up to aid teachers with their regular education instruction. Instruction includes basic reading and writing skills, comprehension, fluency building, comprehensive strategies for reading, and movement to literature. Providing meaningful instructional tasks becomes an important part of the ELA teachers' preparation (Stevens, 2006). This instruction is provided through whole class lecture teaching, recitation, small group work, individual seatwork time, and at times one to one teacher to student instruction (Pasternak et al., 2014). As noted in the in the journal article by, "Teachers should not only teach comprehension strategies, but should also apply them in content area reading to facilitate students' ability to generalize them to new content and different tasks" (Stevens, 2006, p. 3). Time in the ELA classroom is built on instructing students to build on skills that will carry them into years following. Meeting standards and benchmarks gives them the abilities to further their knowledge and build their literacy education background. Times in the classroom are spent on building those literacy skills. By providing high-quality literature and engaging literacy

activities in the ELA classroom students are provided opportunity to enhance their knowledge base. “Through the use of literature, students learn about different genres of writing and become more familiar with famous, well-published authors that they could choose to read more extensively on their own” (Stevens, 2006, p. 2). Students are taught in a whole group environment at times where the teacher uses lecture methods and expects the students’ attention. Students are given individual tasks to complete to check for understanding or to progress monitor their achievement, are given small group reading or skill time and are expected to be able to function in that group setting. Students are then given one to one teacher time when the need arises or when the teacher has built that into his or her lesson or instruction time (Stevens, 2006).

*Special education in the ELA classroom.* Instruction for students with special needs in the inclusive classroom varies depending on their skill set, abilities, and the accommodations or modifications built into their IEPs. Each of the special education students may need individualized attention and instruction. Students with special needs may also require that other skills be included in their instruction, life-skills for example may need to be added to the curriculum that the regular education teacher provides. “Students with disabilities also “need additional instruction, skills, and knowledge in such areas as self-help and independent living...” (Reisberg, 1998, p. 272 as cited in Refice, 2006, p. 29). Integrating these skills into the curriculum will benefit these students by allowing them to learn skills that are essential to everyday life. Teachers in an inclusive classroom need to be given resources outside of what may be available in their daily instruction or regular education curriculum. When inclusion plays a role it is important that teachers are provided with those resources. “General education teachers may also have access to different kinds of technology such as CD-ROMs and educational videos in order to help a student with a disability learn the course material” (Brucker, 1994 as cited in

Refice, 2006, p. 27). Special education students who are placed in the regular education classroom are also required by the federal government to be included in all standardized testing. In the ELA classroom students will be given several standardized tests for reading and ELA. This means the regular education teacher will need to know what accommodations, if any, are listed in each student's IEP so that those accommodations for testing can be made. As noted by Angela Refice (2006):

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Because students with disabilities are now included in general education classrooms, they are required to take the same standardized test as students without disabilities in order to meet the state standards for student performance. However, NCLB has provided accommodations for students with disabilities, so that they are able to take the test. (p. 27)

The regular education teacher may need to work closely with the special education teacher in order to provide for the needs of each of the special education students. Regular instruction will need to be differentiated for students with special needs. Teachers may even need to modify or adapt the curriculum for those students (Taub, 2019). "Accommodations change how a student learns the material. A modification changes what a student is taught or expected to learn" (Strom, n.d., p 1). General and special education teachers may have to work together closely to be able to provide appropriate instruction and adapted curriculum for students with mild or severe disabilities. Teachers will need to provide students with the opportunities to build functional skills when in the inclusive setting. The use of evidence based practices will be an important part of the teachers' preparation when writing or planning instruction that will meet the needs of all students (Taub, 2019). Special education students' in the inclusive setting should

participate in the same activities and learning time as their non-disabled peers, even when modifications or adaptations are required. “Teachers need to create multiple means of engagement to enhance learning in the inclusion classroom (Gore, 2010). Students with academic, behavioral, and communication needs often struggle to achieve cognitive acumen and peer acceptance in the general education classroom” (Karten, 2009 as cited in Casale-Giannola, 2012, p. 28). They may need the aid of a paraprofessional or assistant depending on their disability, which will require an extra adult in the classroom. At times, the special education teacher may need to be available to co-teach or collaborate with the general education teacher in order to provide for the individual needs of the student as well. Lecture times may require the student to maintain their behavior so they are not disturbing their peers, which may mean the assistant or teacher will have to pay close attention to the student and provide reminders when they begin to show signs of that negative or disruptive behavior (Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016). “As inclusion stemmed out from the right for equal education of all children, teachers should provide education to them based on their abilities and disabilities” (Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016, p. 122). Time in the inclusive classroom should be a productive and engaging learning time for all students including students with special needs. Instruction provided should include a variety of instructional approaches to meet all of the differentiated needs.

***Classroom structure.*** The structure in an inclusive, regular education classroom will become a large focus on defining the success of the inclusion. Teachers need to provide structure that works for all students’ needs. If collaboration is necessary all of the parties involved will need to understand that and be able to participate in creating an organized and efficient classroom structure. There will need to be interaction between teachers and students, interaction

between collaborating teachers or staff, student collaboration, specific role designation for staff, support and adaptations, along with behavior management that is productive to all of the students (Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016). Inclusion sets up the classroom structure, for special needs students, with the idea that they are there to receive more exposure amongst their peers. Allowing students to experience a more social learning environment, inclusion gives students access to social interactions they would not have if they were given instruction in a special education classroom. “Therefore, an inclusive school is more focused on a place to learn to live together rather than to live together to learn” (Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016). Setting up the classroom structure with this more social idea in mind helps to bring students together in ways that mimic what they may experience in real-world situations. Students learn team building and teamwork skills which provides them with opportunities to build their levels of tolerance. “In addition, both learning-disabled and nondisabled students improve their ability to communicate in social situations and develop better attitudes toward people who may not fit in” (Daren, 2017, para.6). Not only will the structure of the classroom’s instruction and design need to be taken into consideration but the layout and physical aspects will need to be a focus. As noted by Jorun Buli-Holmberg and Sujathamalini Jeyaprabhan, “The classroom environment needs to be adapted to make it barrier free and least restrictive environment for the children with special needs to move around and use the classroom facilities in a full-fledged manner” (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002 as cited in Jeyaprabhan & Buli-Holmberg, 2016, p. 124).

***Academic achievement.*** In 2002, President George W. Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB). This act became law in the United States and held schools accountable for student achievement in grades K-12. As its’ name states every child would need to be given the

opportunity and support to be successful in the classroom and schools would be held responsible to the federal government to make sure that all students were progressing academically (ESSA, 2017). Over the years, the act has been revised as schools have struggled with many of the definitions within the law. President Barack Obama, made the last revision to the law in 2015 and the act was renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Among many changes to the law are issues that addressed student equity for disadvantaged and high needs students, and requirements that all students be “taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers” (ESSA, 2017, para. 5). This means schools and teachers are responsible for making sure that each student has access to the education they will need to be successful in all areas. Inclusion is meant to be a support for this part of the revised law because it is meant to provide all students with the same or equal access to those higher academic standards. Academic achievement for those students in the inclusive classroom, which would otherwise be pulled out for special education services, is said to be higher because in the regular education setting students are pushed to reach for the higher set of academic standards. “Academic achievement is enhanced, advocates contend, when children with disabilities are expected to adhere to higher standards that usually exist in the regular classroom setting” (Daniel, & King, 1997, p. 68). Students without disabilities or the need for IEP related services, the regular education students, are seen to have a decline, in some areas, in academic achievement when in inclusive classrooms. According to a study done by Daniel and King, in regards to academic achievement and inclusion, student test scores were examined to see where they fell after their experience in inclusive settings and results were split. Students in third grade ELA had an increase in academic achievement while students in fourth grade mathematics had a decline (Daniel, & King, 1997). Other studies and articles based on the topic found similar

results; most claimed a positive impact on student achievement, overall, when students are in inclusive settings (Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006).

### **Analysis**

“Proponents of inclusion contend that with the right preparation and support, students with disabilities as well as regular education students benefit from an inclusive approach to education” (Cortiella, 2006; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008 as cited in Edward, 2011, p. 3). The research to back up this statement or the opposite, which claims that inclusion does not benefit students’ academic achievement, is not readily available. “While much can be found regarding the apparently favorable impact of inclusion on students with disabilities, little research addresses the potentially negative impact on the regular education students” (Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006, p. 75). There are many studies that have been conducted on inclusion in itself and the overall effects on students, many explaining things like social benefits, behavioral needs, parental concerns, and teacher training yet very little on how inclusion impacts the academic achievement of the regular education students. “Careful examination of inclusion-based education is clearly needed to allay the fear that invariably surrounds the practice of educating disabled students with their non-disabled peers” (Daniel, & King, 1997, p. 69). Studies on inclusion explain how students with disabilities require specialized services in many different areas depending on their disabilities, abilities, and needs. Studies like the one done by Jorun Buli-Holmberg and Sujathamalini Jeyaprabhan (2016), show what is needed for inclusion to be an effective practice in the classroom:

Special Needs Education meets the needs of children with specially designed instructional programme to compensate/overcome their disabilities/difficulties. In past, the learning requirements of these children were provided in special settings, such as

special classes, special schools and special residential schools or institutions. Recently, inclusion emerges out with the constitutional provision of equal opportunity for all these individuals. The concept of integration' stemmed out from the perspective of democracy. (p. 118)

When placing special needs students into an inclusive setting, research shows that you must consider many things. These things can include but are not limited to, the classroom structure, and the overall physical layout of the classroom. The roles of people can also be considered and include the number and need for paraprofessionals or student assistants, and teacher roles. In addition, you need to consider the learning materials, classroom instruction, and placement of students with behavioral or mental issues. As these students may have reactions that cause them to act out with or without provocation. You should furthermore look at what modifications or accommodations each student will require and who will be responsible for those, as well as whether or not the regular education teacher is trained and equipped to be able to meet the needs of all students individually (Kavale, & Forness, 2000).

Examining all of these considerations studies also looked at how well regular education teachers would be able to manage an inclusive classroom that would now include students on many varying levels of cognitive ability. One researcher, Angela Refice (2006), noted the following in regards to teacher views on inclusion:

The general educator will be working with students with and without disabilities, especially in a full inclusion classroom, the teacher may feel that she is unable to reach out and help all of her students during class time. Teachers may also feel they are spending more time working with students with disabilities rather than the students without disabilities. (p. 28)

A similar view is found in another study on inclusion practices, the authors, Kenneth Kavale, and Steven Forness note that, “Early on, general education teachers expressed some negative attitudes, especially feelings of inadequacy in dealing with students with disabilities, although they remained generally positive about the concept of integration” (Ringlaben & Price, 1981; Stephens & Braun, 1980 as cited in (Kavale, & Forness, 2000, p. 283). While much of the research has a positive vibe in regards to teacher opinion there is much debate on how teachers view and can handle the diversity and individual needs of students. Sara Daren, in an internet article shows one side of the debate, “For example, in a classroom that offers general education, one "mainstream" teacher offers a curriculum, while the special education teacher simultaneously completes the remediation process with special needs students. The argument here is that each student group may suffer academically from distraction” (Daren, 2017, para. 7).

Similar to the views of teachers in the research, the views of students were also examined. Both students with special needs and regular education students were questioned and identified to determine the views from each side. “Students with Disabilities reported better social and learning environments in inclusive settings furthering their motivation to learn and to work harder” (Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006, p. 79). Regular education students were most often noted with having positive views towards inclusion. Research shows that when regular education students are aware that they are in an inclusive classroom setting and have been introduced to their special needs peers, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their educational environment and had higher achievement (Gietz, & McIntosh, 2014). Inclusion within the research is a much debated and broad topic. There are those in favor of inclusion and those that oppose inclusion. What is common among the research though is that inclusion takes on many forms and can vary in definition depending on the reasoning behind what makes a

classroom inclusive or what interpretation of the laws, which require inclusion, provide. There is little to no research available on the specific question of this paper on what the effects are on the academic achievement on the regular education students in the third grade ELA classroom. The only research that could be found was a dissertation paper closely related to the topic. This paper looked at the effects of inclusion on students reading achievement and the author, Gloria Edwards, concluded that more research needs to be done on the overall effects of inclusion because the number of student with special needs continues to rise (Edwards, 2011). So many more students are being labeled as special needs because there is also a growing rate of noted disabilities or categories that require specialized services being created (Samuels, 2016).

### **Application**

“The realities of the general and special education nexus suggest that general education is neither ready nor willing to endorse a radical policy such as full inclusion” (Kavale, & Forness, 2000, p. 288). If the research is not readily available to make a determination of what the full effects of inclusion are on regular education students in the ELA classroom, it is hard to make a direct decision on what role inclusion will play for me in the future. As a special education teacher much of my time will be spent focusing on my students’ individual needs as dictated by their IEPs. Much of that focus will be to determine where each student will be able to gain the most out of their learning to improve their academic achievement and meet their individual goals. With laws like the ESSA, and IDEA it will be imperative that I choose the LRE for my students. As part of the IDEA, the LRE states that students with disabilities are protected under law and are to receive their education in an environment that provides them with the least restrictions and gives them the most available instructional time with their non-disabled peers. It will be my position to make decisions based on what each student needs and use their IEP along

with the laws protecting them to be able to provide them those things. Being able to recognize where a student will make the most academic progress will be critical in decisions made as to whether or not their time is more valuable in an inclusive regular education setting or if their needs are best met in the special education setting. Not only will I have to use the individual student's needs I will also have to consider staffing and the decisions of others on the IEP team. IEP teams consist of the special education teacher, the general education teachers or teachers, administration, parents, and other advocates or service providers specific to that student.

The academic implications on students with special needs and those without should be more closely addressed and researched so that teachers are able to analyze the data and make instructional decisions in their classrooms that will provide the greatest achievement opportunities for all of their students. Determining the impact inclusion has on students should not be a one sided idea, where only those students with disabilities are considered. What I have been able to learn in researching this topic has opened my thought processes and given me reason to take many different aspect of my position into consideration. Along with the needs of my students, I will have to look at how placing my special education student into their regular classroom, using inclusion, will impact the learning needs and academic achievement of their regular education peers. It will be beneficial for me in the future, as a special education teacher, to collaborate closely with regular education teachers so that together we are providing all students with equal opportunities to engage and become accountable in their learning. This will help to provide them with the ability to make the most progress towards meeting standards and benchmarks set forth by federal and state or local officials as set forth in the ESSA (ESSA, 2017). If students are all to be given an education that pushes them to achieve the high academic standards so that they are ready for college and future careers (ESSA, 2015), it will be important

to look at what environment best suits their needs. Not all students will benefit from being in an inclusive classroom and we need to take that into consideration when deciding where to place students.

Students with special needs require more from their teachers than most regular education students. Their needs are written into IEPs and are monitored by specially trained teachers, special education teachers. My role as a special education teacher is to put those students' needs first as that will be what my position requires. As I collaborate with regular education teachers, it will become my goal now to inquire and gather information on how inclusion is affecting those regular education students. I want to make sure though, that I am providing the LRE or best environment for my students but also take the needs of the regular education students into consideration. If we neglect to provide for the needs and academic progress of the regular education students then as a school, we are not providing for their needs and not leading them to success in their education. ELA is an important classroom subject for early learners. This is an area where students struggle the most, as is my experience, and so this is the area teachers need to pay close attention to. Since the research for inclusion in this area lacks it will be important for me to keep track of student achievement not only for my students but also for those third grade ELA regular education students as well. Sharing the information that is already available will be a good way to open the discussion on inclusion with other educators. I can share the knowledge and information I now have on the topic with fellow teachers and hopefully begin a pattern of working together to better facilitate for the needs of all students. We can make the determination together as to what role inclusion will have in our classrooms and the impact it may have on students. That will help to guide the way I communicate and collaborate with other teachers and will direct my instructional plans.

To make inclusion work for all students, it will be necessary to collaborate and build relationships between special education and regular education teachers. “Collaboration requires an important amount of faith between partners and a flexible approach in lesson planning and implementation of instructional strategies” (Jeyaprathaban, & Buli-Holmberg, 2016, p. 121). Teachers need to work together to create well planned instruction that is presented to students in a way that meets each of their individual needs. Many times in the educational setting teachers cannot find the time needed to be able to collaborate and so it will be important for me to make sure I put forth the initiative to find the time. Here author Angela Refice (2006) makes a good point when she states the following:

Collaborative teaching is crucial when working with students that have disabilities. The student is able to get the special attention he or she needs, and the general educator does not have to feel overwhelmed with the responsibility of teaching both students with and without disabilities. (p. 29)

Being aware of what is taking place in the regular education classrooms of my students will also, help me prepare them for what is expected. This can help to ease behavioral issues or tensions with my students that may arise because they were not prepared for what or how instruction is presented to them. Knowing the individual needs of my students and sharing those needs with the regular education teachers can also help prepare those teachers for what to expect when my students enter their classrooms. Providing teachers with that knowledge beforehand can give them the ability to prepare lesson plans that include the needed accommodations for my students and give them the chance to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classroom. I can give teachers information that may direct how they set up their classroom

or how they organize materials, or even how they layout students seating so that every student has the opportunity to engage in their learning.

Using what I have found in the research, or lack thereof, during this literature review I can better prepare myself as a teacher to make the educational decisions for my students that will best meet their needs. It will be necessary for me to also look at how my role as a special education teacher can affect students in the classroom when inclusion is at play. Further research is needed to critically determine what academic effects inclusion has on those regular education students and it would be beneficial for me to look into my role in future research. Remembering to consider what role I play, not only with my own students, but also in reaching out to other educators will be an important application for me on this topic. Giving other educators an outlook into their own role and how inclusion influences their students will add value to my career in the future. Knowing what information I can provide to them to guide their instruction and how useful my role will be in their classroom, as well, will also be another way to implement my review of the literature on this topic. Inclusion is not an easy topic to discuss when looking at the impact on all students. There are so many aspects at play that will impact student learning and achievement when considering inclusion and as I have found there are two sides. Each side has their own set of opinions with very little research to back them. In favor of inclusion are those that place value on the positive social aspect. While the opposite side of that claims that inclusion has negative effects not only socially but also academically for all students. As a special education teacher, my view will need to remain unbiased. I will need to take information from all sides so that I am considering best interests. It is my view from what I have read thus far, that inclusion should play a role in today's classrooms to the extent that all students are benefiting. Socially I want my students to feel and understand that regardless of their abilities or

disabilities they are an integral part of society as a whole. In the school setting, we create a community for our students that should mimic the outside world so that we are preparing them for life once they have completed their education. Teaching my students how they can contribute to regular society should be a focus in creating the environment with which they are learning in. The counterpart is that regular education students should also be aware and accepting of their special needs peers. They should value the role that every person will play in real life and not look down on those that have differences. My role is to provide opportunities for students to interact with each other in a way that allows them to understand their differences and become tolerant so that we are creating a cohesive community where everyone has a role. Inclusion will provide such opportunities as long as I am guiding students and using achievement data to keep track of how they are progressing.

Using the achievement data of students will give me the information I need to direct my own instruction and make suggestions as to whether inclusion will be the best option for a student and if that should be included within their IEP. Looking at each side of the topic I will be able to provide information to the IEP team that will help them understand how inclusion can and will affect the student. What views will be the most important for a student will be determined by looking at their previous data. That data will give information that will be valuable to placement and it will be my role to provide the team with ideas that include the positive and negative sides of inclusion. The data that is I will use for each student should include not only academic achievement but also behavioral issues that could influence a student's learning needs. The behavioral issues that a student has could make a difference in how I apply plans for inclusion into their goals and IEP. Collecting and using data will become an

important part of my career and will be most useful in deciding how to move forward with furthering the availability to research this topic with others.

### **Conclusion**

When discussing the term inclusion there seems to be an automatic response from those outside of the field of education that shows how little we really know about the topic. Many people will question what inclusion is before a discussion can even begin. Inclusion is, for many, a very new ideal that is not yet a common or understood term. In education inclusion is also a relatively new idea that introduces students with special needs to the regular education classroom. Students that are in inclusive classrooms are educated next to their regular or non-disabled peers. Much of the literature available on inclusion is older information that briefly describes what inclusion is and shows what inclusion means for students with special needs. There is not, however, much research at all on how inclusion affects those students without special needs. Being able to assess how inclusion affects all students is not a simple task and the lack of literature brings that to the forefront.

Being able to meet the needs of all students has been a hot topic in education over the last few years. Teachers are beginning to take a different view on how they provide instruction to their students and are taking the individual needs of each student into account when making those instructional decisions. Today more than ever educators are taking new approaches in what they use to determine what type of instruction and in what environment students will benefit the most. In order to make these determinations it will also be important to look at what role inclusion plays in each area of education. Looking into how inclusion affects the instructional needs and academic achievement in all areas of education can help in deciding the role inclusion should play in the classroom. Specifically taking a look into different subject areas for the

different grade levels and tracking the academic achievement of those students without special needs would be a valuable step. By taking a look into the different areas we can then provide more accurate data to help answer the question of what the effects are on the academic achievement of inclusion on regular education students, those without IEPs or special education needs in the ELA classroom. Examining, over a period of time, how those regular education students without IEPs are being affected by having those special needs peers in the regular education classroom should be an important part of what directs the role inclusion will play.

In using only the theory that inclusion is the ideological solution in providing the best educational opportunities for students with special needs, we are taking away important pieces to a very large and intricate puzzle. With a great lack in research and literature on the topic of inclusion, especially when narrowing it down to the specific area of regular education students in the ELA classroom, it is hard to determine what role inclusion should play in education and what the effects will be. The idea of inclusion is one that, at first glance, seems the only way to provide an equal education to students with special needs. This type of education where all students participate in the classroom together sounds like a utopian society where all people co-exist in an ideal setting. Therefore, many jump on the theory and immediately push for inclusion to be a regular part of educating students, without taking the overall affects that inclusion can have into consideration.

Students in the ELA classroom are being provided instruction that will be the foundation for their continuing education in language arts as well as other areas. Language arts provides the basics for instruction in reading and writing, two of the most important areas of skills that students need to be successful. It is important then that we look at all of the ways students' academic achievement in these areas is affected. Those students without IEPs need just as much

consideration as students with special needs and so more research, on the effects inclusion has on those students, is vital to determining the role inclusion should have in education. As with any educational decision that educators make, regarding students' needs, the effects inclusion has on students should be given more time and attention. More information should be collected and the data used to direct instructional decisions. Inclusion in the ELA classroom may not always be what is best for all students and so taking time to examine the effects that inclusion has on the academic achievement of those students is critical in providing for their educational needs.

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