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## Effects of Special Education and Feeling of Inclusion

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Effects of Special Education and Student's Feeling of Inclusion in School

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Northwestern College

A Literature Review Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

Dr. Daniela Syed

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### Abstract

The inclusion of students with special needs in a general education classroom has been a growing topic in education. This paper reviews literature that researched the effects of special education on student's feelings of inclusion in school. The literature used in this paper examines how teachers, peers, and placement effects student's experiences of inclusion. Additionally the literature examined how other countries approach special education along with the barriers special education students face. Previous research found that the peers, teachers, and placement all have a significant impact on a student's experience both negatively and positively. Italy was found to have the highest percentage of special education students who report feelings of inclusion in their schools and communities. It is important to consider the impact of the peers around them, the amount of interaction the student has with their general education peers, and the preparation and education of the teacher.

### Effects of Special Education and Student's Feeling of Inclusion in School

Inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms is one of the most contested topics in public education today (Fitch., 2003, p. 233). Legislation such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 reinforces that students be placed in the least restrictive environment. The first document to bring the importance of inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom into light on a large scale was *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* which was presented in Spain at the World Conference on Special Education: Access and Quality in 1994 (Blandul, 2010, p. 29). Stankovska, Angelkoska, & Grncaroska agree with the legislation which is that it is a student's right as a person to receive the same education as that of a student without special needs (2015, p. 311). Most special education students however, if included in a general education classroom, have accommodations or modifications that treat them differently than other general education students in the class.

It is important for us to define the inclusion and how it differs from feeling included in order to understand what is being discussed in this paper. In the education system inclusion is having a student with special needs placed in a classroom with a predominately general student population (Idol, 1997, p. 4). However for this literature review it is important to focus on the definition of social inclusion as we want to study student's feelings of inclusion and not just their placement of inclusion. Social inclusion is the amount of participation a student has in the community and the relations that students have as both individuals and as groups (Tua &

Banerjee, 2019, p. 109). It is important to make this distinction because this paper reviews literature that focuses not on the student being included in the classroom but if they feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Proper social inclusion is very important to the development of a special education student's growth of social skills and proper behaviors for their age (Schoger, 2006, p.10).

It is important to understand the benefits of inclusion for students with special needs. Inclusion gives students opportunities to build relationships, improve social skills, and have access to the same education curriculum as a student without a disability (Stankovska, Angelkoska, & Grncaroska, 2015, p. 309). There can also be benefits for general education students as well including the development of empathy, concern for others, tolerance, and become more aware of their own abilities (Majoko, 2017, p. 674). Despite all these benefits, there is still a concern if students with disabilities truly reap the benefits of inclusion.

Even in a school where inclusion is practiced, there are classrooms where special education students do not have a sense of belonging (Fitch, 2003, p. 237). This sense of belonging is important when creating an inclusive environment for students with special needs. Inclusion settings provide opportunities for students with special needs to establish friendships and role models for socialization which could increase their social behavior, self-esteem, and sense of community (Girli, 2013, p. 23). However, if students do not develop positive and strong relationships with their peers it may cause them to feel isolated and lead to feelings of loneliness (Girli, 2013, p. 24). As shown, least restrictive environments can either be very beneficial to a student's education or very detrimental depending on whether they feel included or secluded in

their setting. How a student performs in a least restrictive environment is not an A plus B answer and must be looked at closely when assessing each student. The results of a study by Klinger, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, showed the importance of considering each students placement individually because each student has their own unique needs (1998, p. 148). This paper will look at the effects of special education on student's feelings of inclusion in school. The literature discusses if students in an inclusion setting truly feel included in the classroom and school.

## Review of Literature

### Teacher Impact

Teachers have a large impact on the success of a student with special needs in an inclusion classroom. In order to improve upon a special education student's experience, teachers must be knowledgeable about appropriate instructional practices, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and curriculum differentiation (LeDoux, Graves., & Burt, 2012, p. 20). This is why it is important to continue to educate teachers who have special education students in their classroom through professional development days and continuing their education. In order to support teachers with special education students, there needs to be good communication between professionals, support services for the teachers, and continuing professional development programs (LeDoux, et. al., 2012, p. 27). Just like in many other areas of teaching inclusion is continuing to adapt and new research is coming out so teachers must continually be learning and growing in the area.

**Teacher Preparation.** Having students with special needs in your class as a general education teacher who does not have much training or experience with students who have special needs can be intimidating. There are many studies on general education teachers and their feelings on teaching students and their preparation (Dogan, & Bengisoy, 2017; LeDoux, Graves, & Burt, 2012). Dogan & Bengisoy interviewed teachers that worked in special education centers in the Turkish Republic on their thoughts about inclusion. These special education teachers stressed that the general education teachers they work with were not prepared to teach an inclusive classroom due to the fact they did not have proper support services (2017). LeDoux,



Graves, and Burt's study took data from interactions with general education teachers who teach inclusive classrooms, observations from watching an inclusive classroom, and input from general education teachers throughout the response to intervention process. Their research found that many teachers were not prepared to teach an inclusive classroom and could not properly fulfill the accommodations needed on a student's Individualized Education Plan (2012). In both studies, the major issue with general education teachers and their ability to teach an inclusive classroom comes down to preparation. The general education teachers were not taught the strategies or proper skills to well execute an Individualized Education Plan prior to teaching an inclusion classroom which sets the general education teacher up for failure. However, in a study by Shade & Stewart, they found that just one class on special education can change a general education teacher's attitude towards inclusion significantly (2001). This shows that teacher preparation for an inclusion classroom does not have to be difficult or strenuous but is often overlooked. A general education teacher having a more positive outlook towards teaching an inclusion classroom will aid in their success of teaching it because they will not detest teaching that class. In Zimbabwe they are preparing early childhood teachers by incorporating inclusion in their teacher education curriculum, giving future teachers time in an inclusive classroom, and providing available trainings for teachers who are in inclusion classrooms (Majoko, 2017). These are all opportunities that would be beneficial to general education teachers as well, as they look to teach an inclusive classroom. However this could be beneficial to all teachers because as a teacher you need to be flexible and even if you may not plan to teach an inclusion classroom your school may ask you too later in your teaching career. A teacher who is well prepared and has a more positive attitude will do a better job of including the student with special education

and can lead to better interactions between them and their peers enhancing the student's feelings of inclusion.

**Connecting with Students.** It is important for an inclusive classroom teacher to be well educated but it is also important that the teacher is able to make connections with their students. If a student and teacher have a positive relationship then it has a beneficial impact on the student's outcomes (Jones & Hensley, 2012, p. 37). These outcomes are not just in their academic scores but in the development of social skills as well. If a student views their teacher as being supportive then one can assume they hold that teacher with a positive regard and that teacher makes them feel included and welcomed in their classroom (Jones & Hensley, 2012, p. 36). A teacher may be well qualified and knowledgeable enough to teach a special education classroom but if they cannot build a positive rapport with their students the students may not be receptive of their teaching. As Jones & Hensley stated in their article a teacher can help a student feel more included and raise feelings of inclusion not by showing you are the most knowledgeable about your subject but by being supportive of that student and showing them you care for them.

### **Peer Impact**

The peers of special education students also play a major role in whether or not a student feels included within the school community. Having special education students spend time with general education students increases their sense of socialization in their school on a daily basis (Briere & Siegle, 2008, p. 9). This socialization with general education peers creates a sense of belonging and increases students feeling of inclusion. However, students who have special needs

are more likely to get victimized and bullied by their general education peers (Saylor, & Leach, 2009, p. 70). This bullying and victimization can make a student feel secluded from their peers because they do receive accommodations in their education setting.

**Implications.** The label of special education and the accommodations and modifications that students have can create a sense of seclusion from their peers. This sense of seclusion happens because if a test is given and that student has to leave the class to take it when they get up and leave it singles them out in front of their peers. If a student is solely in special education classes, this can cause and reinforce societal barriers between students with special needs and their general education peers (Kirby, 2017, p. 176). However, even least restrictive environment is not full proof in getting students with special needs connected with their general education peers. Due to a student with special needs impairments they may have a lower level of participation because they cannot do all the things their general education peers are able to do. This could cause students with impairments to be singled out by their peers and create feelings of isolation causing negative implications on their psychological development (Angelides, & Aravi, 2007, p. 477). These implications could include poor self-esteem, low self-confidence, bad self-concepts, inwardness, feeling neglected by peers, shyness, social anxiety and depression (Girli, 2019, p. 24). Girli did a study on seventy-eight primary school students who receive special education support for disabilities including intellectual disabilities, autism, and hearing disabilities and compared it to their relationships with their general education peers. Girli found that a student with a disability who has a negative relationship with their peers leads to a lack of social skills and having negative views and feelings about themselves (2019, p. 34). This shows

the importance of having positive relationships with general education peers is on a student with disabilities. This positive relationship can build a student's social skills and self-esteem leading them to have stronger feelings of inclusion with their peers.

**Bullying.** Social seclusion is not the only concern with students who have special needs and their interactions with their peers. Another fear is that a peer may physically violate and hurt a student with special needs and cause physical harm toward the student (Saylor, & Leach, 2009, p. 70). Many students deal with bullying and physical altercations at school but students with special needs are at a higher risk compared to their general education peers (Saylor, & Leach, 2009 p. 70). A study by Nabuzoka found that children who have learning disabilities were being identified by their teachers as being bullied more than the general education students in an inclusion class (2003). This concern of bullying goes beyond their social skills development and becomes a concern for the special education student's safety. In Saylor & Leach's study, researchers found that students with disabilities had much higher scores than their general education peers when tested on fears and anxiety relating to school safety, physical injury, and harassment (2009, p. 75). Safety is the second stage on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and is an important factor in a student's education whether they have special needs or not. If students do not feel safe in the school setting then they will not be able to learn effectively because they will be focused on what may happen to them or if they are in danger opposed to focusing on the lesson being taught. This physical abuse and fear of safety is a major argument against inclusion of students. Students will struggle to feel included and a part of a community if they do not feel safe within that community. Saylor & Leach suggest some ways to prevent bullying of students

with special needs by increasing how effective students are included, evening out ratio of peers with special needs and general education students, and using extracurricular activities to build relationships between students (2009, p. 78). A well trained teacher can implement the prevention strategies Saylor & Leach listed in order to better a special education students experience in the inclusion classroom.

### **Guardian Views**

It is important when looking at students feelings of inclusion to get the student's guardians perspective on inclusion. Students with special needs may share about their school experiences with their guardian. What a special education students shares with their guardian about their experiences will largely influence a guardians perceptions about the inclusion classroom since the guardian is not able to be with their child during the school day. Some fears that guardians as expressed in the research was a fear of seclusion and a lack of training for teachers.

**Seclusion.** A fear for many guardians is whether or not their students will be secluded by their peers (Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff, & Swart, 2007, p. 360). Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson's study analyzed the guardians views on inclusion for their child with a severe disability. The study found that ninety percent of the guardians had concerns that their child would be socially rejected by their peers in the inclusion classroom (2001, p. 479). Due to all the implications a child with special needs typically has, a guardian desires their child to be accepted by their peers in many cases (Yssel, et al., 2007, p. 361). A study by Yssel and colleagues studied guardians views after their student had been in an inclusion room and many of those

guardians found that acceptance of their child by their peers was not a problem and in many cases students stopped recognizing their child's disability (2007, p 361). This acceptance by their peers and losing the label of "special education" will lead to students having a greater feelings of inclusion in school.

**Teaching Deficiencies.** Many of the issues that guardians had was not that their child was being excluded, but rather the lack of training by teachers (2007, p. 361-362). As a guardian if you do not feel like the person teaching your child is capable of doing so then you will not trust them with you student. This lack of trust can create tension between parent and teacher and potentially effect the student's experience. In the research of guardian views of inclusion it seemed like most of the fears came from guardians whose children had never been in the inclusion classroom. Guardians whose child had been in the inclusion classroom had far less fears about the acceptance from peer. Many guardians think the inclusion of their child should not be based upon their participation with their general education classmates but focus more on the educational setting and how it interacts with both the students and the families' characteristics and ethics (Palmer et al., 2001, p. 482). Families want to know that the student is not only learning academic things but are learning correct behavior and proper social skills for when they interact with people.

### **Placement**

A student's placement can play a big part on their feelings of inclusion in the school. Research by Jones & Hensley found students who are placed in resource rooms where over half their day was spent with general education peers engaged more with their general education peers then that of students in a special education only classroom. One third of the students in the

resource rooms also participated in extracurricular activities such as band or athletics which gave them more interaction time with their general peers (2012, p. 40). These students getting involved in things like athletics and band create more connections with students and more connections to the school which will increase their feelings of inclusion. Students who were in inclusive classrooms on average scored higher in feelings of autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization than students in self-contained classrooms. From this we can infer that interaction with general education peers can influence self-determination positively (Jones & Hensley, 2012, p. 45). Jones & Hensley also discovered that students in self-contained classrooms were more dependent upon their teachers than students in the resource room (2012, p. 47). A sense of dependency could potentially hinder a student's feelings of inclusion because they feel they cannot leave their teacher because they are dependent upon them. This inability to reach out and make new connections limits their ability to get involved elsewhere in the school community.

### **International Approaches**

It is helpful to look to other countries and the approaches they take to include students with a disability. Looking at other countries provides data that helps determine if strategies other countries are using has a better or worse effect on student's feelings of inclusion. If there are better feelings in foreign countries than that of America then maybe modeling what that country is doing may be beneficial to students with special needs in America.

**European Countries.** Blandul's research compares how many students are included into the general classroom and how much their peers accepted them socially in four different European countries including Romania, Spain, Italy, and Poland (Blandul, 2010, p. 29). Italy and

Spain both put significant focus on the education of the teacher in the area of inclusion classroom as well as integration of most students. This differs from Romania that focuses on just integrating students with students who have mild learning difficulties and students who have medium or severe learning difficulties attend special schools (Blandul, 2010, p. 30-31).

Blandul's results found that despite the country that the student with a disability was going to school in, out of the large sample of students with special needs in general classrooms, not a single one felt like a leader in any aspect of the class (2010, p. 33). This indicates that students do not feel as if they have much say among their peers or control in the direction of the class.

Bandul also found that despite not feeling like a leader in their classroom, many of the students with special needs in Italy still felt accepted by their peers which was more than in Romania and in Spain. Bandul argues that Italy's higher rate of acceptance could be linked to the fact that Italy has little to no separation of students with special needs and general education students. This lack of separation has made inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom normal and general students do not view students with disabilities as "special education students" (2010, p. 33). If the inclusion of students with special needs became normalized the stigmas that follow these students would not have the same effect anymore. Also students wouldn't feel different from their general education peers and feel more included as a 'normal' student.

**Zimbabwe.** Majoko ran a study that tested how well 28 early childhood teachers were prepared to teach an inclusion classroom in Zimbabwe (2017, p. 671). Zimbabwe first began to include students with disabilities in general education in 1994 and initially struggled with teachers not being qualified to teach the students with disabilities. Since initially including



students with special needs, Zimbabwe has focused on the education of the teachers in the area of the inclusion classroom (Majoko, 2017, p. 672). During Majoko's study, teachers stated that the main problem with inclusion is handling students with disabilities behaviors, rejection from general education peers, finding additional time to plan modifications and accommodations, and the children's parents not being motivated to help out with the student's education (Majoko, 2017, p. 672). During the interviews, Majoko found that majority of the participants reported that inclusion benefited their students with disabilities on not only an academic level but also a social level as well. These teachers not only shared the benefit of the disabled children but found inclusion beneficial for general education students as well teaching them to treat others that are different from them equally (2017, p. 682-683). This is significant for the inclusion of students with disabilities because if general education students can see students with disabilities not as a lesser or different but as equal, it can greatly help a student's feelings of inclusion. If this can be done in early childhood then general education students will not see special education students in separate classrooms from their own. This will not allow general education students to develop the stigma that special education students are different and belong in a separate classroom at a young age and inclusion in middle schools and high school may be easier because the students already view them equally.

### **Alternative Inclusion**

Alternative Inclusion is the idea of including special education students with general peers thought methods other than inclusion through the classroom. Literature was analyzed to see if alternative methods of inclusion may have a more positive impact on students with special needs than tradition classroom inclusion. An alternative to inclusion in class in which a student

can build relationships with their peers is through inclusion in extracurricular activities including sports, clubs, etc. Some methods of alternative inclusion that were discovered comprised of inclusion through sport, activities, and bringing general education students to the special education classroom.

**Unified Sports.** One example of alternative inclusion is the Special Olympics Unified Sports program which puts general education students and students with disabilities on a team together in athletic competitions. A study by Beiere & Siegle on the Unified Sports program found that when interviewed, all of the participants shared positive feelings toward the program after participating in the program. The results from the survey's given to the students showed a positive change in both social and physical self-concepts (2008). The concept of getting students included more in extracurricular instead of the classroom could be more beneficial for student's social development. In a program like Unified sports, general education students have to sign up to work with the students with disabilities and choose to be there and participate with them. This is different from an inclusive classroom where students do not have a choice if they want to work with a student with a disability but they were just put in a class that has special education students in it. The willingness to work with students with special needs means that students are prepared for the challenges they may come with working with students with special needs and have accepted that and still want to partake in the program. General education students who want to be there and work with the special education students will bring a more positive attitude to the experience and will want to work with the special education students. The general education students desire to work with special education students and their acceptance of them will aid and increase special education students feelings of inclusion.

**Sponsored Clubs and Activities.** A positive place for special education students to get good social interaction time with general education peers is clubs or activities being held at their schools. Having a student get involved at the school opposed to clubs outside of school is there most likely is a professional teacher supervising the club or activity. If a student gets involved in a club outside of school there may not be a professional educator there to monitor the students. Allowing students with special needs to pick a club or activity allows them to connect with a general education peer about an interest they have in common (Jones & Hensley, 2012, p. 47). Having this common ground allows for the students to strike up conversations with their peers about something they are comfortable with. These interactions can aid in developing a student's feelings of inclusion because they will feel more connected to the school and other students besides the ones in their special education classroom.

**Reverse Inclusion.** The Reverse Inclusion Program brings general education students into the special education classroom in an effort to give students with special needs social interaction with their general education peers (Schoger, 2006, p. 5). Schoger discusses the success of this program depending on if the proper general education students are selected to be involved, a good plan for the interactions between the students, activities that are appropriate, and a way to develop and measure goals (2006, p. 5). Some of the benefits Schoger found in results of their study that the students included in the program showed great improvement in social behaviors, special education students began to reach out to general education peers outside the program, and increased participation and communication skills. Despite many benefits Schoger discussed some challenges they had during reverse inclusion which had mostly to do with scheduling students to come in and planning activities (2006, p. 5). The benefits of reverse

inclusion directly impacts a student's feelings of inclusion positively and all of the negatives did not affect the student but did put more stress on the teacher. Through reverse inclusion students felt empowered to reach out and build relationships with general education students (Schoger, 2006, p. 10). Them being empowered shows that they felt confident socially and felt included in the school community and their peers to the point they could reach out to others around the school. This participation with their peers around them and in the school community shows that reverse inclusion can have positive effects on the student's feelings of inclusion.

In many of these alternative inclusion models there was a lot of benefit for the student with special education needs and their social inclusion. This increased social inclusion demonstrates that the student is being more involved in the community around them and are building better social skills and relationships. Through these skills and relationships students will begin to feel more included in the schools system because relationships directly impact how well someone feels included. This arises the topic of alternative inclusion methods potentially be more beneficial for student then traditional inclusion. However, this topic would need more research done on it.

## **Barriers**

Students with special needs will face barriers that their general education peers may not have to face while at school. All students go through barriers but there are some that are more specific to special education students. These barriers could lead to special education students feeling different or secluded from their peers because they do not go through the same barriers.

Some barriers that were specific to students with special needs included communication, academic performance, social construct, and stigmas.

**Communication.** The research indicated a pattern that may describe why students with disabilities feel secluded from their peers without disabilities. An individual with a disability may have barriers communicating whether it is due to a speech impairment, hearing impairment, or an inability to relate to their general education peers because of a lack of social skills (Blândul, 2010, p. 34). Saylor & Leach mention that the characteristics that make it hard for students to communicate are hard to change and often are directly caused by their disability (2009, p. 77). It is hard for general education and special education students to form a relationship when they struggle to communicate and understand one another. This is why some of the seclusion that special education students feel may not even be intentional by the general education students. This communication barrier may be hard to overcome but if a teacher implements activities to promote positive interactions with their peers it could help bridge the communication gap between students with and without disabilities (Okpareke, & Salisbury, 2018, p. 134). If a teacher can set up activities that allow general and special education students to communicate easily it can help to start communication between the students. Once these students began to communicate for an assignment it may open up other conversation topics and allow for the student to work on their conversation skills and build a connection with the student.

**Academic Performance.** It is a societal norm to associate school success with the achievements that a student accomplishes while in school. Due to students with disabilities often being behind their peers academically and not seeing as much success their peers often see students with special needs as being lesser and are not as accepted. Due to their low academic

achievement when students pick groups for a class assignment students with disabilities are often left out and one of the last picked to be in a group (Blândul, 2010, p. 34). This feeling of being the last picked can affect a student's feelings of inclusion negatively due to the fact of them not feeling good enough to be a part of a group with their peers. When a student with special needs is left out of the groups they often feel inadequate and singled out because many other students all have a group besides them. This seclusion from groups decreases their feelings of inclusion just because they may not perform as well academically as their peers.

**Social Constructs.** There are previous social constructs that create this view that special education students are different than general education students. Kirby (2017) talks about this in their article and states that based upon the way society views special education students it creates barriers for them and that they must overcome. Kirby also states that the idea of special education is to fix a deficit that a student may have because of their disability (2017, p. 177). These preconceived views and the idea that special education students need "fixed" causes people to view them differently. Students with disabilities can tell that they are being viewed differently or are being treated differently than general education students and creates a feeling of seclusion. This feeling of seclusion is what teachers should attempt to avoid when working in an inclusion classroom. Kirby gives some ways that may aid in getting rid of the social constructs that are put in place including removing labels, teacher preparation plans, reliable assessment, and instruction that is based upon data (2017, p. 177). These are all possible ways to get rid of the prebuilt social constructs and help in making students feel more included.

**Stigmas.** There are many stigmas that go along with being labeled as a special education student and placed in a special education classroom. These stigmas create lowered expectation for students with a disability which contributes to the stigma the students have (Kirby, 2017, p.183). These stigmas can cause students to have lower grades, put forth less effort, lower academic self-efficacy, have a more negative mood, and have less feelings of hope (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006, p. 140-141). Teachers should be trying to enable the students and create an environment in the classroom that raises a students' belief in their abilities and not reinforce the doubts they already have. The lower expectations on students can lead to them feeling secluded as well because they do not feel like they can complete something affecting the student's self-efficacy and feelings of acceptance (Kirby, 2017, p. 183).

### **Gaps in Research**

There are some gaps in the research where more studies could be done that would benefit students in helping them feel included in their classroom. This research could be beneficial to how we approach inclusion in our schools to create the most positive experience we can for a student with special needs. Some areas where there are gaps in the research is which models of preparation for teachers is the most effective, differences between disabilities and their feelings of inclusion, differences on feelings of inclusion at different ages, and if it is more beneficial to include students in class or is there a better alternative to inclusion.

**Lack of Preparation.** Lack of preparation of general education teachers to teach an inclusion classroom was a common factor across many studies. However, there is little research on what types of preparation works the best. It may be worthwhile to put teachers through

different kinds of preparation such as classes, observation hours, or professional development session and assess their abilities to teach an inclusion classroom and their levels of preparation. This study would help to determine which form of preparation is the most effective for preparing teachers to teach in an inclusion classroom. This could be a study that takes multiple groups of teachers and puts them through one of the methods and tests them on how they felt about their preparation and the feelings of their students on their inclusion experience. This not only gets the view the teachers experience of each but the views on how effective it was from the students that are in the class.

**Disability Differences.** Another gap in the research was differences between disabilities and their feelings of inclusion. There are studies that may test two or three disabilities against one another (Girli, 2013; Saylor, & Leach, 2009) but it is not the focus of the study and there are many other disabilities that could be tested against one another. With each disability there is a different challenge so it may be necessary to compare how these challenges affect a student's feelings of inclusion and if one disability is more aware of their feelings of inclusion than another. This would be a very extensive study because of the wide variety of disabilities and some small sample sizes depending on the disability. This could still be a beneficial study to understanding what levels of inclusion benefit one student with a disability compared to that of a student with a different disability. This research will allow a special education teacher to better assess what may be the best educational settings for a student with a disability during an IEP meeting.



**Age Differences.** Most research found tested students in similar grades or in the same building and compared them. It would be helpful to do some research to see at what grade level students start to develop awareness for their feelings of inclusion. It could also be beneficial to see if general education students start to treat peers with disabilities differently from one grade to the next. This could help us to understand what grade levels would be the best for inclusion. A broader study could also be done to compare the differences between elementary, middle, and high school to see the different trends at each academic level. This could be useful when trying to better educate general education teachers in an inclusion room because you could specify their training and education of an inclusion classroom to the level they are teaching.

**Alternative Inclusion.** Another topic that arose in this literature review that could use more research is in what settings inclusion is most beneficial. There was not very much research on the positive and negatives of inclusion in extracurricular activities (Briere, Donald, & Siegle, 2008). Extracurricular activities is a great way for students to build relationships with their peers. Stronger bonds are often formed in extracurricular activities then in the classroom so it would seem important we focus on inclusion of students with special needs in them. I think it would be beneficial to the special education community to do research on the benefits of inclusion in extracurricular activities verses those of inclusion in the classroom. A study could be done that surveys a sample of students who are only in inclusive classrooms and a sample of students who are strictly in the special education room but are involved in extracurricular activities. It would be interesting to compare the student's feelings on their inclusion setting to see if there is benefits to one verses the other. There could be a third group that is both in an inclusion

classroom and included in an extracurricular to see if it is beneficial for them to be both and see if being in both will improve academic and social abilities. Some other inclusion methods that could use more research is reverse inclusion. Do the students get the same social benefits by bringing general education students into the special education classroom as they do going into the general education classroom. I did find on research study on this by Schoger but would like to see more done as this study had very positive results. The last area of inclusion I would like to be tested is student's inclusion in a church setting. How can students being involved in a church setting such as youth group or bible studies help their feelings of inclusion at school? Students being involved in a church group may give them chances outside of school to connect with some of their classmates and give them familiar faces to connect with at school.

## Conclusion

This publication's contribution to the topic is bringing together literature that discusses the student's feelings of inclusion and what we can do to improve the student's feelings. This literature analyzed these articles side by side as a search for the answer. While a definitive answer is not available because each student's case is different and will need to be individualized to them. This doesn't mean there are common themes that can be analyzed in order to find a common practice that may help students with their feelings of inclusion. Based off the literature researched in this paper some common themes that reoccurred such as the need for better education of teachers on inclusion practices, early inclusion of students with special needs, and inclusion outside the classroom. Many of the articles discussed the lack of education for teachers in the inclusion classroom so it is important we find ways to better educate inclusion teachers. Some possible strategies could include personal development sessions, courses at a college, or requiring more special education courses for all students looking to major in education. Having better educated teachers could aid in making the student feel more included because they will better incorporate them into class with good inclusion strategies so they feel less singled out during instruction or activities. Getting special education students included in a general education setting during early childhood may be beneficial to their level of inclusion later on. By getting students with disabilities in the general classroom at an early age not only helps grow the individual with a disabilities social skills starting at a younger age, but also helps general education students see students with disabilities being in the classroom as a norm. This normalization of the inclusion classroom will help general education students to see them as their peer and not give them a chance to develop the idea that special education students need to be

treated differently. Almost more importantly than getting students with disabilities included in the classroom is getting them included in the community. Getting students with special needs involved in their community allows them to continue to work on their social skills and build relationships outside of the school setting. This could also lead to more deeply rooted relationships being built between the child with a disability and their peers. Inclusion can be scary for a child with a disabilities but if done right can be very beneficial and can increase a special needs feelings of inclusion in the school. From the research most cases where a student is in the inclusion classroom they see benefits in both social skills and academic growth but still may not always feel accepted and included by peers. This makes it important to know the proper peers you are choosing to place a student with a disability with that will make them feel included.

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