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## Enhancing Social Behavior of Children with Autism in an Inclusive Classroom

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*Dominican University of California*

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**TITLE PAGE**

Enhancing Social Behavior of Children with Autism in an Inclusive Classroom

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in  
Liberal Studies

Dominican University of California

by  
Alexandra Rovira

May 2014

**SIGNATURE PAGE**

This Capstone Thesis has been presented to and approved by the Coordinator of the Liberal Studies/Teacher Preparation Program and the LS 4001 Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Liberal Studies.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Though laws relating to including children on the autism spectrum and general education in public school settings are in place, inclusion of students is still not a widespread practice in all elementary classrooms. This study examines the social needs of children with autism and in an inclusive classroom. Children with autism are often placed in separate classrooms in the elementary school. This study examines the positive social behaviors that come from having children with autism in an inclusive elementary classroom. Questions for this research are as follows: What are useful methods to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom? How does the emphasis on all positive social behavior affect all students in an inclusive classroom?

A review of the literature reveals specific approaches to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom are effective. The research also supports that all students benefit in the area of social development in an inclusive classroom with a focus on positive social behavior.

This study follows a qualitative approach by selecting and interviewing teachers on their experiences in instructing students in positive social behavior in an inclusive classroom. These teachers were purposely selected to participate in individual 30-minute interviews because they have experience with teaching autistic students.

Results indicated that there are many useful methods that teachers can use to enhance the social behaviors of autistic students in an inclusion classroom. Additionally, having autistic students in an inclusive classroom is beneficial for the autistic student and the general education students.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Growing up with an autistic younger brother, I always worried about how he would respond in primary school. Would he make friends? Would he be placed in a normal classroom? Would he be about to succeed? Students with autism and other special needs socially may act different from normal student. As my brother grew up and was preparing to attend primary school I noticed some social behaviors that were not normal. He needed extra clarification, had trouble understanding jokes, grew upset easily, and was shy. As my brother entered primary school he was placed in a classroom with normal students. He faced some troubles and needed extra help, but eventually got used to the patterns of the day. Socially he had to adapt to the proper ways to handle disagreement, but by being placed in a normal classroom learned how to face his problems. By being placed in a classroom with normal students he was not given extra treatment when he misbehaved. He received the same consequences as his peers, which made him feel connected to the normal students. Having a brother with autism made me question the importance of explicitly teaching social behaviors to students with autism in an inclusive classroom.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are many children who need accommodation in order to be successful in the classroom. Now that children on the autism spectrum are included in general education classes, educators must be aware of their social and emotional needs.

In the general classroom, teachers and students are often unaware of the needs of a child on the autism spectrum. This paper focuses on the social needs of a child in the context of a classroom, interacting with peers.



Since 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Students, Public Law 94-142 (Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 Law symbol 94;142) opened public school classrooms to children who were typically excluded from these settings because they had handicapping conditions. The law states that students with special needs are to be placed in an inclusive classroom.

While the law is in place, inclusion in the original intention, is not in effect in all schools in the United States. Many educational professionals feel that because autistic students have poor social behavior they are not capable of participating in an inclusion classroom (Strain, Wilson, & Dunlap, 2011). The research supports the premise that children with autism are able to improve their social interaction skills using select strategies that are documented as affective practices.

Unfortunately, students with autism are often separated in special classrooms and kept apart from the general education students due to their poor social behavior skills. Students with autism do not learn how to interact socially if they do not have access and modeling by their peers. Teachers who know and apply effective strategies that address positive social behaviors are able to promote improved behavior in their students.

I review approaches that can help students with autism improve their social behavior in an inclusive primary classroom. My research describes approaches to help reduce behavioral problems of autistic students who are placed in an inclusion classroom.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because the focus on promoting positive social behaviors helps all children in an inclusive classroom. In addition, it is important because it addresses the major problem of the negative effect where students with autism are isolated from mainstream students. Also, the study identifies different techniques teachers can use within an inclusive classroom.

By integrating students with autism in an inclusive classroom, it is possible to see improvement in social skills development in all children. Children with autism have the opportunity to learn appropriate ways to interact with other students. Additionally, students with autism may internalize proper social behaviors in a communal environment.

Children with autism who are separated from their same age peers have limited access to role models in the area of social skills development. This segregation may lead to different levels of social development. By placing children with autism in an inclusion classroom they learn at a young age how to collaborate with others. Additionally, all students in an inclusive classroom have the opportunity to learn from each other and to understand similarities and differences across abilities and social development. Students learn how to work together and be inclusive.

Teachers who have children with autism included in their classroom face a challenge if they are not aware of appropriate strategies to enhance social behaviors. Often teachers are not educated about successful methods to use when dealing with social skills development in students with autism. This study informs and demonstrates effective techniques to enhance positive social behavior in children with autism.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper is to describe techniques that enhance the social behavior of children with autism in an inclusive classroom. These techniques provide the classroom teacher with options to promote positive social skills for children with autism, as well as, others assigned to the classroom.

### **Background Information**

Autism is found under the group of developmental disorders called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASDs). Researcher Diana Friedlander describes most children diagnosed with autism to having difficulties in social areas. These difficulties consist of picking up cues from their environment, the ability to form typical relationships, and language (Friedlander, 2009, p.141). Autism in children is becoming more common; researchers understand that autism affects about 1 in 166 children born in the United States. (Friedlander, 2009, p.141). Friedlander explains that,

When a child is diagnosed with autism, a lack of social or emotional reciprocity in his or her classroom experience causes the most impact. The social aspects of childhood and school come easily to most children, but not to children with autism. Children learn to thrive and grow in their environment by watching and copying others; however, those who have autism often fail to make these social connections. Their isolation causes them to remain inexperienced in a world of comparably savvy children and can make adolescence an endless maze (Friedlander, 2009, p.141-142).

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the emphasis on positive social behavior affect all students in an inclusive classroom?
2. What are useful methods to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom?

### **Definition of Terms**

According to NetPlaces: Parenting Children with Special Needs (2012), the term inclusion classroom refers to the idea of a regular education classroom that is made up of typically developing students and those with special needs.

### **SUMMARY**

From my interest in the social behaviors of autistic students in an inclusion classroom I arrived with two research questions to discover different methods to enhance the social behaviors of autistic students. Additionally, I discovered an emphasis on positive social behaviors and their effect on all students in an inclusive classroom. Though autistic students should be placed in an inclusive classroom, many districts are separating general education and autistic students into different classrooms. This study is important because the focus on promoting positive social behaviors helps all children in an inclusive classroom. In addition, it is important because it addresses the major problem of the negative effect where students with autism are isolated from mainstream students

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The review of the academic literature included an examination of peer reviewed articles published in academic databases. This section is divided into the following topics: Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) Strategy, Approach #2 of Assessment, Strategies, and Growth of Autistic Students, LISTEN Strategy, and FBA and NCA Strategy. The following articles address effective strategies that promote positive social behavior in children with autism in an inclusive setting.

### **Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) Strategy**

The biggest problem that children with autism in an inclusive elementary classroom have is poor behavior. Behavioral problems include: tantrums, aggression, and noncompliance. Researchers have found that the best way to address behavior problems is to have a functional behavioral assessment and environmental modifications in plan. In order to accomplish this task the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) was designed. “PTR was designed as a standardized model based on the principles and literature of applied behavior analysis and on the practical process of positive behavior support.... PTR relies on research-based assessment and intervention strategies,” (Strain, Wilson, & Dunlap, 2011, p. 2).

The PTR was assessed in five school districts in Colorado and Florida with 247 students participating ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. Though the research was focused on students with autism, the PTR used special and general education students; including a total of forty-eight percent of the participations with a disability. The article also gives examples of

students from the experiment. It describes background information, handicaps, and behavioral and academic performances in the classroom.

The PTR required five steps to prepare the team before entering the classroom: teaming, goal setting, PTR assessment, intervention, and evaluation. These steps can be difficult because it calls for participation, targets what causes a child's behavioral problem, and figuring out the best way to fix the unacceptable actions. After each student has been evaluated, strategies to prevent, teach, and reinforce are developed and put to the test in the classroom. These steps are the most importance because it involves interaction with the student. The prevent stage gives the student a tool to avoid behavioral problems. For example, a solution kit can be given to the student. A solution kit has index cards with ideas written on them for proactive decisions to make in class. The teaching stage then teaches problem-solving skills. Reminding students to check solutions is part of this stage. Lastly, reinforcements help students stay on the path to better classroom behavior. Having a reinforcements stage allows the student to come familiar with making positive choices and eventually getting rid of the solution kit. PTR also required graphing of each child's behavioral problems from baseline, during the PTR, and the follow up. Each example from the article shows a major drop in behavior problems.

The article connects to my capstone because my focus is on autistic and regular students in an inclusive elementary classroom and the article uses students with autism for their study. In addition, the research is a credible source with useful data. The data also informs it's readers on the behavioral issues the child faces, the strategy the team uses to address the behavioral problem, and the outcome of the the child's growth. Though the PTR is time consuming and takes a lot of time and support from others, I feel that it is an excellent resource to use for special and general students in an inclusive elementary school.

### **Approach #2 of Assessment, Strategies, and Growth of Autistic Students**

When autistic students are placed in a primary classroom with regular students, their social skills and self-concept grow while their aggressive behavior diminishes. Research shows that by having special needs and regular students in an inclusive elementary school classroom benefit both parties. Both types of students learn how to socialize and work together in a classroom. The article shows that, “Inclusion provides a normalized environment for students with special needs in which there are opportunities for establishing friendships and role models for socialization,” (Girli, 2013, p. 2).

In the study, students with autism were examined based on their social skills, self-esteems, and aggressive behaviors. The study was taken place by placing 78 special needs students into classroom with regular students. These special needs students’ social skills, self-esteem level, and aggressive behavior are tracked and graphed throughout the year. By having special needs and regular students together in an inclusive classroom, students with special needs’ basic social skills increased as they learn to communicate and work together. By becoming familiar with the extra help special needs students need, regular students become familiar with the proper way to communicate and the classroom feels more like a community.

When special needs students’ basic social skills grow their self-esteem develops and aggressiveness level lowers. The results of the study show that, “the social behavior, academic skills, self-esteem and sense of community of students taking inclusion education are more developed than those students educated in separate environments,” (Girli, 2013, p. 3). The article informs its readers that the concept of self is identified by not just the emotions and thoughts of the individuals, but also his/her peers, friends, teachers, and others around. The time when a child, whether with special needs or regular, begins to self develop is during the

schooling age. By having special needs and regular students in the same classroom they become comfortable with each other and learn to socialize which will help a special needs student's self-esteem.

As special needs students and their peers and teachers learn a comfortable and productive way to communicate and work with each other the aggressive behavior lowers. Special needs students feel familiar and comfortable in the normal classroom and tend to not become angry and aggressive. By having a positive relationship with their peers and teachers, students with autism not only appear to have better emotional skills, but also it has been observed that their physical appearances can improve. These physical appearances can be vague, but by having more confidence it can be physically portrayed in their posture, facial expressions, etc.

The article connects to my capstone because my focus is on the social skills of autistic and regular students in an inclusive elementary classroom. This article shows evidence of the improvement in social skills, self-concept, and aggressive behavior of autistic students when placed in a classroom with regular students.

### **LISTEN Strategy**

Students with autism tend to struggle with social interaction and communication compared to regular students. Autistic students' inability to understand social customs and age-appropriate behavior can lead to social isolation and frustration, (Al-Shammari, Daniel, Faulknert, & Yawley, 2010, p. 2). The article shows that the intervention program LISTEN prevents the occurrence of inappropriate behaviors and improve the social behavior of autistic students.



The intervention strategy LISTEN is an acronym for listen, interact, study, training, emulate, and normalize (Al-Shammari, et al., 2010, p. 4). The acronym helps autistic students remember the proper behavior they need to show in the classroom. When applying the LISTEN strategy the teacher must follow five steps in order to achieve the goal of better behavior from the student.

To begin the program, the teacher first goes over what behavior the student will be learning and what is expect from the student. By going over the anticipated behavior, it allows the student to get a better overall view of the process. Next, the teacher introduces the new behavior by having a peer model. By doing so the autistic student will then get a visual of how the proper behavior should be performed. After watching a peer perform the proper behavior the autistic student will get the chance to practice the new behavior repeatedly through role play with the teacher or another student. In the future if the student is in a situation familiar to the role-play he/she can think back to how they handled the situation properly. Then, the student's assimilation to the new behavior will be assessed. Lastly, the student will be given controlled situations to exploit the new behavior they learned.

At a young age students may not grasp the importance of having good behavior. To help them, compensations are used to motive the students desire for behavioral change. The article presents the example, "each time the student remained seated when a stranger entered the classroom, he received a sticker on the chart placed on his desk. Initially after earning each sticker, the student was allowed to select from a variety of tokens," (Al-Shammari, et al., 2010, p. 6).

Results from Al-Shammari's research prove that the LISTEN strategy is an effective way to modify inappropriate social behaviors of autistic students in an elementary class. Al-Shammari discovered, "the participating autistic student independently implemented the LISTEN strategy and successfully modified his inappropriate social behavior by remaining seated in the presence of a visitor," (Al-Shammari, et al., 2010, p. 8).

By putting in extra effort and working with students with autism, students with autism are able to successfully function with regular students in an inclusion elementary classroom. Strategies like LISTEN are great ways to help autistic students stay on task and fix any inappropriate social behaviors they may acquire. Although the article does not express much information on social interaction between autistic and regular students in a classroom together, it demonstrates a strategy to help autistic students obtain appropriate behavior that will keep them on task in an inclusion classroom. I feel that this article will be useful in my Capstone project because it reveals a program to help autistic students maintain appropriate social behavior in an inclusive classroom.

### **FBA and NCA Strategy**

In a regular classroom, autistic students tend to possess problem behaviors. In the article, Hart explains how of 32 autistic third grade students, 88% were diagnosed with social problem behaviors (Banda, Hart, & Kercood, 2012, p.105). The article introduced the Functional Behavioral assessment (FBA) and the Non-Contingent Attention (NCA) as options to help improve social behaviors of autistic students.

The primary purpose of the study was to conduct a FBA with an autistic student by using direct and indirect methods to determine the function of disruptive talking. The second purpose

was to apply the NCA in the general education classrooms. While the FBA portion focuses on studying why an autistic student acts out the way he/she does, the NCA figures out a plan that will help the student break their bad habits.

In this study, a third grade autistic student was placed in a regular classroom after showing he was highly verbal and on grade level with his peers without any academic modifications. After being placed in a regular classroom and not receiving full attention from his teacher, the student began acting out. His FBA recorded that he attempted to gain the attention of his classroom teacher in various settings. To obtain his FBA, an observer would sit in three different lessons: math, reading, and language arts and observe his behavior for 45 minutes each. The FBA confirmed that receiving attention from the assistant did not consistently affect his efforts to gain the attention of his teacher. He would complain about his work, yell across the classroom for his teacher's approval, and caused disruption during class. With his peers he also found trouble finding the correct social behavior. "Bryan initiated or sustained conversations about preferred topics or interest with adults or peers but had trouble sustaining conversations that focused on his communicative partner's chosen topic," (Banda, et al., 2012, p.105).

Once the FBA had been completed, it's important to focus on the NCA. The NCA is to reduce the disruptive vocalizations of the autistic student. In order for the NCA to work effectively, "the reinforcement is delivered independent of the occurrence of behavior," (Banda, et al., 2012, p.105). The autistic student's desk was moved to the front of the classroom near the teacher so he would not find the need to yell for her attention and felt secure since the teacher was close by. In addition, the teacher was easily able to check in on how he was doing. The teacher also individually checked in with him with phrases resembling, " "You are working hard!" "Do you need any help?" "Thank you for raising your hand," " (Banda, et al., 2012, p.107).

By having the autistic student sit near the teacher and having one-on-one check-ins from the teacher fixed the student's FBA that indicated the need of attention from classroom teacher.

Both the FBA and NCA are strategies that would not be effective without each other. The FBA strategy is a great program to step back and take an outside observation on why the autistic student is misbehaving, while the NCA comes up with a solution for the problematic behavior. The FBA and NCA seem to be effective approaches to change an autistic student's social behavior problems. I feel that this article will be useful in my Capstone project because it reveals a program to help autistic students maintain appropriate social behavior in an inclusive classroom.

### **Summary**

The literature review revealed that there are several approaches to enhancing the social behaviors of children with autism in an inclusion classroom. When educational professionals place children with autism in a classroom, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to provide instruction in positive social interactions between and among all students. Often teachers are not trained in addressing social emotional development with a diverse population. Affective strategies exist in the research that can inform teachers of approaches to building appropriate social skills and interactions among students. Teachers who have limited knowledge of strategies need guidance or examples of how to effectively work on promoting social skills development.

## **CHAPTER III: METHOD**

### **Overview**

This research follows qualitative design using interview protocol, purposive sample, and open-ended questions to a select group of teachers who have participated in an inclusive classroom. This research study addresses the following questions: How does integrating special needs and regular students effect the classroom environment? What are useful methods to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom?

The review of the literature identifies different methods teachers can use to promote the social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom. Additionally, informs the positive influence on social behavior that an inclusive classroom provides on all students.

### **Ethical Standards**

This study adheres to the ethical standards established by the American Psychological Association (2010) that safeguards participation of human subjects and research. Additionally, this study was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subject (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number #10220.

### **Participants**

I interviews four female teachers who have all participated in an inclusive classroom with autistic students. These teachers are from the in an urban area in southern California. These teachers range from teaching kindergarten through fifth grade. My first interviewee L.T. is a special education specialist and has been working in education for 36 years. My next

interviewee, T.R., is a Cal State University Fullerton graduate who has been teaching both second and third grade for 24 years. My last interviewee, K.T. is now a kindergarten teacher, but has also taught 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4th grade. She also has 24 years of teaching experience and graduated and completed her masters at Cal State University Fullerton.

I purposely chose to interview these teachers because I felt that they had knowledge relating to my research paper. Before I started conducting my interviews, I emailed the principal to get permission to do research in her school. Once I received her approving response I individually contacted each teacher by email in request to participate. When each teacher agreed to be interviewed I set up individual dates for each interview.

### **Procedures**

I applied and received IRB approval from the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subject (IRBPHS). From there I contacted the principal from a school that I wanted to interview teachers at. When I received her approval I contacted four hand picked teacher individually teacher in request for a 30 minute over the phone interview. Before my interviews I formulated questions that addresses the research of my study. During each interview I recorded their responses by taking notes.

### **Data Analysis**

After completing all the interviews I reviewed each teacher's response. I then searched for common themes including similarities and differences among the responses of the three interviews.

## CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

### Demographics

All my interview subjects were females over 45 years old. They have been teaching for over 24 years and have had autistic students in their classroom multiple times. They all work at the same school in southern California. The elementary school resides in a suburban area in San Bernardino County.

Special education specialist, L. T., informed me that her interest in the social aspects of autistic students came from her experience.

*I have observed and promoted students having increased opportunities to develop positive attitudes toward, tolerance of, understanding of, and true friendships with those who are different from themselves.*

Kindergarten teacher, K.T, explains that her interest arose from the following:

*When I work with autistic children I enjoy their simple and matter of fact views on things so they are interesting and rewarding to me.*

Second grade teacher, T.R., did not become interested in the social aspects of autistic students until she one of her own students had mild autism.

### Useful Methods

From my interviews I learned useful methods to ensure promoting positive social behaviors of autistic students in an inclusive classroom. L.T. introduced me to a successful technique to help autistic students practice their social behavior skills.

*I have been working with students with autism and create social stories to help them identify with situation and social norms. In order to make these come alive – I have been video taping mock situations with peers and have the students watch them and discuss them. After several times walking through scenarios, I try to have the student re-enact the situation and see himself or herself on the video. Once the behavior is clearly identified by the student, then they can try it out with a peer – or possibly teach what they have learned to another student. A sort of “direct” your own movie.*

This technique really allows students to practice real life situations that they will come across and the proper way to handle each situation. Additionally L.T. informed me that creating a visual schedule that establishes the social expectations such as the following:

*Enter the classroom and say hello to at least one friend. Pass out papers to students at your table and connect with eye contact. Ask a question at your table – regarding ..... a different topic can be provided daily such as “what are you having for lunch today” or “what did you have for breakfast?”*

Having a visual scaffold will help the students with their social behaviors until they do not need to look at the visual schedule for a reminder. By the end of the year students will not need to look at the board for guidance, but automatically perform these social expectations. L.T. explains that from these techniques regular students were able to better support the needs of an autistic students at their table and autistic students learn new vocabulary related to social skills.

Among responses from all participants a common method they explained is a simple, but effective, positive reinforcement. Teachers who use positive reinforcement in working with an autistic student in the class assist them in dramatically improving their social behavior. Autistic



students tend to grow frustrated because they usually have trouble with their behavior, knowing that the teacher and their peers support them helps turn their frustration into motivation.

### ***Impact on Social Behaviors***

Not only do inclusive classrooms improve the social behaviors of autistic students, but also general education students. In our interview K.T. explained that when autistic students are placed in an inclusive classroom:

*It helps both sets of children to accept and cherish others' differences. L.T. believes that, The benefits of inclusion may include increased expectations by teachers, behavioral modeling of normally developing peers, more learning, and greater self esteem if the child can build relationships with peers in this environment.*

T.R. explained that by having autistic students in the classroom:

*General education students learn empathy, and they often have to display good character when having the autistic student in their team. The students became caring to the autistic student.*

Overall this shows that not only are autistic students alter their behavior into having better social behavior, but general education students are also receiving positive outcomes. They learn empathy, patience, and how to work with someone who has special needs.

### **Summary of Findings**

From my interviews I learned many useful methods to enhance the social behaviors of autistic children in an inclusive classroom. Additionally, I learned that not only does an autistic student's social behavior grow in a positive way from being in an inclusive classroom, but so does the social behavior of general education students who are in the class.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this paper is to describe techniques that enhance the social behavior of children with autism in an inclusive classroom and discover if having autistic students in an inclusive classroom is beneficial. My research questions were: What are useful methods to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom? How does the emphasis on positive social behavior affect all students in an inclusive classroom?

From my review of the literature I discovered useful methods to enhance the social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom. One method is the PTR which is a five step program that starts before the team enters the classroom and working with the autistic students. This method calls for participation by the teacher and additionally helpers, but the PTR targets what causes a child's behavioral problem and figures out the best way to fix the unacceptable actions. (Strain, Wilson & Dunlap, 2011, p. 2)

From my interview with T.R. I discovered that when autistic students are placed in an inclusive classroom, not only do the autistic student's social behavior improve by being in a natural setting and working with general education students everyday, but also general education students learn empathy. General education students often have to display good character when interacting with an autistic student in their classroom.

Data from the review of the literature and the three interviews addressed my research questions. I found useful techniques to enhance the social behavior of children with autism in an inclusive classroom and discovered that having autistic students in an inclusive classroom is beneficial for the autistic student and the general education students.

### **Limitations**

For my sample my interviewees were chosen by convenience and not a random sample. Additionally, all my interviewees teach in the same district and may not generalize to other populations. This gave me a small sample size for the purpose of this study. As a result, the findings only apply to a small setting in a school district in Southern California.

### **Implications**

#### ***Practical Implications***

Further researchers may want to find useful methods that do not require outside support when enhancing an autistic student's behavior in an inclusive classroom. It appears that in my review of the literature all methods require outside support and help, but not all districts and classrooms have access to outside help. It seems that a future researcher should look into techniques that the classroom teacher could perform on his/her own.

#### ***Research Implications***

Further researchers may find it helpful to observe multiple autistic students in an inclusive classroom, as well as autistic students in a special education classroom and compare their social development. Additionally, a future researcher may compare general education students who participated in an inclusive classroom with general education students who did not.

Furthermore, there are many useful methods to use when enhancing an autistic student's social behavior. A future researcher should continue the search in finding increasingly successful methods of promoting social behaviors. Lastly, because I had limitations to interview teachers who all teach in southern California, a future researcher should interview

other teachers from other areas and states, while using the same questions and compare the answers.

### **Conclusions**

In assessing the starting point for this research project from the initial formulation of research questions, I learned that this field is quite large. Other professionals have examined the importance of teaching social skills to students with autism. There are many resources that teachers can use to enhance the social behaviors of autistic students, some which require little prior knowledge of the social behaviors of autistic students. Lastly, when autistic students are participating in an inclusion classroom, the social behaviors of general education students also are enhanced. In the process of completing my research project I gained knowledge on enhancing the social behaviors of autistic students in an inclusive classroom.

### **About the Author**

Alexandra Rovira is a junior Liberal Studies Major at Dominican University of California. Born and raised in southern California Alexandra moved up to northern California to receive her teaching credential. She has always been interested in students with special needs, especially young children with autism, with a particular focus on helping them succeed in the classroom.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Please tell me how your interest in the social aspects of autistic students came about.
2. What are useful methods to enhance social behavior of autistic students in an inclusive classroom?
3. Describe what worked with these techniques.
4. Did you use the same techniques with general education students when they acted out? If so, describe the result in terms of changing student behavior.
5. What are the positive social behaviors that come from having children with autism and general education in an inclusive elementary classroom?
6. As you think about our conversation today, with a focus on identifying strategies that teachers in the general classroom can use to enhance social interaction behavior of autistic children, what would you add or suggest to someone who is in the initial stages of becoming a teacher in the public schools?