University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Graduate School of Professional Psychology: Doctoral Papers and Masters Projects

Graduate School of Professional Psychology

5-26-2015

The Effects of Inclusion Classrooms on Students with and Without Developmental Disabilities: Teachers' Perspectives on the Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Development of All Students in Inclusion Classrooms

Allison E. Evins

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/capstone_masters

Part of the Psychology Commons

The effects of inclusion classrooms on students with and without developmental disabilities: Teachers' perspectives on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of all students in inclusion classrooms.

A DOCTORAL PAPER
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

BY
ALLISON E. EVINS, MA

Abstract

In education settings, inclusive or mainstream classes are resisted at the secondary level and there is little research about the possible positive aspects of including students with and without disabilities or an Individualized Education Plan in classes together. In order to better understand the potential benefits of mainstream classrooms, it is important to understand the perspectives of teachers who work within these high school settings. The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of teachers and describe the development that teachers see in inclusive classrooms. Interviews with four teachers revealed insights on mutual learning between the two groups of students, the challenges to making inclusion work effectively, and the social, emotional, and behavioral development that occurs for all students within an inclusive, mainstream classroom. The goal of this paper is to inform educators about the potential for growth among all students when students with disabilities are integrated at the high school level, as well as to raise awareness about the need for additional support for teachers within these settings.

Review of the Literature

In a culture where the population of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other Developmental Disabilities seems to be rapidly growing, or being identified more frequently, understanding the obstacles and challenges faced by these individuals is also gaining importance. As children and adolescents with some type of disability navigate the school system, the social and emotional deficits must also be recognized and addressed (Whalen & Henker, 1985).

A 2004 amendment to The Individuals with Disabilities Educations Act (IDEA) places disabilities in the school setting into one of the following categories:

> mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as 'emotional disturbance'), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (118 STAT. 2652).

Specifically, a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder can have a huge influence on the functioning of a student. For example, individuals with autism may have social deficits, a lack of emotional awareness, and may display somewhat distracting behaviors due to the nature of their diagnosis. However, any diagnosis can affect learning and development for a student.

Nationally, during the 2011-2012 school year, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 13% of the student population participated in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), an increase from 8.3% during the 1976-1977 school year after the implementation of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). An IEP is designed to help the student with the difficulties described above; however, it requires work and implementation by the teacher, administrator, and parent (Lee-Tarver, 2006). For the

purpose of this paper, the terms IEP and disability are used interchangeably to describe students with a developmental disability. Additionally, the study uses the terms *mainstream classrooms*, *general education classrooms*, and *inclusion classrooms* to describe the classes that include both students with and without a development disability.

Students with a disability may appear more different than their typically developing peers, due to the delays or deficits present. However, all students are being increasing placed in general education settings (Holloway, 2001). Currently, the common method is inclusion, which Foreman and Arthur-Kelly (2008) describe as an effective way to promote an inclusive, welcoming, nondiscriminatory, and open education for each student. Despite the delays and deficits of individuals with disabilities, the benefits of inclusion on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students have been studied in depth at the elementary school level, although less research has been conducted at the secondary level. Limited past research suggests that inclusion is viewed more negatively by secondary level teachers (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Yet, the same obstacles faced by disabled elementary students are often still obstacles at the high school level. This paper will focus on high school inclusive practices to address the gap in the literature and counter some of the resistance of inclusion at the secondary level. Additionally this paper will focus on how social, emotional, and behavior differences affect inclusive education and how these areas developed further by being included in a mainstream classroom.

Diversity in Disability

While inclusion is popular, not all students with disability may experience the same benefits by being placed in a mainstream setting as individual differences may also

affect the success of each student. For example, the level of severity of a student's disability may affect his or her success in an inclusive setting. Research shows that "higher functioning children demonstrated development growth in inclusive classes, and lower functioning children made greater gains in specialized classrooms" (Holohan & Costenbader, 2000, p. 226). This suggests that mainstream classrooms may not provide the same potential opportunity for growth, as the level of impairment caused by the student's disability may affect success.

Additional personal factors, such as gender, may also influence the degree of success within inclusion classrooms. Semrud-Clikeman and Schafer (2000) stated that, as children age, females tend to initiate more social interaction than males. Similarly, a study by Saarni (1999) suggested that females typically have more encouragement to talk about their feelings than their male counterparts. Therefore, females with a disability may gain more social benefits from inclusion than a male the same age. These studies suggest that not all students with a disability have the same experience and progress by being included in a general education classroom. Inclusion classrooms have found general acceptance. Successful placement is affected by the severity of disability and other personal differences, which may be one reason that this practice is often met with resistance at the secondary level.

Social Development

The differences in social skills may also be a cause for resistance for placing students with a disability in mainstream classrooms, as social impairments are often present with many of the disabilities described in IDEA. Richardson, Tolson, Huang, and Lee (2009) indicate that one of the main reasons students struggle socially is because they

have never learned adequate social skills or behaviors. The capacity for social reciprocity is often less developed in individuals with Autism and can also be under-developed in individuals with a traumatic brain injury or lower cognitive functioning, as well as other disabilities. Additionally, "students who ha[ve] disabilities [are] socially isolated" within general educations classrooms (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998, p. 124).

On the other hand, conflicting research suggests that in inclusion classrooms, "over half of all initiations were made by [individuals] with disabilities" and "[students] with disabilities made approximately two thirds of social related initiations" (Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz, 2008, p. 485). This suggests that, within inclusion classrooms, exposure to general education students may promote social development and prosocial behaviors that otherwise may be lacking when surrounded by other socially impaired students. For students without a form of disability, there are also some social benefits. Further research by Lindsay, Proulx, Scott, and Thomson (2014) indicated that inclusion provides the chance for non-disabled students to learn tolerance and appreciation for their disabled peers. The benefits are not only apparent for those students with disabilities, but also those without.

Another reason for high school teachers' apprehension may be that the social skills needed for sustaining friendship are more complicated for older children than for elementary students (Dunn, 1996). Again, this could account for the more negative views and less successful inclusion at the secondary level than at the primary level. The complexity in development of social skills is more apparent in general for adolescents and perhaps the growth in this area is less measurable for older students.

Emotional Development

Semrud-Clikeman and Schafer (2000) stated that emotional development is important for students because it can be affected by peer relationships. Because school is a crucial part of daily life for children and adolescents, its impact on the emotional competence of students is also huge. Research on inclusion classrooms for preschool children revealed that lower functioning children learn social and emotional skills at the same rate in inclusion and self-contained classrooms, while higher functioning disabled students made more progress in inclusive than in segregated classrooms (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000). This suggests that inclusion classrooms may have the potential to be a significant factor in the emotional development of students of all functioning levels.

The differences between the impact of peers on preschool and high school students' emotional development is less researched, but as high school students strive to fit in with their peers, the peer impact is likely to also be significant. Due to the effect of others on emotional competence, it is important that the environment be supportive and positive, regardless of whether the classroom is self-contained or inclusive.

Behavioral Development

Another contributing factor to the resistance of inclusion is behavior in the classroom or school setting. For teachers, there continues to be a challenge when addressing maladaptive behaviors within the classroom. Szymanski (2012) stated that challenging behaviors can be effectively managed through understanding the cause of a student's behavior and working to prevent a behavior before it starts.

Yet, behaviors are not only problematic for the child exhibiting the behavior, but also all students in the setting. Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, and Scott (2013) stated that not only are disruptive behaviors distracting for a majority of the students, another

difficulty is explaining the behavior so that the other students understand that some students need more structure and attention to control their behavior. This speaks to the impact of behavioral problems on every student in the general education classroom, as behaviors are more apparent and disruptive for other students. Arceneaux and Murdock (1997) stated that much of the resistance to inclusion involves the disruptive nature of many behaviors. However, they suggested that there is a positive change of behaviors in students with disabilities due to pressure from typically developing peers.

There are some inconsistencies in research about the increase of problematic behavior, as conflicting research implies that there may not be an increase in acting-out behaviors, as students in inclusion classrooms do not experience more suspensions or detentions as a result of their behaviors than their counterparts in pullout classes (Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). A majority of the research continues to highlight the importance of peers and influences of peer pressure and how peer pressure can foster development in students. An important goal for children with disabilities who display inappropriate behaviors is to learn and develop more appropriate behaviors after exposure to students without disability who display more socially accepted behaviors.

Understanding Inclusion

To counter much of the resistant attitude that many teachers hold, it is important to better understand what makes a more successful environment. As mentioned previously, the prevalence of students with disabilities being placed in the mainstream classroom is increasing, and as a result, understanding the effects and benefits for inclusion is also becoming more important. Inclusion is now currently a common method of practice and is mandated by federal law (IDEA). However, each inclusive or general

education setting still has diversity depending on the services and accommodation for the individual students. It is important that inclusion practices continue to prioritize the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students with and without disabilities and make the experience beneficial for all. To ensure that this is a focus, teaching inclusion includes the use of many other resources to increase the quality of education. For example, Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, and Algozzine (2012) write that inclusion classes are the most beneficial when teachers and service providers are "collaborative and consultative" (p. 482). The most successful general education classrooms include teachers, co-teachers, paraprofessionals, and educational support to facilitate inclusion and adapt instruction for those students who need more educational assistance (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). This is needed to ensure that all students are met at their developmental level so they can optimally benefit from interaction and educational material.

Challenges with Inclusion

Understanding the negatives of inclusive education is also crucial in order to adequately address the challenges of inclusion at the high school level. Within general education classrooms, there are still difficulties and obstacles to face when incorporating children with disabilities into the mainstream classrooms. The benefits have been explored, but teachers are the main source of evaluating and understanding ongoing challenges. These obstacles that are most apparent for teachers are "understanding and managing behaviour; socio-structural barriers (i.e., school policy, lack of training and resources); and creating an inclusive environment (i.e., lack of understanding from other teachers, students and parents)" (Lindsay et al., 2013, p. 347). This suggests that, while

inclusion is often seen in a positive manner, there continue to be challenges in making it the most beneficial environment for students. Success within a mainstream class with students with disabilities requires much more work for teachers than in alternative special education environments.

Another problem remains for the special education teachers, regardless of whether they teach in an inclusion class or in a special education class. A qualitative study by Shoho and Katims (1998) found that "special education teachers reported higher levels of alienation than general education teachers" due to feeling "more stigmatized and less connected to the school value system than general education teachers" (p. 9-10). It is possible that these feelings of alienation experienced by special education teachers are often passed on to special education students. Another potential benefit of including more students with disabilities in the general education system is that more teachers may also be included and feel more connected within the school system. Sixty-four percent of support professionals within the inclusion classrooms indicated the need for continued professional development (Liston, Nevin, & Malian, 2009). These challenges with inclusion seem to become more problematic and prevent inclusion at the secondary education level.

There continues to be resistance as teachers worry about "the time and effort necessary for implementation" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Although the argument that inclusion is more difficult and time consuming for teachers is likely true, the social, emotional, and behavioral benefits for all students within the classroom are profound. McDonnell et al. (2003) emphasizes these benefits by noting that adaptive behaviors are improved for students with a disability as a result of inclusion. The practice of including

students with disabilities and those without disabilities in the same classroom should

continue, yet teachers' reports of their experiences highlight the importance of also

providing more, well-trained support in working within these classes.

Perspectives of Students

As children with disabilities are incorporated into mainstream classes, the

students' experiences should also be explored. Some past research aims to provide this

perspective. In 2005, Broer, Doyle, and Giancreco interviewed students to learn about

their perception of inclusion. This study mainly focused on the perspectives of students

who had the support of paraprofessionals. They often felt stigmatized for having this type

of support and believed that it prevented opportunities for peer interaction. Additional

research focused on interviews of students and their perceptions of having students with

disabilities within the general education classes. The overall perception was not

unanimous, but some students without disabilities preferred that other students with a

disability received specialized, rather than inclusive, education. Additionally, most

students with disabilities relayed that the work was not appropriate and they needed more

assistance through special education classes (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Students also

see the positive and negative effects of inclusion, and their preference is not always clear.

It is important to understand whether the positives outweigh the potential harm and to

implement inclusive practices that are beneficial for all students.

Gaps in the Literature

Few studies focus on secondary inclusive education. Research is lacking in the

area of secondary education. Lindsay et al. (2014) explain that more research should

focus on the older students with disabilities "as most studies to date have focused mainly on elementary school children" (p. 120).

Also, most of the published research on the importance of inclusion classes has been conducted by educational researchers, while there is little research looking at the psychological development of students. It is crucial to understand how schools works to include all students in academic work, but understanding the effects of inclusion on individual students' social, emotional, and behavioral development is equally important.

Another reason for needing more research at the high school level is that there are a number of inconsistencies in finding successful inclusive strategies in high schools, despite the success of the same strategies at the elementary level (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Further studies are needed to focus on the challenges and experiences of high school teachers, highlighting positive examples of inclusion.

Regarding student development and progress, Lyons, Cappadocia, and Weiss (2011) emphasized the need for future research to explore the social development and skills of students inside and outside of inclusion settings. Perhaps gaining input from secondary education teachers will help us better understand the developmental effects of inclusion for the high school students. Secondary education teachers with firsthand experience in inclusion classes can serve as valuable resources for those attempting to understand the results of inclusion for all students.

Research Question

Qualitative research with teachers with first-hand experience can promote more in-depth understanding of the interactions and the potential psychological growth and development of the students. Researchers rarely ask teachers to comment on the positive

benefits of mainstream or inclusion classes for their students. Past research has focused

on the challenges for teachers, but there needs to be a shift toward work based on

teachers' perspective of the psychological growth they notice with their students. While

implementation is important, the students' well-being and progress in social and

academic skills is one of the most important goals of inclusion. The present study will

focus more on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of all students and less

on the educational benefits or detriments of inclusion or mainstream classrooms. This

study addresses the following question: What are teachers' perceptions of the effect of

inclusion classrooms on the social and emotional development of students with and

without disabilities? The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the

effects of inclusion classrooms on the development of students with and without

developmental disabilities.

Method

The research method employed in this study was derived from Consensual

Qualitative Research (CQR), which focuses on numerous individual experiences to find

consistencies within the information (Hill et. al., 2005.) Hill et al. (2005) stated that

> The essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in
> semistructured data collection techniques (typically in interviews), which allow
> for the collection of consistent data across individuals as well as a more in-depth
> examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data
> analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at
> judgments about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one auditor to check the
> work of the primary team; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-analyses in the
> data analysis. (p. 196)

The purpose of CQR is to find consensus about ideas, allowing the researcher to

construct an accurate picture of the participants' experiences (Hill et al., 2005). The steps

to analyzing data and the terminology for categorizing data were modified from a CQR

method; however, as there was no research team this does not qualify as a true CQR study. It will aim to highlight teachers' understanding of the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students in these classrooms and will provide a descriptive picture of the work for those outside the education setting. Other qualitative methods use observation or attempt to form a theory based on the data. CQR was chosen for this study because the study did not aim to make conclusions, but rather tell the stories of individuals with first-hand experience working in inclusive settings.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants in the study were recruited from two Arkansas high schools. It was important to ensure that the teachers chosen for the study taught students from the same grade levels in order to construct a more accurate picture of this group's issues. A list of high schools from one geographical area in Arkansas was compiled, and the principals at public school districts were contacted by the researcher to help recruit participants for the study. Additionally, each administrator at the school was given a script to be included in emails to teachers, as well as sample flyers to be posted in teacher prep spaces. Each participant had to meet certain criteria, including teaching 9th-12th grade in a public school setting and teaching in classrooms that had students with and without IEPs. The participants for this study were four teachers, with a variety of experiences, from two schools. The study participants included mainstream teachers of elective and core classes, as well as an inclusion teacher. The participants were offered a gift card for their time and effort.

Measures

The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions and included follow-up questions and probes (See Appendix). Unlike with traditional CQR, only one researcher conducted this study, with guidance from her committee. The researcher and her committee developed questions that addressed the teachers' experience, challenges of teaching in mainstream classes, positive and negative interactions between students, students' behavioral changes, and student socialization.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver approved the study. Participants gave written consent before the interview was conducted, and additional written permission was obtained from the principal at each school. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study and names were not included on the interview transcripts.

Procedure

Participant interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Transcriptions of the interviews were then sent to the participants to allow them to assess their accuracy. The participants were also offered a follow-up interview to provide clarification or to share other ideas that may have arisen after the initial interview. Some participants offered clarification on the interviews, while others had no requests for changes to be made.

After corrections were made to the transcripts, the data were analyzed to find common themes and ideas. The terminology and categories for the ideas were the main component taken from CQR, although these steps were followed by an individual researcher rather than having a research team reach a consensus. According to Hill et al. (2005), it is important to form domains, which involve finding main topics within the

data, and to then develop core ideas, which includes breaking the topics down into few words that remain close to the original participants' words. The third major step is cross-analysis, which identifies categories that are found within the domains and core ideas. Through cross-analysis of the transcripts, team members reach consensus about the wording for the categories and they must agree that each idea fits into a specific category. Consistent with CQR, each core idea was also placed into the following categories based on the frequency with which they occurred: *general, typical,* or *variant* (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Hill et al. (1997) suggested that ideas that apply to all cases are rated as *general, typical* ideas are those found in at least half of the cases, and *variant* ideas are found in only a few cases. In this study, categories were considered general (G) if they applied to three to four cases; typical (T) if they applied to two cases, and variant (V) if they applied to one case. Table I shows the categories for the four interviews that were conducted.

As there was no team or auditor available for data analysis, the researcher completed the steps independently. The first step was to read through each transcript, with as minimal bias as possible. Once each transcript was reviewed, the researcher read through each interview again and highlighted the main topics within the interviews. Once the main topics were highlighted, they were reviewed again and summarized into more succinct words or descriptions that remained close to the actual data. These succinct summaries are called core ideas. Once these core ideas were formed, they were again examined by the researcher and placed into fewer, more broad categories. During this process, one researcher created the domains, core ideas, and categories; therefore, some bias was also likely interpreted with the results. It is likely that ideas that were

expected by the researcher were added to the interpretation, while results that were novel, may have been more easily overlooked.

Results

Analysis of the data allowed three main themes (discussed below) to emerge, with a number of smaller ideas that also addressed the experience of teachers within inclusive classes.

Theme 1: *Mutual learning and interaction between students.* Participants discussed the different interactions noted between students with an IEP and those without. Teachers noted that the students within the general education system learn to accept many types of human differences. For example, when students with some type of disability or IEP are included in mainstream classrooms, there are more "academic levels, social levels, and racial diversity." As a result of such diversity, one teacher believes that the students learn to cope with more diversity in other settings as well, which can be applied throughout life. There also seems to be a prominent pattern within mainstream classrooms where mainstream students volunteer to help other students who may struggle with the coursework. One teacher reports, "I've just been overwhelmed with how supportive they are and how helpful [the students are]". As some students experience difficulty with assignments, students without disabilities seem eager to help them. Aside from working together on assignments in the classroom, the participants typically reported that role modeling is also an important element of inclusion classes. Some students will "model and scaffold correct ways" to complete the work and behave. Whether the students are aware of this or not, those from more specialized classrooms

learn positive social interactions, behaviors, and academic rigor from being included with general education classmates.

Theme 2: *Positives and negatives of inclusion classrooms.* Participants emphasized the number of challenges to making inclusion classrooms work well for all students. Generally, the teachers indicated that spending equal time with each student while meeting standardized goals is a primary concern. One teacher reported, "I think the biggest challenge is trying to make sure I spend enough time with each student helping them, because sometimes I might spend more time with my special children and I feel like sometimes I don't get to my average class students." With this in mind, it is also important to recognize the challenge of pacing to meet the needs of each student, while also striving to meet standardized goals. The participants recognized that "learning is a very individualized process" and what each student has the capacity to learn may "not meet state or government expectations." Variant responses, or responses given by only one of the four participants, also highlighted a number of other concerns from the participants about making inclusion work, including the need to differentiate instruction, the need to keep all students engaged despite differences in how slowly or quickly students learn new material, and the possibility that some students may be overlooked. The participants agree that inclusive education "makes the inclusion teacher's job harder" and its takes time to first "get through some rough patches" that are inevitable. However, despite the challenges, another general response was that inclusion classrooms create a positive environment and experience if done correctly.

Theme 3: *Critical development for students.* Each participant mentioned a number of benefits of teaching within a mainstream classroom for students. Specifically,

each teacher reported a social, emotional, or behavioral component that can be developed through incorporating students with and without disabilities into the same learning environment. Peer pressure typically tends to dictate how students act, socially and behaviorally, in peer groups. The teachers agreed that once students are introduced to mainstream classrooms, they are initially socially isolated. Throughout the year, the students with disability become more integrated and engaged in the mainstream class and they become "more socially interactive with students." The participants also noted that the students seem to be more socially motivated to interact with their peers. The interviews indicated that students learn social rules from watching others' behavior. For example, one participant stated that if a student is "…inappropriate[e], then they have a friend who they are socially hanging out with, [that] is going to respond to it, either negatively or positively."

While each participant recognized that IEP students may become withdrawn once they are placed in a mainstream class, huge emotional development also tends to occur. One of the most commonly stated ideas was that "confidence…is the main" thing that increases when they are included in the general education system. Each teacher reported that students with a disability "come out of their shell," they "feel like they are part of the school and part of the generation they are living in," "they start to shine," "the confidence is built up," and they "feel better about [themselves]."

Another theme was that problematic behaviors tend to be more apparent in students with a disability. In a new setting that includes more academic motivation, it seems that "some try to disguise their academic immaturity behind inappropriate behavior." Again, the teachers typically indicated that behaviors improve and there is a

decline in distracting behaviors due to the peer pressure and social rules they learn from being around students who do not display problematic behaviors. The participants noted "that student's behavior, because of the negative peer pressure surrounds the negative behavior, changes."

A last theme is that students with an IEP can learn to be successful through inclusion classes. Although success is individualized, there are life lessons and other benefits of having interactions with general education students. One teacher stated that the students can use what they learn in "…a different way based on their experience and their disability." Each student has "achieved something. They have learned something new." According to what has been learned, "the social skill or the academic skill, in some way, [is] beneficial."

Table I. Domains, Categories, and Subcategories of teachers' perception of inclusion

Domains, Categories, and Subcategories	Frequency
Mutual learning and interaction between students	
Lessons learned	
Positive Lessons	V
Accept Differences	G
Role modeling	T
Life Lessons	V
Coping to diverse conditions	V
Interactions among students	
Help each other in the classroom	V
Work together on assignments	G
Less help compared to elementary students	V
Positives and negatives of inclusion classes	
Challenges for teachers	
Equal timing with students	G
Challenges in the classroom	G
Meeting standardized goals	G
Differentiating instruction	V
Use IEP as crutch	V
Keeping all students included	V
Students are overlooked	V
Making inclusion work	

Good teacher/student ratio	V
Respond to needs	V
Positive views of inclusion	G
Critical development for students	
Social development	
Isolation of students	G
Promotes interaction	V
Integrated into classroom	G
Peer pressure/ social rules	T
Social motivation	T
Emotional development	
Gain confidence	G
Irritated at differences	T
Withdrawal	G
Behavioral development	
Problematic behaviors	T
Lack of motivation	V
Exposure to negative behaviors	V
Individual Success	
Success	G
Individualized goals	V
SES level	V

Note. G=general (includes 3-4 cases), T=typical (includes 2 cases), and V=variant (includes 1 case).

Discussion

These four participants reported a number of positive and negative effects of having students with a disability incorporated into the mainstream classes. High school teachers reported that there is evidence of mutual learning and interaction between students, that there are a number of challenges, as well as positives for the teachers and students, and critical development for all students. The students experience a number of social, emotional, and behavioral changes. They also indicated that each student achieves some form of success, although the type of success looks differently based on the student's ability and his or her future goals. The idea that inclusion classrooms are beneficial, as Tomasik (2007) also reports, is not a novel concept.

The challenges of this type of classroom are well-accepted, but successful inclusion involves special training, extensive planning, and commitment by the teachers (Brice & Miller, 2000). These ideas were reported by high school teachers, and are important as this perspective is often lacking in past research.

The study participants also described a concept that had not been reported in previous studies: that the curriculum is not the only learning that occurs, as life lessons are often part of the mutual learning that occurs in these classes. The opportunities for growth are not only dictated by the standardized expectations of the school and the government, but personal lessons may also occur as a result of more diverse learning environments. An interactive classroom is formed, where students must depend on other students to learn and complete assignments. Arceneaux and Murdock (1997) stated that those students who helped others also benefited in terms of the academic work being taught. Learning becomes a bidirectional process and is less dependent solely on the educator in the classroom. As students see others struggling, they may learn responsibility for helping others in their community. Students learn that there are differences between others and that not everyone learns the same way, and the importance of adapting to diverse settings and accepting differences.

The teachers also spoke about the interactions between students with and without disabilities. Teachers reported the eagerness of students without disabilities to "jump up" and help the other students, which confirmed previous research that states that nondisabled individuals work together to help the students with disability (Tomasik, 2007). This peer-support role can give students without a disability a purpose in the classroom and builds a supportive environment. Inclusion classrooms provide the

opportunity to gain responsibility and acquire positive characteristics that can be helpful throughout life. This is another example of how learning in high school is not limited to the subjects being taught, but provides lessons much larger than what can be taught using traditional teaching methods. It is beneficial that this still happens at the high school level; however, this study's data also suggest that helping diminishes during the secondary education years.

Another finding of this new study confirmed some of the previous data that emphasized the negative reactions and the resistance to mainstream classes at the secondary level. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) found the following challenges of inclusion in high school: negative teacher attitudes toward inclusion, the lack of consistent success when working with peers, the inconsistencies of successful co-teaching, and the more complex subject material. This study's high school teachers indicated a number of challenges, such as balancing time between students, meeting standardized goals, seeing students who use their IEP as a crutch, keeping all students engaged, and differentiating instruction. One teacher also stated, "at the high school level, you do not see [the students] going to bat for each other the way they do in elementary." The reduced amount of positive interactions in secondary education may also be a source of resistance by educators. Despite the challenges, the participants each concluded that inclusion and mainstreaming students with a disability into the classroom is positive for all students. Lindsay et al. (2013) also concluded that, with proper support for the teachers, the inclusive environment can be even more successful than the general classroom. The participants included ideas that they felt would be beneficial in making inclusion more positive for the students, such as having better teacher-to-student ratios

within the classroom, as well as more time to give individualized attention to needier students. The interviews revealed that the challenges of mainstream classes can make the teachers feel less supported by the school system and can make their job more difficult. It is likely that the teachers could experience more burnout and frustration after working in these mainstream classrooms, which require more work to achieve success. Again, this is consistent with the research that stresses that teachers should receive extensive support and training for providing services to students with and without a disability in inclusive classrooms (Lee-Tarver, 2006).

The current study revealed teachers' observations about changes in the students who move into mainstream classrooms from segregated classes. The teachers indicated that, at first, the students seem to be more withdrawn and isolated, and then as they experience success in the class and feel more welcomed, they become integrated and are likely to make social overtures to other children. The teachers also reported that, at times, the students with an IEP socialize with other students who they know also have a disability. However, once they become more comfortable, it becomes difficult to distinguish which students have a disability. Carter et al. (2008) suggests that there are more opportunities for peer interaction and social engagement in these inclusive classrooms than in special education classrooms. Although these social interactions are limited at first, the current study suggests that social skills can be further developed with more peer interaction. The simple presence of peers can promote interaction and motivate the students. Aside from the increased frequency of social interactions, the quality of the interactions can also be improved. The current study indicates that appropriate social rules can be learned, as students engage with one another based the feedback they receive

from their peers. Those students without a disability have the opportunity to show and encourage the social development of students who may struggle to otherwise reach out to their peers. This finding is also consistent with research stating that "students in full inclusion classrooms have the advantage of being in close proximity with typically developing peers, thus creating more opportunities for friendships" (Lyons et al., 2011).

The current study also revealed gains in the emotional development of students. One of the participants' most frequently expressed ideas was that students with a disability experienced increased confidence from being placed in an inclusive classroom. Students initially prefer to sit on the periphery of the class, be less engaged in lessons, and stand apart from other peers due to feeling different. However, as their time in the class increases, the students' confidence grows tremendously. Each of the teachers endorsed this idea, suggesting the importance of this emotional development. This increased confidence and the emotional impact that inclusion has is often overlooked, but it is an important benefit to consider.

There continue to be a number of behavioral concerns in mainstream classrooms. It is not uncommon that once students with a disability are included in general education classrooms, they learn to act out to avoid having to complete the more challenging schoolwork. Students who are used to functioning in mainstream classes may have more exposure to negative behaviors as a result. At the preschool level, inclusion classes have been shown to promote developmental progress in students with a disability (Holohan & Costenbader, 2000). However, the current study does not strongly support the likelihood that development occurs the same way in high school. Again, the participants addressed the importance of the changes that occur due to the social pressure of wanting to fit into

the mainstream class. Yet, the behavioral improvements for the students who act out were less apparent compared to the social and emotional benefits that were reported by teachers.

Regardless of the social, emotional, and behavioral changes that occur, the idea that success is obtained for all students was a common theme. Meeting standardized goals was reported to be a common challenge within inclusion classrooms; however, the importance of individual goals and the success that is apparent in mainstream classrooms should also be reported. Research shows that mainstream classrooms with students with a disability can be beneficial for all students (Arceneaux & Murdock, 1997). Teacher interviews noted the idea that each student has the capacity to learn some type of beneficial skill. The skills and information learned by the students may not be part of the curriculum taught by the teacher, but life lessons, social skills, and other prosocial behaviors can also be learned through interactions with other students. One teacher described how a student who moved from purely special education classes into mainstream classes was then motivated to take courses to prepare for college. It is likely that, if the student did not have the chance to succeed in a mainstream class, he or she may have also lacked the motivation or resources to apply for college.

Limitations to the Present Study

This study has several limitations. Since the qualitative interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format, the interviewees may have presented their answers with a more positive valence than if they were asked to fill out an anonymous survey. Additionally, there were fewer participants for this study compared to other CQR studies and, therefore, the overall findings may be relatively limited. Having more interviews

could provide more insight into the experiences of teachers. The experience of working within inclusion classrooms may vary tremendously, so it is important to recognize that other teachers may have different or conflicting experiences.

In terms of the qualitative methodology used, it is also crucial to remember that only one researcher completed this study. For a true consensual qualitative research study, a larger team is needed for analyzing the data and reaching consensus about the domains and core ideas.

Clinical and Research Implications

The findings from the data, as well as data from past research, may allow for further understanding of the implementation of inclusion classrooms at the high school level. While mainstreaming students with disabilities has been met with much resistance and fear, this study shows that there are a number of benefits for the students as well.

In terms of the benefits of having students without a disability included in classes with students with a disability and an IEP, the data reveals fewer specific benefits compared to their counterparts with a form of disability or IEP, but life lessons are definitely learned. Students learn how to be positive role models, how to accept differences, and how to cope with others' differences. Students without a disability also learn responsibility and how to help out others who may not learn in the same way that they do.

Those students with a disability and who have an IEP have more clear-cut developmental advances than their typically developing peers. For example, socially and emotionally, they learn appropriate ways to behave and interact from their peers. There is more opportunity to recognize pro-social behaviors and to react to environmental

feedback. Also, the confidence that is gained directly affects the students' self-esteem. Being allowed to learn with typically developing peers promotes personal growth in ways that may not be available in special education classes. Behaviorally, students with a disability continue to display problematic or distracting behaviors. However, as mentioned previously, these students do learn to adapt based on feedback from peers. The behavioral benefits for students being included in mainstream were less distinct than the emotional and social benefits.

Teachers show some apprehension in their attitudes toward inclusion. The challenges make the teachers' jobs more difficult. However, the growing popularity of inclusive classrooms is requiring more and more teachers to provide instruction in this setting.

The current study also opens the doors for future research. It may be informative to ask teachers to describe less successful inclusion experiences. Additionally, it would be useful to include a larger sample to include more teachers' experiences within mainstream classrooms, as well as using a research team to provide more consensus during data analysis.

Conclusion

The interviews indicated that inclusion affects all students in a classroom. Students without disabilities learn life lessons about tolerance and looking out for others, while students with disabilities learn more appropriate social and emotional skills. Students coming from a general education background now have more exposure to inappropriate, distracting behaviors. Students who struggle academically may resort to problematic behaviors to disguise their difficulties with course material. Those students

with behavioral problems do not necessarily learn more acceptable behaviors through being placed in general education placements. Overall, teachers approved of mainstream education; however, teachers are also aware of the challenges. At the high school level, the obstacles continue to be met with apprehension and resistance. However, the current study can provide some teachers' perspectives on the benefits of mainstream classes and their perspective about potential benefits for students with and without an IEP or disability within these classes.

References

Arceneaux, M. C., & Murdock, J. Y. (1997). Peer prompting reduces disruptive vocalizations of a student with developmental disabilities in a general eighth-grade classroom. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 12*(3), 182-186.

Brice, A., & Miller, R.J. (2000). Case studies in inclusion: What works, what doesn't. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, 21*(4), 237-241.

Broer, S.M., Doyle, M.B., & Giangreco, M.F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support. *Exceptional Children, 71*(4), 415-430.

Carter, E. W., Sisco, L. G., Brown, L., Brickham, D., & Al-Khabbaz, Z. A. (2008). Peer interactions and academic engagement of youth with developmental disabilities in inclusive middle and high school classrooms. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 113*(6), 479-494.

Dunn, J. (1996). Children's relationships: Bridging the divide between cognitive and social development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 37*(5)*,* 507-518.

Foreman, P., & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2008). Social justice principles, the law and research as basis for inclusion. *Australian Journal of Special Education, 32* (1)*,* 109-124.

Holahan, A., & Costenbader, V. (2000). A comparison of developmental gains for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive and self-contained classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Education, 20*(4), 224-235.

Holloway, J.H. (2001). Inclusion and students with learning disabilities. *Educational Leadership, 58,* 86-87.

Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E.N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2)*,* 196-205.

Hill, C.E., Thompson, B.J., & Williams, E.N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*(4), 517-572.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (2004). 118 STAT. 2647-2808.

Lee-Tarver, A. (2006) Are individualized education plans a good thing? A survey of teachers' perceptions of the utility of IEPs in regular education settings. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 33*(4)*,* 263-272.

Lindsay, S., Proulx, M., Thompson, N., & Scott, H. (2013). Educator's challenges of including children with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream classrooms. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 60*(4)*,* 347-362. DOI: 10:1080/1034912X.2013.846470

Lindsay, S., Proulx, M., Scott, H., & Thompson, N. (2014). Exploring teacher's strategies for including children with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 18*(2)*,* 101-122. DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2012.758320

Liston, A. G., Nevin, A., & Malian, I. (2009). What do paraeducators in inclusive classrooms say about their work? Analysis of national survey data and follow-up interviews in California. *TEACHING Expceptional Children Plus, 5*(5), 1-17.

Lyons, J., Cappadocia, M. C, & Weiss, J. A. (2011). BRIEF REPORT: Social Characteristics of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders across classroom settings. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities, 17*(1), 77-82.

Mastropieri, M. A. & Scruggs, T. E. (2001). Promoting inclusion in secondary classrooms. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 24*(4), 265-274.

McDonnell, J., Thorson, N., Disher, S., Mathot-Buckner, C., Mendel, J., & Ray, L. (2003). The achievement of students with developmental disabilities and their peers without disabilities in inclusive settings: An exploratory study. *Education and Treatment of Children, 26*(3), 224-236.

Obiakor, F. E., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Rotatori, A., & Algozzine, B. (2012). Making inclusion work in general education classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children, 35*(3), 477-490.

Rea, P.J., McLaughlin, V.L., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2002). Outcomes for students with learning disabilities in inclusive and pullout programs. *Exceptional Children, 68*(2), 203-222.

Richardson, R.C., Tolson, H., Huang T.Y., & Lee, Y.H. (2009). Character education: Lessons for teaching social and emotional competence. *Children & Schools, 31*(2), 71-78.

Saarni, C. (1999). *The development of emotional competence.* New York: Guilford Press.

Semrud-Clikeman, M. & Schafer, V. (2000). Social and emotional competence in children with ADHD and/or learning disabilities. *Journal of Psychotherapy in Independent Practice, 1*(4), 3-19.

Shoho, A. R. & Katims, D. S. (1998). *Perceptions of alienation among special and general education teachers.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Stanovich, P. J., Jordan, A., & Perot, J. (1998). Relative differences in academic self-concept and peer acceptance among students in inclusive classrooms. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(2), 120-126.

Szymanski, C. A. (2012). Managing behavior by managing the classroom: Making learning accessible for deaf and hard of hearing students with autism spectrum disorders. *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education,13,* 26-31.

Tomasik, M. (2007). Effective inclusion activities for high school students with multiple disabilities. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness,101*(10), 657-659.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Digest of education statistics, 2012* (NCES 2014-015), Chapter 2. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014015.pdf.

Vaughn, S., & Klingner, J.K. (1998). Students' perceptions on inclusion and resource room settings. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*(2), 79-88.

Whalen, C.K., & Henker, B. (1985). The social worlds of hyperactive (ADDH) children. *Clinical Psychology Review, 5,* 447-478.

Appendix

Interview Questions

    I.   What is your experience working in inclusion classrooms?

   II.   What is your greatest challenge as an inclusion teacher?

  III.   What types of social interactions have you noticed between students? (e.g., playing, fighting, helping, etc.) How do social interactions differ according to whether they take place in the classroom or during unstructured school times?

  IV.   (i.e., students with disability interact together, students without disability mainly interact, or students with and without disability interact equally)What do you think that students without disabilities gain from being in an inclusion classroom?

   V.   What do you think that students with disabilities gain from being in an inclusion classroom?

  VI.   Overall, what are the disadvantages of inclusion classrooms for *all* students?

 VII.   What behavioral changes (if any) have you noticed in a student with disability who is brought into your inclusion classroom?

VIII.   What are some examples of positive interactions you have seen between students with and without disabilities?

  IX.   What are some examples of negative interactions you have seen between students with and without disabilities?

   X.   What would you like for individuals outside the classroom to know about students in inclusion classrooms?