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## Strengthening the Teacher Toolkit: Effective Autism Inclusion Methods

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Strengthening the Teacher Toolkit:

Effective Autism Inclusion Methods

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### Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is on Autism inclusion methods. This is an important issue for teachers because they are often not given the tools and resources to effectively include their students with Autism Spectrum Disorders into a general education classroom. It is argued that some of the most effective methods include peer-mediated instruction, antecedent procedures, and school-wide organizational change. Considerations of the issue, should include the perspectives of both Special Education and General Education teachers. Three themes/action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Antecedent procedures are argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of Autism Inclusion.

### Strengthening The Teacher Toolkit: Effective Autism Inclusion Methods

Since I graduated high school, and throughout my college education, I have taken a great interest in working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). In high school, I was an intern in a preschool class with ASD students, and learned a lot about working with students with ASDs, as well as the importance of Autism inclusion in schools. After hearing my mother, who is a special education teacher, struggle with getting her students with ASDs an effective education in general education classrooms, I wanted to find more effective methods for Autism inclusion in schools.

Over the past year, my mother had been telling me about the struggles that the special education teachers at her school faced, and are still facing, to get the general education teachers to agree to Autism inclusion. The teachers are struggling with one particular student, Tony<sup>1</sup>, an eighth grader with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Tony has a tendency to fall asleep when he does not understand the tasks that are being asked of him. While Tony is capable of doing the work in a general education classroom, he cannot always get one-to-one assistance because the teacher has to focus on the whole class. There are a few minor adjustments that could be made such as different explanations, breaking down assignments, or allowing him to create a Powerpoint instead of writing an essay. With these adjustments, Tony would be able to better perform the tasks that are being expected in the classroom.

However, some of the teachers do not seem to understand that making these slight modifications for Tony would drastically improve his behavior and performance in their classrooms. The problem is that many of the general education teachers at Tony's school do not understand how to work with students with ASDs, particularly due to a lack of training. In Tony's case, the general assumption is that the reason he is falling asleep in their classes is

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

because he is unable to perform the tasks that are being asked of him. This leads to the general thinking that Tony is not academically ready to be in their general education classrooms, and they feel as though he should be in a special education classroom. The issue that arises when keeping Tony in a general education classroom, is the fact that he would not be challenged due to the curriculum being too simple or below grade level for him, which would cause him to be held back academically. By allowing him to be in a grade level, general education classroom, Tony can gain both the academic skills and social skills he will need when going into high school next year.

Tony's story is not uncommon for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, although the behaviors may vary slightly depending on the student. Those who have worked with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders understand that many students with ASDs are incredibly intelligent but have a difficult time communicating and socializing with peers. They often need slight adjustments to assignments and lesson plans when they are working in a general education classroom, but a lot of teachers do not know what adjustments to make that could help their students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. After hearing the struggles and frustrations that my mom and other special education teachers have been facing when it comes to Autism Inclusion, it brought the topic to the forefront of my mind. From my own experiences and observations, as well as those of people I know, I felt it important to research the important and insightful topic of effective Autism inclusion methods.

### **Literature Synthesis and Integration**

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) affect many aspects of a child's life, but the aspect that is most prominent is behavior. ASDs are extremely hard to diagnose early on, but can be seen when children have a hard time engaging in social interactions with peers. Students with

ASDs need to be pushed to interact with their grade level peers, and the Inclusion Model for intervention helps with just that (Guel, 2016). Without being in a general education classroom at their grade level, students with an ASD will not be exposed to all of the grade level standards in which they will be tested, and they will not be able to better their social skills by interacting with their grade level peers. The best way to solve these issues are to call for school wide change, include peers in instruction for students with ASDs, as well as following antecedent procedures in the classroom.

### **The Issue**

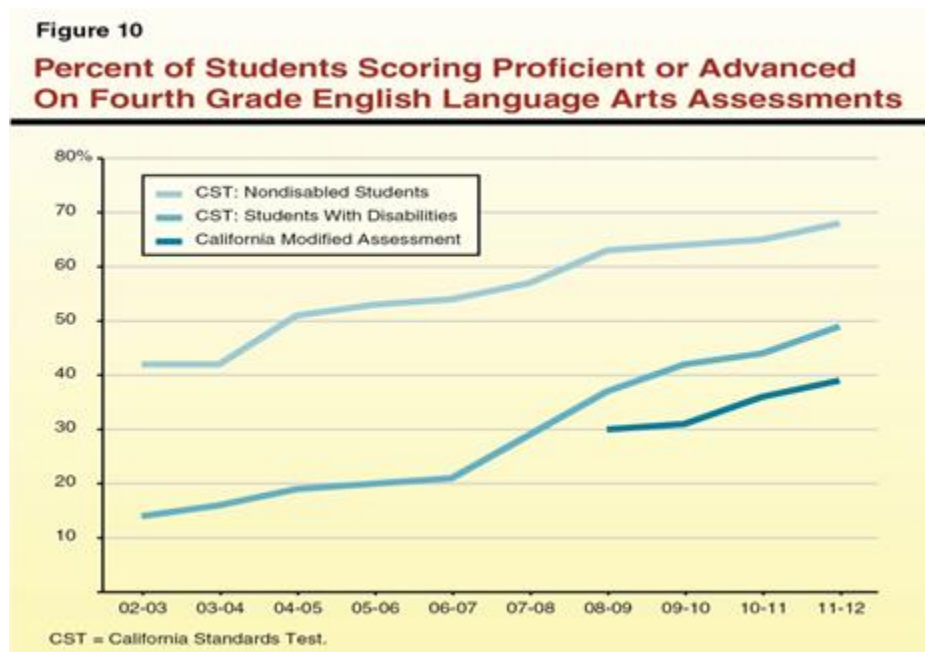
ASDs are becoming more prevalent in today's society, and early intervention is suggested for successful treatment. Autism Spectrum Disorder was first described and named in 1943 with three common characteristics which are: preferring to relate to objects over people; obsessing about maintaining routines and sameness in their lives; and tending to seek complete aloneness, shutting out the world around them. ASDs have become more common in the past 10 to 20 years, as doctors are better at spotting them; therefore the diagnosis is more frequent (Guel, 2016). Autism Spectrum Disorders are hard to define since there are many different types, ranging from the broad categories of "regressive" and "non-regressive" types (Ardhanareeswaran, 2015). Due to the difficult behaviors and additional supports that students with ASDs often need, it is found to be difficult to find effective methods for Autism inclusion.

**Social Interactions with their Peers.** Inclusion is important for students with ASDs because part of the disorder, according to Autism Spectrum Australia (n.d) is difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships, and difficulties with social interaction (para. 5). These are the greatest areas of weakness for those with ASDs, and therefore schools have the responsibility of working social skills into their curriculum, but according to Daily (2005),

schools do not always recognize that they have this responsibility (para. 11). Vygotsky's Social Development theory (2016) plays an important role in emphasizing the importance of social interactions with peers for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Vygotsky's main idea with this theory is that social interaction is a key part of cognitive development, and social learning is how a child learns ideas first, and then on an individual level (Social, para. 3). The social development theory plays an important role in the development of all students, but is even more important for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Students with ASDs often find it difficult to have social interactions with others, so by using the inclusion method, they are in an environment where they need to interact with peers. Not only does inclusion allow for students with ASDs to have equal educational opportunities, but it almost forces them to interact with their peers, and gain the proper social skills that they might not get in a special education classroom.

**Equal Educational Opportunities.** The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was enacted by President Obama in 2015 and, "reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students" (Every, n.d). ESSA measures student progress through annual statewide assessments where students, regardless of their ability, are expected to be successful. When students with higher functioning ASDs are placed in a special education classroom, they are only learning half of the state standards that they will eventually be tested on (Guel, 2016). Due to this, they often perform poorly on state standardized tests due to the fact that they are being held back in the Special Education classroom. However, general education teachers are often hesitant to implement the inclusion model due to their perception of readiness and ability from students. As Kurth and Mastergeorge (2012) stated, children with Autism

Spectrum Disorders are often thought to be lacking the intellectual or readiness abilities for academic instruction (p. 36). Despite findings that counter the academic benefits of Autism Inclusion, more and more research has been done that promotes improvement of academic skill development for those students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012, p. 36). If they were to be in a general education classroom, they would be exposed to and learning the grade level standards in which they will be tested on, therefore giving them the opportunity to perform better. The following figure shows how students with disabilities perform on state testing compared to how nondisabled students perform on state testing.



*Figure 1. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced On Fourth Grade English-Language Arts Assessments. Taken from Legislative Analyst's Office.*

The percent of nondisabled students who scored proficient or advanced on fourth grade English language arts assessments, compared to the percent of disabled students who also scored proficient or advanced, as well as those students who took the California Modified Assessment are represented in the figure above (Guel, 2016). The California Modified Assessment was



designed for students with mild-to-moderate disabilities (Fearn, 2012). Figure 1 was produced in January of 2013, when the inclusion model was not as popular. When schools use the inclusion model, this could potentially happen much less because students who are higher functioning and able, will be in a general education classroom where they will be learning all of the state standards that they will be tested on.

**School wide organizational change.** The first step in implementing Autism inclusion is making sure that the school has policies and practices in place that create a positive and accepting environment in the general education classrooms for students with disabilities. As Crosland and Dunlap (2012) mention, “the school context in which inclusion is considered can be as important or more important in achieving success than the integrity of the specific procedures that are implemented” (p. 258). When there is school wide acceptance of both autism inclusion as well as the general inclusion of students with disabilities, it makes it easier to implement the following procedures. When there is not school wide acceptance, Autism Inclusion can be implemented, but it is possible that the effectiveness may not be as high impact as it could potentially be.

**Peer-Mediated Instruction.** Peer-mediated instruction in general education classrooms is a way for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders to gain social interaction with their peers. The appeal of this type of inclusion method is that peer-mediated instruction requires, according to “the active involvement of peers in providing assistance to promote the social-related skill acquisition and/or active participation of students with disabilities” (Carter, Gustafson, Sreckovic, Steinbrenner, Pierce, Bord, & Mullins, p. 208, 2016). If their peers do not interact with them, students with disabilities, especially those with ASDs, are not inclined to take the first

step in socializing with their peers. When peer-mediated interaction is implemented in the classroom, all students' education can potentially benefit.

**Antecedent Procedures.** This type of inclusion strategy is dependent on the individual student, and can only become effective after a period of time. Antecedent procedures refers to, “manipulating some aspect of the environment to evoke a desired response or make an undesirable behavior less likely to occur” (Crosland & Dunlap, p. 254, 2012). This inclusion strategy can be done in three different ways, including priming, prompt delivery, and visual schedules. The definition of priming, in terms of Autism Inclusion, is simply giving the student a preview of what to expect from the information or activity that will be done, before the student actually does the activity (Crosland & Dunlap, p. 254, 2012). Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders are not comfortable in situations that are unfamiliar to them, and they are less likely to participate in those activities, and could lash out and exhibit behaviors that are undesirable and disruptive in a general education classroom. If they are familiarized with the activities beforehand, they are more likely to be comfortable and exhibit positive behaviors as well as not be a disruption to the class and the activity itself. The theory of planned behavior, according to LaMorte (2016), is used to anticipate how a person will react given a certain situation. The theory states that behaviors are often influenced by three things, which Freitag and Dunsmuir (2015) define as “The person’s own ‘behavioral attitude’...secondly, the influence of the ‘subjective norm’...the social pressures placed on them by significant others....lastly, their ‘perceived behavioral control’ over carrying out the behavior” (p. 406). When students can know what to expect, their behaviors will be positive rather than disruptive to the classroom. Antecedent procedures use the theory of planned behavior in regards to inclusion to both improve both the student’s “behavioral attitude” and their “perceived behavioral control”. Using

these procedures will help teachers use the theory of planned behavior to anticipate how students with ASDs will respond to classroom activities and procedures when in a general education classroom.

### **Conclusion**

In short, Autism Inclusion is seen as the most effective way to teach students with high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders, and implementing inclusion strategies effectively will lead to higher performances from students with ASDs. All students, according to the ESSA, are entitled to an equal education, and those with ASDs will receive that when in classrooms with their grade level peers. They will also continue to gain better social skills, when they are required to interact with their peers in a general education setting. The actions that need to be taken in order for this to happen include, an overall school climate change, Peer-Mediated instruction, as well as implementing procedures that will make undesirable behaviors less likely to occur.

### **Method**

For this Capstone Project the researcher investigated how teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder view Autism inclusion and what they thought could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what she learned to formulate an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience.

### **Context**

Research was done in Fairview, California. This town is located in rural Charm County, and is surrounded by farmland, since it is in an area known for agriculture. Fairview Union School District is made up of six schools; five elementary schools and one middle school. The population served by this district is mainly of Hispanic, African-American, and White

ethnicities, with 46% of students qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price meals. In addition, 15.8% of students in this district are classified as English Learners. The particular school in which research was conducted was Fairview Middle School (FMS), located on the outskirts of Fairview, surrounded by homes and farmland. The school has 770 students enrolled, with 110 being special education students. The layout of the school is very open, with a large quad area when you first walk in. The lunch tables, basketball courts, and field are to the immediate left as you walk in through the main entrance, and the classroom hallways form a semicircle around the main quad area. The school has an average of 40 teachers, with an average ratio of about 21 students per teacher (Fairview Union Elementary, n.d).

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

I invited four teachers to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experience and expertise in teaching students with Autism. Their knowledge and experience helped me to discover methods that could make the Inclusion model more effective. Amongst this group, 100% of the participants were female and the mean age was about 35.

**Cheryl Johnson.** A white, female special education teacher at Fairview Middle School. She is 49 years old and has been a special education teacher for five years. This will be her third year teaching both special education resource and math classes at Fairview Middle School. She has also taught special education English language arts at Fairview Middle School. Cheryl received her Bachelor of Arts in Education, her Master's Degree in Special Education, and both her multiple and special education teaching credentials from Western Governors University.

**Shelby Martin.** A white, female special education teacher at Fairview Middle School. She has been teaching for fifteen years, as both a general education and special education

teacher. Shelby has been teaching at Fairview Middle School for twelve years, and is the lead of the special education department at FMS. She currently teaches special education English language arts and math, and was recently named Teacher of the Year for Fairview Middle School.

**Elizabeth Swanson.** A Hispanic, female, special education teacher in the Fairview Union School District. She has been teaching for ten years, both in the general education and special education setting. She currently works as a moderate to severe special education teacher, and in addition she also teaches classes for college students getting their degrees in special education. Elizabeth has her bachelors, masters, and PhD in Education.

**Patrice Lancaster.** A Hispanic, female, English Language Arts teacher at Fairview Middle School. She has been teaching English Language Arts at Fairview Middle School for eleven years.

### **Researcher**

Autism inclusion is personally meaningful to me for a couple different reasons. In high school, I interned in an Autistic preschool classroom for two years. Due to that experience, I became very passionate about working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and thus the importance of Autism inclusion. The struggles and frustrations that special education teachers face when it comes Autism inclusion were brought up to me by my mother, a middle school special education teacher. She has several students in her classes that have Autism Spectrum Disorders, and was fighting with the general education teachers at her school to get those students into their classes.

I see that Autism inclusion is important, and know that with the right tools, Autism inclusion methods can be practiced easily and effectively. After working in an Autistic Preschool classroom for two years, I have a much better understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders. I

think this really helps in understanding and researching what tools teachers need in order to practice Autism inclusion effectively. I think something that makes me different from the informants and influentials is definitely my education level and experience working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. These differences will have a positive impact on my work and perspectives on the concern.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

*Face to face interview questions:*

1. Tell me about your experiences working with students on the autism spectrum. Are there any methods you have used with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders that you have found effective when working with those students in a General Education classroom? If so, what were they?
2. What do you see as the challenges with Autism Inclusion; and/or What are you concerned about when it comes to Autism Inclusion?
3. What is currently being done to improve Autism Inclusion. And by whom? What do you think of these efforts? Why?
4. What do you think should be done about to make Autism Inclusion more effective?
5. What do you think are the obstacle to making Autism Inclusion more effective?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about Autism Inclusion and/or the improvement of Autism Inclusion?

### **Procedure**

Participants were interviewed individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in the location of their choosing. A semi-structured interview

format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Lastly, upon finishing each interview, the data was analyzed and used to perform a beneficial action on the school's campus.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, teachers were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve Autism Inclusion methods. This is important because many students with Autism Spectrum Disorders are academically capable of being in general education classrooms, but due to lack of knowledge on how to best implement inclusion, they are left behind in special education classrooms. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Figure 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Time; Probability of Impact; and Reasonableness. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

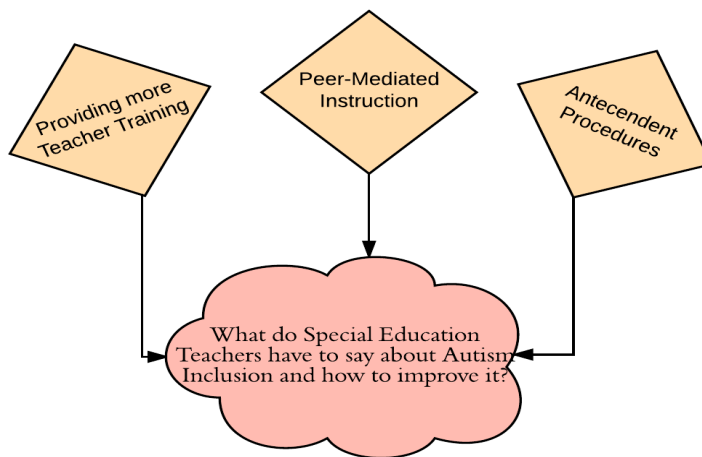


Figure 1. Three effective ways to implement Autism Inclusion according to Special Education Teachers.

### Teacher Training

The common theme that emerged after conducting several interviews was the importance and effectiveness of teacher training. All of the interviewees stated that in order for Autism Inclusion methods to be more effective, general education teachers would need more training on how to work with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as training on the different methods they could use. Cheryl Johnson (personal communication, October 26th, 2017), a special education teacher at Fairview Middle School stated, “To make Autism Inclusion more effective, we need to have specific training on how to work with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and any student that learns differently.” The problem with Fairview Middle School, and other schools across the nation is the lack of training that general education teachers get in regards to Autism Spectrum Disorders. For example, in a study done by Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, and Scott (2013) about educators’ challenges of including students with ASDs, it was reported that “Teachers felt they lacked adequate information about ASD, particularly with respect to specific ways to work with a child in the classroom” (p. 354). This shows that across the nation, general education teachers are not getting enough training to be able to support their



students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The teachers that were interviewed gave several different ideas to solve this problem, including more time for general and special education teachers to work together to brainstorm ideas; co-teaching classrooms with general and special education teachers, and just more time for training in general.

At Fairview Middle School, every Wednesday afternoon is reserved for staff development. This staff development time is often set aside for school-wide trainings, allowing teachers time to prepare their classrooms, and other things that the staff cannot do when students are present. As brought up by Shelby Martin (personal communication, October 25, 2017), “this would be a perfect time to do a crash course on Autism Inclusion, or just allowing the special education and general education teachers time to work together”. However, this time is often used for other types of trainings that are often divided by subject, and often do not allow for the general education and special education teachers to be together. If school districts allowed more time for training on Autism Spectrum Disorders and how to work with students with ASDs, Autism Inclusion strategies could be more effective.

### **Peer-mediated Instruction**

As previously stated, the first sign of Autism Spectrum Disorders in children is a lack of social interaction with peers. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders often need significant assistance in gaining the same social skills as their peers. Peer-mediated instruction, which is based partly on the social learning theory, is one way that students with ASDs can strengthen their social skills. A common concern that was found when conducting the interviews was the social skills of students with ASDs slowly declining as they get older. Based on the social learning theory, children learn through others first and then on an individual level. When asked if having peer assistance helps students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Cheryl Johnson (personal

communication, October 26, 2017) stated “Yes, I have found it to be helpful for most students with ASDs. General education peers are more than willing to help these students, and it allows for positive social interaction. ASD students do well when they have someone model for them the expectation” . This goes along with the social learning theory, and is the main reason why researchers have found peer-mediated instruction methods to be helpful when implementing Autism Inclusion.

Battaglia and Radley (2014) stated that “Meta-analyses have found peer-mediated to be effective for increasing a variety of social skills, including joint attention, communication, initiations, maintaining interactions, and turn taking” (p. 4). While peer-mediated instruction needs to be handled carefully and implemented correctly, the end result is incredibly positive for students with ASDs in the long run. The proper procedure with peer-mediated instruction however, is to select peers who will prove to be effective and helpful for the ASD student. Patrice Lancaster (Personal Communication, October 25, 2017) stated in her interview that “I’ve found it helpful to put [ASD] students next to a calm, patient student”. As with all inclusion methods however, it is important to note that peer-mediated instruction should be implemented only if it will be effective for the student with ASD. As noted by Cheryl Johnson (personal communication, October 26, 2017), “There are certain students on the spectrum that it does not work for because they might have trouble communicating or they do not do well with peer interaction”. Therefore, peer-mediated instruction depends on the student with ASD, and their capability of interacting with others. However, if implemented correctly peer-mediated instruction can prove to be effective in helping students with Autism Spectrum Disorders to gain and practice proper social skills.

### **Antecedent Procedures**

As previously stated, antecedent procedures refers to, “manipulating some aspect of the environment to evoke a desired response or make an undesirable behavior less likely to occur” (Crosland & Dunlap, p. 254, 2012). When conducting interviews, it was found that teachers found many different antecedent procedures helpful when implementing Autism Inclusion. As Elizabeth Swanson (Personal Communication, October 25, 2017) stated, “Most of [the students] are schedule driven and when you provide a visually centered and structured environment they seem to thrive more”. Examples of antecedent procedures given in the interviews included, visual schedules, listing procedures visually around the classroom, giving clear, concise directions, and making sure to tell in advance what is to come throughout the day. Antecedent procedures are based on three things, priming, prompting, and pictures, which are all things that promote positive behaviors out of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and can possibly prevent negative behaviors from arising. Other forms of antecedent procedures could be implemented in the classroom depending on the grade level.

Harrower and Dunlap (2001) give the following example of priming; “if a child is having difficulties...where the teacher is reading the class a story, each day’s story could be read to the child individually before the child experiences the story in front of the presence of the entire class” (p. 766). Antecedent procedures such as this allow for disruptive behaviors to not happen, since the student will know what to expect when this activity takes place with the whole class. Prompting in terms of antecedent procedures might include the examples given of giving students clear, concise directions as well as making sure to tell them in advance what will be coming throughout the day. When the student is prompted, either by the teacher, an assistant, or peers, it elicits appropriate behaviors over time, and eventually the prompting will not be needed

because the student will know what to expect (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001, p. 767). Antecedent procedures also take the form of pictures, which explain expectations, directions, or other things to the students without having to be verbal. Visual schedules have been known to be the most effective, and are used for “increasing predictability and as an alternative to verbal and written instruction” (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001, p. 767). There are many different ways to implement antecedent procedures in the classroom in order to help Autism Inclusion be more effective, and help students with Autism Spectrum Disorders transition into a general education classroom better.

### Conclusion

Table 1  
Evaluation of Action Options

	Time	Probability of Impact	Reasonableness
Providing more teacher training on how to work with students on the Autism Spectrum	Low	High	Moderate
Implementing more peer-mediated instruction in classrooms	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Using Antecedent Procedures	High	Moderate	High

From the data collected, it can be seen that there are several different methods and ideas that can be used to make Autism Inclusion more effective in schools. As shown through the research as well as in the interviews, the theme that would make Autism Inclusion more effective would be having both more training for general education teachers. As seen in table 1, teacher

training would take the least amount of time while also having a high impact, and is moderately reasonable. As previously mentioned, the school in which interviews took place has every Wednesday set aside for teacher training and preparation. Training on how to work with students with ASDs as well as ideas to implement in the classroom could be given during this time. This recommendation would have a high probability of impact, as the biggest factor that affects Autism Inclusion is the low level of training that general education teachers have. If more training was implemented, teachers would be better prepared to work with these students and Autism Inclusion would be made more effective. Also shown in table 1, both peer-mediated instruction and antecedent procedures would have a moderate impact when implemented on their own. However, these things could also be implemented with the teacher training by training the teachers on these Autism Inclusion strategies as well. The limitations of the recommendation would be that some school districts would not wish to set aside time to conduct this teacher training, and some teachers would not be willing to sacrifice their time in order to attend these trainings. But in order to make Autism Inclusion more effective for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, schools must make teacher training an important aspect of their schools.

### **Action Documentation and Reflection**

The focus of this capstone was finding Autism Inclusion methods that would be more effective in implementing inclusion in schools. After interviewing several special education teachers and a few general education teachers at Fairview Middle School, three action options emerged. Through the interviews and my own research, I found that a significant increase in teacher training and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders would be effective, as well as implementing more peer-mediated instruction, and using more antecedent procedures in the classroom.

The action that seemed to be the most effective was teacher training. This option allows for the other two action options to be introduced to teachers as more effective ideas to use in their classrooms. The significant lack of teacher training was a concern from every single person interviewed, so it made sense to implement that action option. I felt that this option allowed me to give a cumulative summary of my research findings, while also allowing teachers to choose which ideas to implement in their classroom.

For the teacher training, I created a PowerPoint (Appendix A) that could be presented during a staff development meeting. As previously stated, Fairview Middle School reserves Wednesday afternoons for staff development, so I felt as though it would be fairly simple to give the staff the PowerPoint to present at one of those Wednesday meetings. I sent the PowerPoint to one of the special education teachers at Fairview Middle School so that she could review it and decide when to present it to the rest of the staff. When making the presentation, I used my research findings from this project to include important reminders about Autism Spectrum Disorders based on the symptoms, as well as ideas for implementing the other two action options. Upon initial review, the presentation just needed to have a few things added to be tailored specifically to the students at Fairview Middle School, but overall was a good start in teacher training for the school.

The response to the presentation so far has been extremely positive. The special education staff at Fairview Middle School felt that it helped general education teachers get more concrete and specific ideas of ways they could better help students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Although the presentation was a brief overview, it also helped start the conversation about getting more training for working with all students with disabilities. It was unexpected for

me to see such a positive response to the presentation, because I felt as though some would not take it seriously given the fact that it came from a college student.

When I started this project, I felt as though I had a lot of knowledge about working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, based on my experience in working with them. However, after completing this project, I have come to realize how complicated and complex Autism Spectrum Disorders truly are. Although people with ASDs will exhibit similar behaviors, the ideas and implementation options need to be very individualized for each student. However, if all teachers had a better understanding of the characteristics and personality traits that are common for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, they would better be able to accommodate for those students.

### **Critical Reflection**

From this project I have learned a lot about myself. I have gained a lot of skills as both a writer and researcher, and have realized that the subject of my capstone is something that I am extremely passionate about. Working on this project has taught me more about my personal writing skills, and has pushed me to be able to better explain myself in my writing.

The themes of the Liberal Studies department and the required coursework have impacted me greatly in terms of professional development. Over the course of my time at CSUMB, I have gained great knowledge that I will use as a future educator. I feel as though the MLOs of the Liberal Studies department have pushed me to become more multiculturally aware and able to use that awareness in my future classroom. Not only this, but the themes throughout the Liberal Studies department have given me many tools to use in the future that will allow me to easily transition as a first time teacher. The required coursework has allowed me to reflect on my thoughts and feelings about how I will be as an educator, but have also broadened my thinking

and awareness about different issues that could arise for teachers. Not only that, but the required coursework has allowed me to take that knowledge into the classroom already, as well as help me learn by being in different types of classrooms.

The necessary next steps that I would need to take in order to become the professional I want to be would be to take the information and tools I have already been given and use them in the classroom. While I don't have all the tools I will need to be an exceptional teacher, the Liberal Studies department has given me a solid foundation through which I can grow from.



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**Appendix A**

Presentation Link

# Making Autism Inclusion More Effective

Important Reminders and Tips for All Educators

Roxanne Guel  
Senior Capstone  
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<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JwOQnjRTi0w2OjH1PQLJIMtUGAPSdCizkG-gD0Fsuks/edit?usp=sharing>