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## Inclusive Classrooms

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Inclusive Classrooms

Meghan Ihrke

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Spring 2019

Winona State University  
College of Education  
Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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Inclusive Classrooms

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Meghan Ihrke

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

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### Abstract

Inclusive classrooms are proven to be successful all over the world. Inclusive classrooms are when special education students are in general education classrooms all day long receiving the same educational instruction. Inclusive classrooms have a positive effect on not just special education students but the general education students as well. Inclusive classrooms have been proven to reduce bullying, increase acceptance of differences, increase academic success and improve overall school satisfaction. The problem being, inclusive classrooms aren't generally practiced in the United States, even though they are proven to be effective. In order to make inclusive classrooms the standard instead of an option is to get all educators, school administrators, students and parents educated on what inclusive classrooms are. There is research from many countries and the United States that proves that inclusive classrooms are the best option for all students.

*Keywords:* inclusive classrooms, special education

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### **Introduction**

Inclusive classrooms have been proven effective in countries all over the world. In the United States, educational standards don't include inclusive classrooms. An inclusive classroom is one in where no matter what the student's ability level is, they are in general education classrooms all day long (Idol, 2006). The United States generally practices mainstreaming, which is where a special education student joins a general education classroom for only certain subjects based off their individualized educational plan (IEP) (Idol, 2006). Mainstreaming is proven to be less effective than inclusive classrooms because the special education student doesn't feel apart of their class and their general education peers don't accept them as equal. In order to make inclusive classrooms effective teachers need to be receptive and willing to adapt their educational approaches for all students. Research has proven most teachers are receptive to trying inclusive classrooms if they have the proper tools and training in order to make is successful. Inclusive classrooms have been proven to improve academics, social, emotional and overall improvement in educational satisfaction amongst special education students and general education students. With general education student's becoming more knowledgeable of disabilities and individual differences schools have seen an increase in acceptance of special education students and a decrease in bullying.

### **Review of Literature**

It is not mandatory in the United States for special education students to have full inclusion within the educational setting. Inclusion in the United States has become focused on just those students who are disabled or special education students. Inclusion in public schools started with allowing students of color to attend public schools with Caucasian students (Broderick & Mehta-Parekh & Reid, 2005). Then it went to allowing students with disabilities

to attend public school, and eventually allowing non-English speaking students. A common thread being all these students could attend public school but were kept separate, “inclusion through exclusion” (Broderick & Mehta-Parekh & Reid, 2005, p.194). Most educators and the general public now expect that students with disabilities are taught in separate classrooms by special education teachers. Inclusion is more than just students with disabilities its students who are marginalized by there race, socioeconomic status, second language acquisition, disability, etc. (Broderick & Mehta-Parekh & Reid, 2005). The research on inclusion is mostly based off of students who have disabilities and general education students.

Inclusion in the educational setting is defined as “a student with special education needs is attending the general school program, enrolled in age appropriate classes one hundred percent of the school day” (Idol, 2006, p.4). The goal of inclusion is for students with disabilities to be full members of their schools and classes and for students to achieve their goal of achieving academic and functional success (Janney & Snell, 2006). There are countries all over the world that practice inclusive classrooms, Indonesia, Thailand and Canada are examples of a few. According to Kantavong 2017, the Ministry of Education in Indonesia defined inclusive education as “an education system that provides opportunities for all students with disabilities and intelligence potential and/or special talent to receive education in an environment with student in general schools.” (p.292)

Inclusion is different from special education students who mainstream into classrooms. Inclusion is when a special education student receives all of their academic curriculum in all general education classrooms (Idol, 2006). Mainstreaming is where a special education student spends a portion of their day in general education classrooms and a portion in special education classrooms (Idol, 2006). Janney & Snell, 2006 conducted a study in the United States with

elementary age students showing students who are part-time mainstreamed are seen as a visitor rather than a classmate, because they don't participate in the same classroom assignments. Students who were mainstreamed into the general education classroom had modified assignments, so the general education student's saw this as unfair (Janney & Snell, 2006). In the United States all special education student accommodations are recommended through a student's individualized education program (IEP). There are other countries practicing mandated inclusion of all students with disabilities. Canada adopted the United Nations Convention of the Right of Persons with Disabilities in 2010 stating "individuals with disabilities are entitled to support that facilitates full inclusion within educational settings" (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013, p. 98). In Canada, educators had to go through trainings about different disabilities, adapt to a co-teaching learning environment and reconfiguring classrooms. Administrators had to fully support inclusive classrooms in order for it to be successful. This indicates that Canada saw the importance of inclusion in the classroom. As previously stated, there is a stigma attached to special education. In the United States, students with disabilities are seen as deviant and special services accommodate deviant students and services should be done in a separate room (Kirby, 2017). Students who are considered to be deviant will not feel included in their school. Moving towards inclusion will allow for special education students to feel more accepted and have more commonalities with their peers.

Studies have proven that students with disabilities, specifically special education students, who spend more time in a general education classroom have higher scores on achievement tests, have less absences and perform closer to grade level than students who are withdrawn from general education classrooms (Jordan & Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Along side with improvement in academics, inclusion is also shown to help increase positive



social interactions amongst all students. Placing special education students alongside their normally developing peers through inclusion is creating an opportunity for student's to experience successful social interaction (Avcioglu, 2017), thus creating peer acceptance between special education and general education students. Students who aren't accepted by their peers carry around scars not from just their school years but for their entire life (Avcioglu, 2017). Scars including fears of acceptance, exclusion, feeling different and inadequacies.

Previous research suggests that general education teachers had a positive view about educating students with disabilities in a general education setting (Idol, 2006). Educators with a special education background had positive attitudes towards inclusive classrooms because they had more background information on the topic (Kantavong, 2017). Research has shown that successful inclusive classrooms include employing coping strategies and different teaching approaches (Kantavong, 2017). Teachers that have received training on special education student had a more positive attitude towards inclusive classrooms (Kantavong, 2017).

Even though the overall consensus is in favor for inclusive classrooms, there are educators that are not as receptive. Inclusion needs to have the support of teachers in order for it to be successful. Those educators who are hesitant with inclusive classrooms is because they don't have the information on inclusive classrooms and the difference in mainstreaming student's into general education classrooms (Kantavong, 2017). Ensuring educational staff have the information available to them before they are expected to change their educational approaches will ease the transition. For inclusive classrooms to work it teachers, administrators and students all have to have a behavioral and attitudinal changes (Kantavong, 2017). General education teachers perceive they don't have the ability to cope with student's varying disabilities, due to lack of training (Kantavong, 2017). When special education students are included into

general education classrooms it generates more creativity in lesson planning for teachers. Teachers will need additional support from administrators and support in the classroom by paraprofessionals. Research by Kantavong in Thailand and Indonesia shows that teachers who have less years in the field are more open to inclusive classrooms with special education students rather and teachers who have been in the field for many years (2017).

Overall, educators have a positive attitude towards inclusion of students in regular classrooms (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Additional staffing will be needed in order to make inclusion classrooms a successful learning environment. Previous research has found four different classroom models to assist teachers with inclusive classrooms: consulting teacher model, cooperative teaching model, supportive resource programs and instructional assistants (Idol, 2006). In a consulting teacher model, the special education teacher serves as a consultant to the general education classroom teacher. The special education teacher does not work directly with the students. In a cooperative teaching model, is where the general education teacher and the special education teacher work together in the same classroom and co-teach to all students. In supportive resource programs, general education teachers work with the resource teacher in order to create an individualized program for instruction the resource room. Which creates for consistency and ease of learning between two rooms. Instructional assistants or paraprofessionals assist special education students in their general education classroom which allows for more hands-on help for students (Idol, 2006).

Inclusion positively affects more than just the teachers and special education students it also affects general education students. General education students who don't have disabilities and don't have interactions with students with disabilities get their understanding through negatively charged words. Words such as: learning disabled, emotionally disturbed and mental

retardation become part of their vocabulary because general education students have little or no interaction with students with disabilities it allows for those negative associations to prevail (Janney & Snell, 2006). Research suggests non-special education students in general education classrooms do not suffer academically as a result of being in an inclusion classroom (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Research also suggests having students with special needs in general education classrooms doesn't effect provincial test achievement scores of students who don't have special needs, it could in fact have slightly improved scores throughout the whole class (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Different levels of learning in inclusion benefit not only the special education students, but general education student who can benefit from modified lesson plans. High school aged students in general education settings were asked 27 questions on a 4-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement-not applicable) related to their interactions and experiences with students who have disabilities (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Research found general education students were in agreement with students who were in inclusive classrooms demonstrated higher scores of advocacy and displayed more tolerant attitudes towards diversity (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). On the 4-point Likert scale agreement was the highest selection on the scale. When you think of gender and willingness to accept peers with disabilities, girls have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than boy did (Blackman, 2016). Students who have a more negative outlook towards students with disabilities is due to lack of exposure. Students who have a negative attitude towards student who have disabilities prevent students with disabilities from participating in school, leads to bullying, poor academic performance and potentially dropping out of school (Blackman, 2016). If general education students are not exposed to students who are not exactly like them their attitudes towards individuals with disabilities will not change. The social and academic benefits of

inclusion include: friendships, positive peer support, improved academic performance and social integration (Blackman, 2016). Benefits for inclusion classrooms affect more than just the special education students, it positively affects the staff and general education students as well.

### **Discussion**

Inclusive classrooms are proven to be successful. It can positively effect teachers, students, academics and social and emotional needs of all involved in inclusive classrooms. The goal of inclusive classrooms is for all students, general education and special education students to feel like full members of their class and achieve their full academic and functional achievement. Inclusion is different than mainstreaming, mainstreaming students doesn't allow for each student to feel like a full member of their class and they have alternative assignments. Research has proven that majority of teachers have more of a positive outlook on inclusion than a negative. For teachers who have a hesitation towards inclusive classrooms, its from lack of training and education with students with disabilities. Full school cooperation needs to happen in order for inclusive classrooms to be successful. Inclusion helps take away the stigma surrounding special education students and disabilities. Inclusion has proven to have more positive effects on general education students and decreased bullying. It has made general education students more aware of difference amongst all different types of students.

A limitation of this project is in regards to inclusion in the United States, it started long before it was attached to just students with disabilities. Inclusion should be more than just student's who have disabilities, it should encompass every difference race, language, religion etc. Research has only been done in regards to students with disabilities so there isn't enough research-based information on total inclusion. Since the United States doesn't generally practice

inclusive classrooms, there isn't as much evidence-based research as there is from different countries.

### **Author's Note**

This topic has become not only a professional passion but a personal one as well. I have worked with special education students for the past seven years in different job capacities in schools. I have friends whose children are in special education classrooms. I have seen how our current education system is failing special education students. We as a country are still using inclusion through exclusion for student's who have any differences or disabilities. By bringing awareness to a change that should be an educational standard, I hope to create a conversation resulting in a change in the education system as we currently know it. Aside from all of the previous benefits listed about inclusive classrooms, its proven to decrease bullying. Which in itself is a major topic in schools today. I want to help create an educational environment where my friend's daughter is looked as an equal peer and not a special education student with a disability. Through training and education this a method that can be taught in all schools in the United States without teachers feeling as though they will lose their job or have added responsibilities.

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