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Benefits of Inclusion: Supports and Strategies for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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**Benefits of Inclusion:
Supports and Strategies for Students
with Intellectual Disabilities
by
Molly M. McCain
December 2020**

**Master's Project
Submitted to the College of Education
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Molly McCain

Abstract

Special Education has evolved over the years. One shift has been the placement of students with special needs, specifically those with Intellectual Disabilities (ID). These students are getting out of their special education classrooms and are being mainstreamed in the general education setting with their same aged peers. Studies have revealed there are positive social and academic benefits to inclusion, including increases in peer-to-peer interactions, shared learning opportunities, and access to general education curriculums. Unfortunately, students do not always acquire these benefits because people working with students with ID: students, teachers, and paraprofessionals, are unaware of what inclusion is and what the best practices are for implementing it. This project examines research-based supports and strategies for inclusion implementation, so that students with ID can acquire the academic and social benefits of inclusion.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Educators have been called to push and advocate for the inclusion of students with special needs, specifically those with intellectual disabilities (ID). When students with intellectual disabilities have access to the general education setting, there is a potential for them to acquire academic and social benefits. These benefits include new peer related relationships, shared learning opportunities, access to relevant curricular content, and raised educational expectations (Carter, et al., 2015). Research expresses there are positive strategies and supports that will lead to more benefits of inclusion. Some of these strategies include peer partners, collaboration, and proper training and monitoring. Ideally, students without special needs, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals will be able to implement inclusion strategies and supports into their daily practice. Currently, students with intellectual disabilities at Wylie E. Groves High School in Birmingham, Michigan are being mainstreamed in the general education setting, but the adults and peers are not using positive strategies and supports; therefore, the students are missing out on academic and social benefits of inclusion.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) initiative has given more students the opportunity to access the general education setting with their general education peers. Although there are potential benefits of that, there are factors that adversely affect the benefits of inclusion.

One factor contributing to students with ID not acquiring the social and academic benefits of inclusion is that peers without special needs are reluctant to initiate conversations and collaborate with students with ID in the general education setting without any instruction or interventions (Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chung, & Sisco, 2011). The students are hesitant to do so because they are not sure what to do and/or say and are intimidated by the adult supports present in the classroom. This hinders students with ID because they are missing out on opportunities to interact and build relationships with their same aged peers.

Although communication, collaboration, and consultation between special education teachers and general education teachers is necessary and beneficial for inclusion, it is not always easy to accomplish and does not continuously get done (Hogan, Lohman, & Champion, 2013). Adults who work with students with ID need to collaborate and come up with a person-centered plan so that the students can get the full benefits of inclusion (Cumming & Strnadova, 2017). They also need to consult each other in their areas of expertise (Hogan et al., 2013). If teachers do not communicate, collaborate, and consult with each other, benefits of inclusion are hindered for the students.

The root cause for students not receiving the benefits of inclusion is despite it being a federal law, paraprofessionals are not being trained (Breton, 2010), and they are not being constantly monitored and evaluated (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2015). This is the root cause because paraprofessionals are crucial to inclusion. They are the adults who attend general education classes and observe if the students are obtaining

the benefits of inclusion. Also, when paraprofessionals do not get training and are not being informally monitored and formally evaluated, students with special needs are not receiving an appropriate educational program (Breton, 2010), which defeats the whole purpose of inclusion. Peers, teachers, and administrators are not always implementing positive inclusion strategies and supports; therefore, students with intellectual disabilities are missing out on the academic and social benefits of inclusion.

Background of the Project

Attitudes towards and the treatment of people with disabilities has a long and complex history that has shifted over the years (Anastasiou, et al., 2015). Like other marginalized groups such as low socioeconomic status, minorities, and English language learners, children with disabilities have faced discrimination and exclusion in American education. An example of discrimination in the early twentieth century is the 1919 *Beattie v. Board of Education* case (Kirby, 2017). The Board of Education requested a student with a disability to be prohibited from attending school with his peers. The court ruled in favor of the Board of Education and concluded that other students should not be adversely affected in schools because of a student with a disability (Kirby, 2017).

Education for students with special needs has come a long way since *Beattie v. Board of Education* through actions like the Civil Rights Movement and the Disability Rights Movement. These movements helped fuel legislation in support of students with disabilities in education (Wright, 2020).

One disability civil rights law enacted in the United States was Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Wright, 2020). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.), this law prohibited discrimination of people with disabilities in programs that received federal assistance.

Another legislation was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 (Wright, 2020). According to the Special Education Guide (n.d.), this law was one of the first attempts to secure equal access for students with disabilities in education.

In 1990, two forms of legislation were enacted. One was Title II of the Americans of Disabilities Act (ADA). The U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights (n.d.) stated Title II of the ADA prohibited discrimination of individuals with disabilities in services, programs, and activities provided by state and local entities. The other legislation was the amendments and renaming of EAHCA to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In 1997, there was an amendment to IDEA. Annino (1999) stated the goal of the 1997 amendment to IDEA was to improve the “quality” of special education for students with special needs. The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) were two main highlights of the amendment (Annino, 1999). LRE and FAPE are the cornerstones to inclusive placement in education (Kirby, 2017).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 outlined the supplementary aids and services that would help support students in their LRE need to be peer-reviewed (Wright, 2020).

Although special education has evolved, there are still areas of improvement in terms of inclusion. Inclusion is best implemented when teachers understand the history of disabilities in education and can create learning opportunities that are equitable for all students (Olson & Roberts, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

The root cause for students with intellectual disabilities not getting the social and academic benefits from inclusion is paraprofessionals not getting the proper training and support. Paraprofessionals are the adults who work with students in the general education setting every day. They are the individuals who are there to observe what is going on when the students are mainstreamed, and the ones who are responsible in making sure the students are given the proper supports to be successful.

The purpose of the project is to create a professional learning development training for the paraprofessionals who work with students who have intellectual disabilities. The professional learning and training will walk through a guidebook for the paraprofessionals. The self-created guidebook will be in a three-ring binder with dividers that include special education definitions, academic and behavioral strategies, and other educational best practices. The guidebook will be a place where paraprofessionals can stay organized with sections to put general education class notes and student information in. The professional learning development training will

be done during district given time (half days). The paraprofessionals will go through the different sections of their already made binders.

Paraprofessionals can become more confident when supporting the students out in the general education setting if they are trained and explicitly shown what to do and how to do it. The more confident they are in supporting students with ID in the general education setting, the more likely students will be able to acquire the academic and social benefits of inclusion.

Objectives of the Project

After reviewing the para guidebook at training, paraprofessionals supporting students with cognitive impairments, will be able to understand the definitions and requirements of inclusion and explicitly learn strategies to implement inclusion so students can acquire benefits. The paraprofessionals will show their understanding through interviews and observations. Special education and general education teachers will be interviewed to voice their opinions and observations on how the paraprofessional and students are doing in their classrooms. Once the department head determines if the paraprofessional has a complete understanding of inclusion and can implement it appropriately using supports and strategies, the students will be interviewed to see if they are personally seeing the benefits of inclusion.

Definition of Terms

Free and Appropriate Public Education- An appropriate education for individual students may comprise of special education classes, general education classes, related supplementary aids and services, and more. (IDEA, Section 300.101)

Inclusion- Educating a child with special needs with children who are nondisabled to the maximum extent appropriate. Having children with special needs spend time in the general education setting, even if it means providing additional supports and services. Inclusive classrooms integrate peers with and without special needs (IDEA, Section 1412 and Gebhardt, Schwab, Krammer, & Gegenfurtner, 2015).

Intellectual Disabilities- Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance (IDEA, Section 300.8.6).

Least Restrictive Environment- Students with disabilities receive education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with non-disabled students (IDEA, Section 300.114)

Paraprofessional- Credentialed education professionals who work with teachers and provide behavioral, instructional, and other supports to students in the general education and special education settings. (Viestra, n.d.).

Scope of the Project

The project addresses providing professional learning and resources to paraprofessionals who support students with intellectual disabilities in the general education setting. The project will include research-based academic and behavior strategies as well as inclusion tricks and tips. Also, the project will provide special education information that will be useful and helpful knowledge for paraprofessionals. The project includes formal and informal observations and

collaboration between special education teachers, general education teachers, department heads, students and paraprofessionals.

The project will first be done in the moderate and mild Cognitive Impairment (CI) classrooms at Wylie E. Groves High School, and then will be implemented in the other Cognitive Impairment classrooms in the Birmingham Public School (BPS) district; West Maple Elementary School, Berkshire Middle School, and the Adult Transition Program. The schools are in a suburban, public school setting in Michigan. Using purposive sampling, the participants (subjects) will include the six paraprofessionals who support high school students with intellectual disabilities in the Cognitive Impairment program. The participants will also include the students with CI eligibility who participate in the general education setting for at least one class period a day.

The project does not address parents' feedback on inclusion and the paraprofessional support their child gets. Also, it does not address the hiring process of CI paraprofessionals, which might play a part in how effective a paraprofessional is. This project does not consider if certain general education classes are easier to implement inclusion strategies than others. The general education classes are based off the students' individual schedules that are already created.

A potential limiting factor is Covid-19 and remote learning. Paraprofessional support looks a lot different in a virtual setting than an in-person setting. Depending on when this project will be implemented, the strategies might have to be reconsidered and reevaluated.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, there has been a shift from isolating students with special needs to mainstreaming them with their same-aged peers in the general education setting. Inclusive education is not just the physical placement of student with special needs in a classroom, but it also encompasses the educational experience of the student (Kirby, 2016). The 2003 United States Department of Education report found that 48% of all children with disabilities were placed in regular education classes 79% of the time (Laymon, 2010).

Integrating students with disabilities with students who are typically developing can lead to many benefits (Carter, et al., 2015). The benefits of inclusion include an increase in social, interpersonal, and academic skills. Although there are positives to inclusion, research shows students do not always receive the benefits of it. Educational supports that aid in the implementation of inclusion include peer strategies, communication, collaboration and consultation of team members, and paraprofessional supports.

Theory/Rationale

Historically speaking, inclusive education is a relatively new idea. Changes to policies and legislation has shifted education from a segregated system to an inclusive one. General education and special education have been merging to create an education system where students with special needs can be integrated with same aged peers (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). This education system is called inclusion or

inclusive education. There is research that shows there are benefits to inclusion (Carter, et al., 2015), but critics argue there are flaws to the rationale for inclusion and the realization of inclusive classrooms (Dyson, 1999).

The rationale for inclusion is unclear, and there is criticism for reasons why there is such an urge to implement it. Kauffman & Hornby (2020) examine two components that call the rationale for inclusion into question. The first component is misguided leadership. Senior academics and policy makers have oversimplified the complex issue of inclusion and portrayed it in a term, “All Means All,” (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). This term means that all children, no exceptions, must be educated alongside their same aged peers. This advice causes concern because it overgeneralizes what inclusion is and hinders the importance of it. The second component is the long and complex history of the treatment of people with special needs. In the past, people with disabilities were not treated the same. They were labeled, isolated, and called names. Today, people are more accepting of people with special needs, but are overcompensating by not wanting to put a label on people or categorize them into any groups. (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Kauffman & Hornby (2020) argue that it is still appropriate and necessary categorize people. Students eligibility and individual needs are important and based off the groupings. The sole purpose of inclusive education should not be based on people not wanting to categorize students.

The realization for inclusive classrooms deals with how inclusion should be implemented. Critics argue that inclusion is ambiguous (Dyson, 1999) and overly optimistic (Kauffmann & Hornby, 2020). Research shows that the implementation of

inclusion should be intentional and well thought out. There are two ideas on how inclusive education can be successful.

The first idea deals with the thought of inclusion being what is in a place and not the location itself. This idea focuses on classroom culture. Classroom culture is represented by teacher beliefs, management skills and expectations, classroom dynamics, and social relations (Berry, 2006). The goal is to use Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to create a classroom culture that represents a community of learners. Berry (2006) states that when classrooms represent a community of learners, inclusion can thrive. Students can feel accepted and valued.

The second idea is that the success of inclusion occurs when the organizational paradigm focuses on structures and practices that encourage teamwork and togetherness (Clark, et al., 1999). Schools that create structures that have teachers working together and not in isolation will lead teachers to be able to respond appropriately to diverse learners (Clark, et al., 1999). A shift in internal structures and practices will help with the success of the implementation of inclusion.

Inclusive education has its advantages and disadvantages. There are benefits to inclusion, but the why and how behind it should not be overlooked. The rationale for implementing it should be research-based and well thought out, and the way to implement inclusion should be intentional. The success of inclusive education occurs when people work together as a community of learners.

Research/Evaluation

Peer Strategies

Along with enhancing learning, a main purpose for inclusion is to promote social interactions with peers without disabilities (Feldman et al., 2016). Peer-to-peer supports are beneficial when the students without special needs know what to do and what to say to the students with special needs. Students may be reluctant to interact if there is little encouragement or if the expectations are unclear (Thompson, et al., 2018). When general education students are taught specific strategies, they will be more confident when working with their special education peers.

Close Proximity. One peer strategy is students with special needs being in close proximity to students without special needs in the classroom (Feldman et al., 2016). A casual-comparative research design was conducted to determine how often students with disabilities sit next to general education peers while mainstreamed. The study found that students with intellectual disabilities were in proximity to peers an average of 45.2% in academic general education classes and 40.7% in other classes (Feldman et al., 2016, p. 203). The study also concluded when students were not in proximity to their peers, they were isolated at their own table with other students with disabilities and a paraprofessional (Feldman et al., 2016). When students are secluded while in the general education setting, inclusion benefits are not being met. Proximity is a strategy that can be met if teachers are intentional about seating and placements of students.

Peer Partners. Peer partners is a research-based, positive inclusion strategy that provides general education peers interventions to be successful when working with their special education peers in class (Carter, Moss, Hoffman, et al. 2011). Positive peer interventions can increase appropriate conversations, help build positive relationships, and give the students opportunities to practice social skills (Feldman, et al., 2016). Peer support arrangements are also beneficial for the general education peers. Typically developing peers may learn more about themselves, improve their attitudes towards people with disabilities, and develop new support and advocacy skills (Carter, Moss, Asmus, et al., 2015). Peer partners can create positive relationships with students and are advantageous for all students.

Peer Support Arrangements. Research from Carter, Moss, Asmus, et al. (2015) indicates there is an evidence-based peer-to-peer strategy called peer support arrangements. Peer support arrangements are individually tailored interventions that emphasize both academic and social supports. To implement this strategy, Carter, Moss, Asmus, et al. (2015) state there are six steps to follow. The steps are:

- Step 1: Develop a peer support plan
- Step 2: Select and invite peer partners
- Step 3: Orient students to their roles
- Step 4: Work together in class
- Step 5: Facilitate interactions and support
- Step 6: Reflect on impact

This strategy will help the peers be less reluctant to initiating interactions because there are specific and explicit guidelines for them to follow.

Self-Disclosure Process. Another researched-based peer strategy that has the potential to increase positive peer interactions is the theoretical model of the role of the self-disclosure process (Ryan, et al., 2016). This process encourages students to self-disclose inner feelings and experiences with one another. When this happens, a stronger connection may develop between a mentor and mentee and the quality of the overall relationship will be more positive (Ryan, et al., 2016).

Many students with ID are placed in general education classes for the sole purpose of peer-to-peer interactions (Feldman et al., 2016). When positive plans, supports, and strategies are implemented, general education students will more likely initiate interactions with special education students. The opportunities for them to have conversations and build relationships with same-aged peers increases.

Communication, Collaboration, and Consultation Between Team Members

Multiple members make up a special education team, including the special education teacher, general education teacher, paraprofessional(s), administrators, and the student. Just like in any team, communication between members is a critical requirement in achieving successful inclusive education (Laymon, 2010). Also, for inclusion to have its benefits, teamwork and collaboration between the members are among the most important factors (Gebhardt, et al., 2015).

Students who receive special education services typically have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Since it is individualized, teachers need to share

that important information with each other. Teachers should be aware of the student's needs so that they can best support the student (Gebhardt, et al., 2015). Although general education teachers need to be aware of student's individual needs and student supports and accommodations (SAS), it is important to remember to have a balance of individuality and collectivity (Hansen, et al., 2020). If a teacher individualizes a student's experience in the general education setting too much, he/she will miss out on the benefits of inclusion. Hansen, et al. states that differentiation is a balance between individuality and collectivity, while individualizing takes away the collectivity aspect (Hansen, et al., 2020). Special education and general education teachers need to communicate and collaborate on what the experience should look like for the student and what their roles are for making that happen.

Historically, divisions between special education teachers and general education teachers are deeply rooted in aspects of education including federal policy, funding, and society's view of disability (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). One research-based model that has increased the partnership between teachers is the collaborative-consultation model. This model allows special education teachers and general education teachers to share their teaching practices and share student accountability (Eisenman, et al., 2011; Pettersson & Ström, 2019). In this model, professional educators, typically a general education teacher and special education teacher, meet to discuss and solve challenges by inputting their individual expertise (Pettersson & Ström, 2019). This model allows teachers to feel supported and valued.

General education teachers have the expertise in curriculum and standards, while special education teachers have the expertise in individualized strategies and supports (Eisenman, et al., 2011). Teachers should share their knowledge with each other, but their expertise should not be mutually exclusive from one another.

Paugach, et al. (2020) argues that communication around inclusion should not be solely focused on student needs but should also incorporate curriculum. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), High Leverage Practices (HLP), and Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) are examples of curriculum practices that help students with special needs access and be successful in the general education curriculum (Paugh, et al., 2020). Both special education and general education teachers should have knowledge in curriculum practices and should consider curriculum when implementing inclusion.

Positive teacher relationships, communication on differentiation, consultation strategies, and curriculum practices are all part of a positive inclusion environment; however not all teachers have the knowledge and skills in those areas. In order to bring change and benefits to inclusion, continuous professional development is vital (Kempen & Steyn, 2016). Kempen and Steyn (2016) suggest the collaborative staff development model will help teachers become more equipped and well versed in the area of inclusion. The principles in this model include:

- Is student centered
- Builds collaborative learning
- Establishes meaningful internal and external networks

- Uses collaborative problem-solving
- Utilizes pockets of expertise
- Provides rich opportunities for context specific learning
- Connects professional learning activities to meaningful content

Not only does there need to be collaboration between teachers and service providers, collaboration with leaders is also crucial for inclusion. Effective leadership aids in the success of supports and services received by students (Sherry et. Al, 2020). A study that used a qualitative, multi-method approach to determine what was needed in schools to best support students in inclusion found that school principals were critical in driving inclusive education and supporting and motivating teachers (Tones, et al., 2017). Since school leaders have a significant role in the inclusion for students and attitudes of staff, communication and collaboration between the groups is needed.

When teachers communicate with each other about students' individual needs, collaborate on teaching strategies, and consult on student accountability, the benefits of inclusion increase for the students.

Paraprofessional Supports

According to the 2018 United States Department of Education federal data, about 488,000 paraprofessionals support students with disabilities in schools (Walker, et al., 2020). Paraprofessionals play a critical role in the education of students with intellectual disabilities, especially in the area of inclusion (Hogan, et al., 2015).

Paraprofessionals are the adults who go to the classes in the general education setting

with the students. They are the ones who observe what is going on and can determine if the student is acquiring the benefits of inclusion.

Since paraprofessionals have such a critical responsibility, training seems and is mandatory under the federal law (Douglas, et al., 2015). Although it is federally mandated, research shows paraprofessionals are not getting the training in the area of behavior, emotional, and social challenges and/or the training in school, district, and state regulations and rules (Breton, 2010). Walker, et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine if paraprofessional training was indeed effective. The design included a special education teacher training three paraprofessionals with a workshop, video modeling, and coaching. The results concluded that with proper training, all paraprofessionals increased their fidelity and accuracy when implementing instructional practices. One paraprofessional increased her mean percentage of implementation from 16% to 85.7% accuracy, the second paraprofessional went from 8.88% to 98.67% accuracy, and the third paraprofessional increased her accuracy from 12.92% to 74% (Walker, et al., 2020). This shows paraprofessional training is crucial for students to see benefits, because the adults supporting them have a better understanding on how to support them.

When adults do not get trained, students with intellectual disabilities are not receiving appropriate education supports. It is also an area of concern if a paraprofessional does get trained but has never had or had limited informal consultations with special education teachers and/or formal evaluations with administrators (Douglas et al., 2015). Just like teachers, paraprofessionals need to be

monitored and informed of what he/she is doing correct or what areas need improvement.

If paraprofessionals do not get the proper training, support, or feedback, it can hinder the benefits of inclusion. Without proper training, a hinderance is the paraprofessional can potentially take peer-to-peer interaction opportunities away from students with disabilities. A problem becomes apparent when a student with special needs spends most of his/her social time with a paraprofessional (McGrath, et al., 2010). Along with social problems, academic issues might occur when a paraprofessional is not trained or supported. Another problem is when the paraprofessional begins to make most of the instructional decisions for a student (McGrath, et al., 2010) or when the paraprofessional replaces the general education teacher (Rasmitadila & Goldstein, 2017). In a study conducted to determine the role of a teacher assistant in an inclusive classroom, the researchers found that students with special needs become dependent on paraprofessionals and interact more with them than their general education teachers (Rasmitadila & Goldstein, 2017).

It is critical that paraprofessionals get trained and are monitored throughout the school year. Without proper training and feedback, disadvantages on inclusion can outweigh the benefits. Students will benefit from inclusion if paraprofessionas are aware of academic, social, and behavior strategies.

Summary

Throughout the history of education, students with disabilities have been discriminated against and excluded from rights (Anastasiou, et al., 2015). With

current legislation such as LRE and FAPE, students with disabilities are getting the opportunity to have an educational experience similar to their same aged typically developing peers. Educators and administrators can help amend the barriers from historical shortfalls by advocating and educating students together to the greatest extent possible (Olson & Roberts, 2020).

Evidence suggests students in an inclusive setting develop better social skills and friendships by interacting with students without disabilities (Lui, et al., 2017).

One example of peer-to-peer strategies includes peer partner interventions (Carter, Moss, Hoffman, et al. 2011). This strategy gives general education students explicit supports and strategies for positive interactions with students with disabilities.

Another peer strategy includes peer support arrangements (Carter, Moss, Asmus, et al., 2015). This strategy looks at students' individual needs and matches peers up based on those needs and interests of the students. It also lays out a six-step plan to implement peer supports. Self-disclosure is another peer strategy that helps with student to student communication (Ryan, et al., 2016). Proximity to students with and without special needs in the classroom is a research-based strategy that helps increase the frequency of peer interactions (Feldman et al., 2016). Peer strategies must be clear and explicit in order for them to be beneficial.

A variety of people make up a special education team. These people include the special education teacher, general education teacher(s), paraprofessionals, administrators, and the student. In order for there to be benefits of inclusion, the team members need to collaborate, communicate, and consultate with each other.

(Gebhardt, et al., 2015). When a student with an IEP is in a general education class, the teacher tends to individualize his/her experience and tasks to meet his/her individual needs. Hansen, et al. (2020) argues there needs to be a balance of individuality and collectivity through differentiation. It is important for general education teachers and special education teachers to work together. A model that supports collaboration and communication between the two groups is the collaborative-consultative model (Eisenman, et al., 2011). Teachers are not the only two members who need to be team players. Administrators and school leaders also play a critical role in how inclusion is viewed in the school (Tones, et al., 2017). Collaboration and communication among team members are critical for inclusion.

Paraprofessionals are members of the educational team that arguably have one of the biggest roles in a student's inclusion experience (Hogan, et al., 2015). Paraprofessionals are typically the adults who work with the students in both the special education and general education setting. The effectiveness of a paraprofessional depends heavily on their preparation and supervision (Steckelberg, et al., 2007). Research has found that even though they play a critical role, paraprofessionals are not always trained, supported, or supervised (Breton, 2010; Douglas, et al., 2015). There is evidence that shows with proper and appropriate training, paraprofessionals are able to increase the accuracy in properly implementing instructional practices (Walker, et al., 2020). However, when paraprofessionals are not properly trained, it can be problematic (McGrath, et al., 2010; Rasmitadila & Goldstein, 2017). Benefits of inclusion are seen when paraprofessionals are properly

trained. When paraprofessionals are not trained and monitored, supported, and/or supervised, it adversely affects the benefits of inclusion.

Conclusion

In order for students to reap the benefits of inclusion, certain educational strategies and supports need to be implemented as a team. Findings show that peer strategies, collaboration and consultation of team members, and paraprofessional supports are critical for inclusion. The evidence gained from the peer strategy articles will be beneficial to include in the paraprofessional guidebook and professional learning development training. Included in the guidebook will be information about what to do to support and encourage peer interactions. Findings from collaboration articles will be shared with the paraprofessionals at the professional learning development training. Paraprofessionals need to be informed the benefits of communicating and collaborating with different team members. Those findings will also be used when collecting data to see if the paraprofessional guidebook is increasing the benefits of inclusion for the students. Information gathered from the articles about paraprofessional support will be incorporated throughout the project; which entails paraprofessional training with organizational supports and strategies in the beginning of the year and monitoring through informal and formal meetings throughout the school year.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

The literature from the articles on inclusion propose a need for collaboration and communication among team members who work with children with special needs. The team member who work with the students in both the general education setting and special education setting are the paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals provide individualized assistance and accommodations for students with special needs. These supports include note taking, scribing, reading, prompting, checking for understanding, and more. Brenton (2015) states in his article that paraprofessionals are not receiving proper training and are not getting evaluated or supported throughout the school year, even though it is mandated under federal law. Paraprofessionals need to know their federal, state, and district expectations, they need to be taught a variety of supports and strategies when working with students with ID, and they need to know the students' individual information. Not only do paraprofessionals need to be trained (Walker, et al., 2020), they should also be monitored and evaluated (Douglas et al., 2015).

Described in this chapter is the timeline of the project, what the project entails including materials needed, how the project will be evaluated, what conclusions were made, how the data and information will be shared with other professionals, and what additional information is needed to make the implementation of the project successful.

Project Components

A baseline survey will be done in the school year prior to the implementation of the project. Information gathered from a baseline survey is needed to see what the paraprofessionals know and do not know about inclusion and supporting students with ID in the general education setting. It will also gather information on what training and monitoring is currently happening.

To help the paraprofessionals learn their responsibilities, be confident, and stay organized, a professional learning development (PLD) training needs to be held at the beginning of the school year during a back-to-school Professional Learning Committee (PLC) time. This paraprofessional learning development training will walk the paraprofessionals through the paraprofessional guidebook. The professional learning training will take place over two half days. The materials needed are six binders (one for each paraprofessional) and dividers (ten for each binder). Also, the book, *Paraprofessionals and Teachers Working Together: Highly Effective Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms*, by Susan Gingras Fitzell, M. Ed, will be passed out at the PLD for the paraprofessionals. This book contains communication and organizational tips for paraprofessionals. Academic strategies and graphic organizer, as well as behavior strategies and charts are found in this book.

On the first day the PLD training, paraprofessionals will get the guidebook and dividers 1-5 will be discussed. The first divider will include information on federal, state, and district. Information will include special education terms, IDEA 2004 information, and contact information of people in the BPS Specialized

Instruction and Student Services (SISS) department. The second divider will include academic strategies for working with students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID), such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), High Level Practices (HLP), Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), verbal/ non-verbal prompting, graphic organizers, touch point math, and phonics/reading strategies. The third divider will include behavior strategies for working with students with ID, such as brain breaks, behavior tracking charts, and the difference between punishment vs. discipline. The fourth divider will include social strategies, such as peer interaction strategies gained from the articles read. The fifth divider will include a list of peer partners; students in the LINKS program, that will work with the students with ID in the general education setting. Also, a list of the teams and clubs that the students are involved in will be included so teachers have a better understanding on who knows who.

On the second day of PLD, the paraprofessionals will walk through the rest of the guidebook and there will be time for questions. The sixth divider will include the paraprofessionals individual schedule, paraprofessional master schedule, expectations of duties for each class and student, and his/ her evaluations. The seventh divider will include the students' IEP information like the student profile page of the IEP and the students' IEP goals. The eighth divider will include the students' supplementary aids and services (SAS). Also, an accommodations tracking data form will be provided so paraprofessionals can keep documentation of what SAS were used and when (Appendix A). The students' Contingency of Learning Plan (CLP) will also be included if the school is virtual or hybrid. The ninth divider will include any student

behavior intervention plans and/or medical plans. The tenth divider will include notes that were taken in the general education classes (Appendix B). These notes will be shared with the special education teacher so that all team members will know what was done in class and what homework needs to be completed.

The paraprofessionals will work with the students every day. The paraprofessionals will be observed and interviewed twice a trimester (in the middle and the end). The students and teachers (both general education teacher and special education teacher) will be interviewed as well.

At the end of the school year, the Specialized Instruction for Student Services (SISS) department head will use the paraprofessional observation scores and interview responses, as well as special education and general education teacher interviews, to determine if the paraprofessionals have a complete understanding of the guidebook of inclusion. If he/she does, then the students will be monitored and interviewed to see if they are actually acquiring the benefits of inclusion.

Project Evaluation

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis, through ethnographic research, will be used to analyze the data. The surveys and baseline will use both closed-ended questions (Likert scale) and open-ended questions (What do you do to ensure peer-to-peer interactions?). These types of questions will help gather both qualitative and quantitative data to interpret. The interviews will also use a qualitative approach. Observations will be made, and the observation checklist used will gather quantitative data.

The first form of data collection will be a baseline survey given to the paraprofessionals through a Google Form (Appendix C). This survey will be used to see what current strategies, practices, and plans are working and not working, and what needs to be taught.

The data collection will be the actual professional learning development training where the guidebook is covered. An outline of the two half-day PDL training is listed (Appendix D) as well as the dividers for each section of the guidebook (Appendix E).

A formal observation of the paraprofessionals will be conducted by the SISS department head. The instrument used will be a checklist based off the 5-D+ TM Evaluation System: Purpose, Classroom Environment and Culture, Student Engagement, Professional Collaboration & Communication, Assessment, Curriculum and Pedagogy (Appendix F). The 5-D+ Evaluation System is the same system the teachers are evaluated with. Using the same evaluation system will help the paraprofessionals feel valued as well as make sure all educators are being evaluated with the same criteria.

A semi-structured interview of the paraprofessionals will occur after the observation (Appendix G). The interview will be led by the SISS department head. The information obtained from this interview is to determine if the paraprofessionals are using the guidebook and if they find it helpful. It also allows the paraprofessionals to be reflective and identify their own strengths and areas of improvement.

A 15-minute meeting with general education teachers and special education teachers will cover the glows and grows of the paraprofessionals (Appendix H). The meetings will be done individually and will be led by the SISS department head. The data gathered from these interviews will identify if the paraprofessionals used the strategies and if collaboration between all adults is being done.

Semi-structured interviews of the students will be given to determine if the students are acquiring the benefits of inclusion (Appendix I). Accommodations such as reading or scribing will be allowed for the students.

Project Conclusions

The goal of the project is to combine the research-based solutions into a comprehensive, beneficial, easy-to-use guidebook for paraprofessionals, so they can help students with intellectual disabilities get the full benefits of inclusion.

The project combines the research supported strategies that are critical to inclusion; peer strategies, collaboration and consultation of team members, and paraprofessional supports. The guidebook incorporates positive peer interventions and strategies, such as peer partners (Carter, Moss, Hoffman, et al. 2011) and positive peer arrangements (Carter, Moss, Asmus, et al., 2015), along with academic and behavioral strategies. Gebhardt, et al. (2015) stated the adults working with the student with special need should know the needs of the student. The guidebook provides sections that will help the paraprofessionals and general education teachers know information about the student including supplementary aids and accommodations, IEP goals, behavior intervention plans, and medical plans.

The root cause is the adults (paraprofessionals) working with students in both the general education and special education setting have not received the proper training or monitoring to support the students with ID. Breton (2010) concluded that paraprofessionals play a critical role in inclusion. The main purpose of this project is to help prepare and support them so that the students can receive the many benefits of inclusion.

Plans for Implementation

Students with intellectual disabilities will continue to join general education classes. The data and information gathered from the project will help with making sure the students acquire the benefits of inclusion. The training will help the paraprofessionals feel confident when supporting the students. The monitoring will help the paraprofessionals know what to continue or what to improve at. If this project is successful at the high school level, the data should be shared with BPS SISS administrators. If they agree this is beneficial and could help with inclusion, the project could be implemented and used with paraprofessionals in other CI classrooms in the district.

The cost of this project (professional learning development training and guidebook) is inexpensive. To train and monitor six paraprofessionals, the cost will be less than \$400.00 for the year. Once the materials are purchased, they will not have to be purchased again. The cost of six professional development books is \$117.96, six 3-ring, 3-inch binders is \$82.29, and six 10-tab dividers is \$31.98. The cost for food, drinks, and additional goodies is also budgeted in. There will not be an additional cost

for the professional learning development training half days since those days are embedded into the paraprofessionals' contract.

This project is working with a special population, so there is permission needed in order to complete this research. The first is permission from the students and/or parents. A letter and email will be sent to the parents of the students with cognitive impairments informing them that the paraprofessionals who work with their child will be participating in a training in the beginning of the year and will be monitored throughout the year. Getting their permission is important. Permission from the other CI teacher is wanted since there will be a meeting with her and her students. Also, permission is needed from the general education teachers because the department head will need to go in their classroom and observe, as well as meet with them. Permission from the principal of the school will be required to see if there is any inclusion or Groves expectations needed to be included in the study. Permission from the SISS department head is needed as well since that is who will give the okay to do this project. The SISS department head will also be the one observing the paraprofessionals. The last person is the BPS SISS supervisor. This project will need to be approved and overlooked by the supervisor.

The goal for this project is to prepare the adults who support students with ID. The adults who support the students in both the general education setting and special education setting are paraprofessionals. This preparation can be achieved by providing helpful resources using research-based strategies and supports and by taking the time to train and monitor the paraprofessionals. When paraprofessionals

use best practices, students with ID can acquire the social and academic benefits of inclusion.

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Appendix B-Paraprofessional Notes in General Education Class

Date: 02/25/2020

RUSEK

2nd Hr. psychology

Homework:

Teacher didn't assign HW to the students

- Finish personality disorders
- Treatment/ Therapy Jigsaw Activity: (in psychopathology packet)
Finish your part today - 10 minutes
to get info fr. your group tomorrow
- Examine treatment options/therapy options
for various mental disorders
- Success Criteria: SWBAT identify treatment
options within medication/therapy/lifestyle
categories
- Final exam review is posted on Google Classroom
- Crash course in personality disorders is posted in
Classroom too.

tomorrow we will do the diagnosis activity
looking @ 5 scenarios/interviews.
Recommend treatment.

(2/24)

Personality Disorders Guided Notes

- 3 Clusters of personality Disorders

Cluster	Behavioral Description	Personality Disorders
A	odd + eccentric	paranoid schizotypal
B	dramatic erratic	antisocial borderline histrionic narcissistic
C	anxious fearful	avoidant, dependant Obsc

- Antisocial Personality Disorder

Breaks rules

Tells lies

Irritable/aggressive

Rationalizes taking advantage of someone

(Casts off blame)

Described as sociopath

- Psycho/Sociopaths

• psychopath + sociopath is similar

• some researchers use the term interchangeably

- lack of empathy

- lack of overall emotion, esp. fear

• passes blame onto others

• don't detect fear in others

• both manipulate - sociopaths tend to be more aggressive

- More likely to be diagnosed in men

- Biological Reasoning:

Underdeveloped emotional systems in the brain

damaged frontal lobe

more males with this than females

psychopaths ~~can't~~
do well in
competitive
environment
are dishonest

Appendix C-Paraprofessional Baseline Survey

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf9H4hc1unPCcXbuIoSomIeQoe>

<fnBiEEsGzqWC7fx0S7nb3eg/viewform>

Paraprofessional Baseline

* Required

What does being a paraprofessional mean to you? *

Your answer

What does cognitive impairment mean? *

Your answer

What does inclusion mean? *

Your answer

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how well do you think special education teachers communicate with you? *

1 2 3 4 5

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how well do you think general education teachers communicate with you? *

1 2 3 4 5

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how well do you think general education peers interact with peers with special needs? *

1 2 3 4 5

Were you trained for this position? *

Yes

No

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how well do you think you were trained? *

1 2 3 4 5

Have you been monitored throughout the year? *

Yes

No

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how well do you think you have been monitored? *

1 2 3 4 5

In terms of your job, what is going well? *

Your answer

In terms of your job, what needs improvement?

Your answer

SUBMIT

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Appendix D-Outline of Professional Learning Development Training

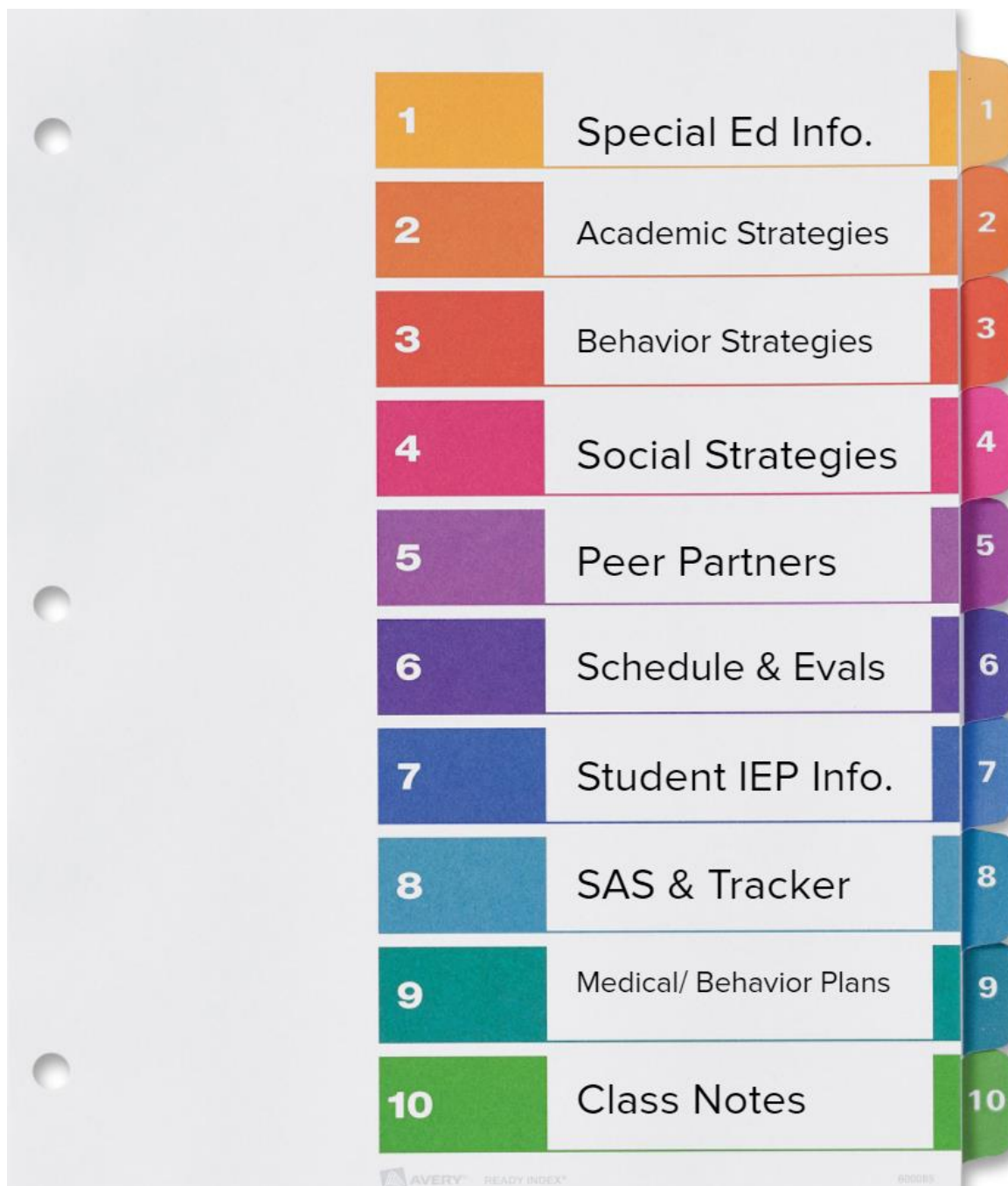
Day 1 of Professional Learning Development Training

- ❖ Welcome Back
 - Summer recap
- ❖ Baseline Data
 - Share responses
 - Time for feedback and paraprofessionals to share their thoughts in person
- ❖ Purpose of Project
 - Inform my intent and reasons for creating a guidebook
 - Go over my expectations
- ❖ Professional Development Book
 - *Paraprofessionals and Teachers Working Together: Highly Effective Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms*, by Susan Gingras Fitzell, M. Ed
- ❖ Guidebook
 - Pass it out and give time for paraprofessionals to flip through it
 - Explicitly go over dividers 1-5
- ❖ Closing remarks
 - Have individuals ask questions for the good of the group
 - Give a brief overview of day 2 plans

Day 2 of Professional Learning Development Training

- ❖ Recap from Day 1

- Ask if there are any questions
- ❖ Guidebook
 - Explicitly go over dividers 6-10
- ❖ Observations
 - Talk about who is observing and when
 - Go over the checklist
- ❖ Questions
 - Spend time answering group and individual questions

Appendix E-Divider Titles

Appendix F-Paraprofessional Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist based off of the 5-D+ TM Evaluation System

Purpose

The paraprofessional arrives on time with the student	
The paraprofessional leaves at the right time with the student	
The paraprofessional has his/her guidebook	
The paraprofessional uses academic supports	
The paraprofessional uses behavior supports	
The paraprofessional uses social supports	
The paraprofessional uses and tracks accommodations	

Classroom Environment and Culture

The paraprofessional is sitting in a appropriate spot	
The paraprofessional is encouraging peer interactions	
The paraprofessional uses appropriate language	
The paraprofessional uses the GROVES way	

Student Engagement

The student is engaged in the lesson	
The paraprofessional monitors if the student is engaged- check in	

Professional Collaboration & Communication

The paraprofessional is taking notes for the special education teacher	
The paraprofessional clarifies with general education teachers	

Appendix G-Paraprofessional Interview Questions

Questions	Answers
What classes do you support students in?	
What academic strategies do you use most? What academic strategies do you use least?	
What behavior strategies do you use most? What behavior strategies do you use least?	
What social strategies do you use most? What social strategies do you use least?	
How often do you communicate with the special education teacher?	
How often do you communicate with the general education teacher?	
What is going well? What is not going well?	
What area could you improve in?	

Appendix H-General/ Special Education Teacher Interview Questions

Questions	Answers
What classes do you teach?	
Who is the paraprofessional in your class?	
Does the student arrive on time?	
Does the student leave early?	
Who does the student sit by in class?	
Does the student talk to any general education peers in the class?	
Does the paraprofessional provide academic, behavior, and social strategies?	

Glow	Grow

Appendix I-Student Interview Questions

Questions	Responses
What paraprofessionals do you work with?	
What does he/she help you with?	
What do you wish he/she helped you with?	
Do you talk with your peers in class?	
Who do you sit by in class?	
Do you get to class on time?	
Do you leave class early?	
Do you like being out in the general education setting? Why/ why not?	