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SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SPECIAL OLYMPIC UNIFIED PROGRAMMING AND THE EFFECTS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Social Inclusion and Special Olympic Unified Programming

and the Effects on School Climate

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine our daily experience with weather. When it is warm outside, we are generally comfortable. When it is extremely hot or freezing, it may cause discomfort. When it is cloudy, this may make us feel gloomy or need relief from the sun. School climate can explain how we feel or how much we engage in our environment. School climate's definition explains how people feel and how willing they are to be engaged or involved and contribute to the school.

Educators have been studying school climate for over 100 years (Cohen et al., 2009). School climate influences how students feel, their willingness to get involved, and their excitement about their sense of self and others. Engagement or inclusion in an educational climate is not always evident with students with disabilities. People need to analyze how their actions or behaviors contribute to the school's feelings and its climate. The intersection between school climate and inclusion can be difficult to distinguish as they both rely on each other to make the most impact (Coulston & Smith, 2013). Inclusion and engagement within school climates require schools that reflect respect, equity, dignity, honesty, justice, and safety. School climate requires engaging students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents/guardians, and community partners. This engagement from all members can allow for inclusion, acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students. Reports, studies, and legislation has emphasized the importance of a positive school climate. It has proven to reduce achievement gaps, enhance healthy development and skills, and a foundation for lifelong success (Special Olympics, 2000c).

When students with disabilities are included and socially accepted in their schools and communities, it affects the climate or atmosphere. Special Education has evolved throughout the years, as it has gone through various stages. Initially, exclusion from school, their community, and even their own families was a norm for people with disabilities. Then segregation, where

students with disabilities were educated but remained separate from society. Next public schools were required to provide spaces and programs for students with disabilities and integrate them. Lastly, classrooms, schools, and communities could consider students with disabilities and find the best fit for every student and their needs through inclusion. Inclusion has even evolved from physically inclusive and placing students in general education classes for academic content. Social Inclusion is where students require more of the main academic content in a different environment but benefit from being with peers in a general education course.

Special Olympics programming has always focused on helping individuals with intellectual disabilities reach their full potential and providing additional opportunities to involve them within their communities. Special Olympics has now expanded the focus beyond sports and competitions into other arenas to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. One such avenue is Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS, 202a), a program through Special Olympics that has main strategies focusing on creating and sustaining a positive school climate that values and manifests appropriate and effective engagement leading to inclusion, acceptance, respect, and human dignity. Unified Champion School programming offers Unified sports, whole-school engagement, and inclusive youth leadership opportunities as part of a bigger goal of viewing students with a disability from a strength-based rather than a deficit-based perspective. The goal is to create public schools that ensure that all students have a sense of belonging and are naturally included in all aspects of the school's daily operation.

When students with and without disabilities are given the opportunity to interact in meaningful ways, like through UCS programming, and allow their similarities to be highlighted rather than accentuate their differences, they are valuable and have a positive attitude. Positive

attitudes by all school members create environments where everyone can learn about each other, show acceptance, become leaders for change, and create a positive school climate.

Research Questions

One question guides this literature review. How does Special Olympic programming or programming relate to social inclusion impact people within the school climate?

Focus on Paper

Research parameters started with Unified Champion School programming through Special Olympics website and research. Unified Champion School research is completed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs and Special Olympics. By analyzing and studying students' experiences with Special Olympic Unified Champion School programming, we can better understand how to implement inclusive educational programming and provide meaningful experiences for all students.

Additional sources were consulted through ERIC, St. Cloud State University college library, Google, and descriptors utilized were *inclusion, integration, social inclusion, school climate, Unified Champion Schools, Special Olympics, and peer and teacher's attitude on inclusion.* The number of articles found was 22, with 11 of them to be elaborated on in Chapter 2. The articles chosen were primarily based on reading the abstract and looking through the article for valid information pertaining to the research and articles that demonstrated research, peer-reviewed, and data.

Historical Background

One hundred years ago children with disabilities received little or no formal education. In the early 1900s, schools were created to educate children with special needs. These schools claimed to educated children, but they were more of a residential facility or institution in reality.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Eunice Kennedy Shriver saw how people with intellectual disabilities were mistreated. The Kennedy family had a sibling with an intellectual disability, and they witnessed how children with disabilities did not have a place to play or belong. Eunice had a vision for change, and she held a summer day camp for kids with intellectual disabilities right in her backyard. John F. Kennedy, Eunice's brother, was elected president of the United States in 1961, and with his help, they started a white house panel on people with intellectual disabilities. This vision eventually grew into the Special Olympics movement in 1968 (Special Olympics, 2020a).

In the 1970s, there was even more improvement in special education. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 fought for civil rights for all disabled people and required accommodations for special education students in schools. In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) forced children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education and obtain education in the "least restrictive environment" possible. The Least Restrictive environment is still widely used in special education today (Alleducationschools.com, 2018).

In 1997, EHA revised and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This new plan emphasized individual education plans (IEPs) for all special education students (Alleducationschools.com, 2018)

In 2008, Unified Champion Schools was established to build inclusion and acceptance in schools. As of 2017, over 5000 schools in the United States participate as a Unified Champion School (Special Olympics, 2020c).

Theoretical Background

School climate reform is an evidence-based strategy that supports K-12 students, school personnel, parents/guardians, and community members to learn and work together to promote

prosocial education (Coulston & Smith, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education, Center for

Disease Control, President Obama's Bully Prevention Partnership, many state Departments of

education, and many more organizations endorse school climate renewal as a strategy to increase

learning and achievement, enhance school connectedness, reduce drop-out rates, prevent

bullying and other forms of violence, and to enhance teacher retention rate (Coulston & Smith,

2013).

Educators have recognized that school climate is essential for over 100 years. It was in

the 1950s that they began to study school climate extensively. Research shows four significant

school climate areas: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment (Cohen et

al., 2009).

The relationship between school climate and inclusion can support the development of

communities with mutual respect, understanding, and equity for each other. Focusing on the

worth of diversity and ways to celebrate what each person can contribute gives the realization

that everyone has a place in the school climate or community.

Importance/Rationale

In the past, people with disabilities were in institutions and were not included or involved

in society. Throughout history, many movements for students with disabilities to be included and

accepted in society and the school climate. Every person has a basic human need to feel that they

belong and are loved. The typical school and most social environments can have many

challenges: intense social and academic pressure and bullying. Special Olympics research has

found that one in three students report bullying, and students with disabilities are two or three

times more likely to experience bullying. Students with intellectual disabilities also are faced

with isolation and do not spend time in a regular education classroom. Inclusion and school climate build off each other to ensure all students feel valued.

Working in a school environment that honors inclusion and unity through Unified club and integration into general education classes, the substantial impact of peer interaction on students' lives with disabilities is evident. Within these relationships, peers practice and refine social skills, access support systems, shared activities, and companionship, and learn peer norms and values. These relationships are crucial in their adolescent development. Interaction with peers in general education may play an additional role in academic, functional, social skill development, and social competence. Students with and without disabilities who feel connected to school are resilient, can better problem solve, have communication skills, and ability to empathize. Students who have these skills can make positive and healthy choices. General education teachers and administration are more accepting of inclusion when they see the connections between students with and without disabilities and the unique opportunities for students to learn more than the academic content in these general education classes.

Definition of Terms

Inclusion is a set of best practices and shared values that meaningfully support the diversity that each person brings to the school. It is a mutual expectation that all students are encouraged and engaged in school activities to their fullest potential. (Coulston & Smith, 2013). High-quality implementation of aspects that are important for the psycho-emotional and academic development of students with and without special education needs (Schwab et al., 2018).

Special Olympic Unified Partners: Individuals without a disability who train and compete as a teammate alongside Special Olympics athletes on a Unified sports team (Special Olympics, 2020d).

Special Olympic Unified Athletes: Individuals with a disability who train and compete on a Special Olympic team or a Unified sports team (Special Olympics, 2020d).

School Climate: The quality and character of school life. Students, families, and educators work together to promote the feeling of socially, emotionally, and physically safe and where people are engaged and respected. Four main areas are safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment (Cohen et al., 2009).

Refers to school life quality and characters that focus on patterns of people's school life experiences and reflect norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Schwab et al., 2018).

Social Inclusion: is a philosophy that each person has a desire to be socially and emotionally connected with the school (Coulston & Smith, 2013.

Special Olympics: The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community (Special Olympics, 2020c).

Unified Champion School: Special Olympics Unified School strategy includes Unified sports, inclusive clubs, whole school engagement, and youth leadership in combination to address many challenges faced by students with intellectual disabilities in schools. They create

communities where students with intellectual disabilities feel welcome and included in all school

activities, opportunities, and functions (Special Olympics, 2020b).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to examine how programming related to social inclusion impacts school climate. This chapter is organized into two major sections: studies that talk about inclusion interventions through programs like Special Olympics and Unified Champion Schools and the effects on students and staff within the school climate. Research in each of the two areas is chronologically ordered from older studies to more recent ones.

Inclusion Programming/Interventions

Inclusion programming is defined as an organization such as Unified or other intervention that a school puts into place in order to promote inclusion that involves students with disabilities. This section reviewed seven studies investigating Special Olympics, Unified programming, and social inclusion.

Idol (2006) evaluated special education students' inclusion in general education. This study aimed to examine and describe how special education services are provided within various schools. In this study, the definition of an *inclusive school* is that all students are educated in general education programs. A student in special education is educated full-time in the general education program. Inclusion is different from the definition of *mainstreaming*, which is when students with disabilities spend a portion of their school day in the general education program and a portion in a special education program.

This study had a participating school district, where the executive director of special education selected eight schools. The criteria for selecting schools were that each school had a well-developed special education program, and the staff felt that their approach was appropriate. The director also chose half that was at the bottom of offering inclusion, and the other half was at the top of the continuum of offering inclusion.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through personal interviews with educators. This interview involved preconceived questions and was conducted privately with each person involved. Statewide test data were also examined in each of the eight schools regarding the effect of testing students with disabilities compared to the school's overall results.

The data had frequencies and percentages, with reliability at 100% interrater reliability. This study's results were organized into two parts. The first contained the four elementary schools' evaluation results, and the second was the results of the four secondary schools. Results showed that 36% of the participants reported that students with disabilities in the general education classes resulted in higher statewide test scores with the general education students. An additional 33% reported that the general education students' test scores remained the same. In two out of the four schools, educators reported that student attitudes towards students with disabilities had improved due to inclusion (Idol, 2006). The most shocking find was that three out of the four elementary schools and 50% of the secondary schools made a noticeable improvement in average student scores over 4 years.

Overall, participants in this study favored the movement of inclusion and more toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classes. They could see the impact of students with disabilities on other students in their classes. This author's concern is to continue to monitor the referrals to special education. Referrals tend to increase because teachers who want to promote inclusion may push more students to qualify for special education.

Bota et al., (2014) evaluated the social inclusion factor in school communities for young people with intellectual disabilities. This research gathered quantitative and qualitative information about social bonding between intellectually disabled athletes and their partners from schools and competing on sports teams. The author's approach aimed to identify the self-concept

and self-esteem among athletes with a disability concerning their social integration and how their peers in school and during special Olympic events perceived them.

Unified sports is one of the Special Olympics programs with allows students with and without a disability to experience each other's abilities, make friendships, and promote inclusion. It also improved self-esteem and self-confidence among the athletes. As a review, Unified sports has two types of participants. Athletes consist of participants who have a disability, and partners consist of participants who do not have a disability.

The sample consisted of 92 subjects, 46 were athletes with an intellectual disability between the ages of 11 and 46, and 46 were partners aged between 11 and 21. They were all participants in the Unified Sports Project. The athletes came from seven special schools, and most of the partners were pupils from five mainstream schools and colleges.

The authors used observation, conversation, questionnaire-related methods, statistical processing methods (SPSS), and data interpreting to complete the research. One topic of research was if age influences the way Special Olympic athletes express their opinions, and data showed a positive correlation between the age of participants and the self-confidence in which they express their opinions, which increases with age. There was also a positive correlation between the perception of the participants' high athletic training level and how they express their opinions, which confirms that sports can promote physical levels and cognitive and emotional levels and the effect of empowerment.

Data analysis found that 36 partners out of 46 think that people with disabilities can train and become performing athletes and are an essential part of the community; this suggests that partners favor social inclusion and acceptance.

In conclusion, creating physical activity environments that encourage diversity and individual growth effectively creates successful inclusion. With Special Olympic athletes' self-image in correlation with others' attitudes, they found a positive self-concept and perception of the attitude of the non-disabled partners. Unified programming proves to have a positive perception of the disabled athlete's potential and contribution to the community. In the author's opinion, bringing Unified programming into schools is an excellent opportunity for young people to understand acceptance, adherence, sharing, and friendship, caring, and making a general difference in someone's life.

McConkey et al., (2013) conducted a study that evaluated Unified sports outcomes, focusing on social inclusion. Qualitative data analysis identified four main themes: 1) the personal development of athletes and partners; 2) creating inclusive and equal bonds; 3) promoting positive perceptions of the athletes; and 4) building alliances within local communities. This study aimed to describe factors that promote social inclusion within Unified sports and determine how these factors are present across two different sports and five countries and identify suggestions for further developing Unified sports.

Qualitative data gathered to show Unified sports and its impact on social inclusion. Unified sports programs are in 28 countries in Europe. In this study, the number of selected countries was established where the Unified programming was better established and focused on two main sports, football and basketball. Initially, eight countries were considered to meet the criteria, and five agreed to participate in the study. Serbia, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, and Hungary were the participating countries. Fifty-five teams were represented, involving 156 athletes, 106 partners, and 65 coaches. Eighty-one percent of the athletes were male, 87% of partners were male, and 75% of coaches were male.

In each of the five countries, individual interviews were conducted with five athletes, five or six partners, and five coaches. Group interviews were conducted, with an average of four teams in each country. Five parents of both athletes and partners were interviewed and were four or five community members (teachers or politicians).

In each country, two or more researchers from universities who had experience in sports or disability research were responsible for translating all the written materials into the local languages and the interview data back into English. The data collection was based on a 1-day competition among the participating team, which allowed the researchers to observe the sports in action and give the teams an enjoyable experience. Interviews were done throughout the competition when members were available. They were conducted in a quiet, separate room and usually lasted about fifteen minutes.

To analyze the data, the approach used was interpretative phenomenological analysis. Interviews were read, reread, and then coded according to the main themes and subthemes. The second round of coding was applied to compare the five countries' themes and check for variations.

All participants confirmed that Unified sports had resulted in athletes' greater social inclusion. This was evident in sports engagement and shared activities away from the sports field. The four main themes and subthemes from the data collected were personal development of athletes and partners, inclusive and equal bonds, positive perceptions of athletes, and building alliances.

Personal development of athletes and partners was seen in sporting skills, interpersonal skills, and opportunities offered to them through Unified sports. Both athletes and partners reported improvements in their skills and increased stamina on the sports field, which led to

increased status among peers at school and in their community. These improved interpersonal skills showed growth in self-belief, self-esteem, confidence, and improved communication skills. Athletes reported the broadening of opportunities that they experienced in their community through Unified sports. It would allow them to meet other people with disabilities in their community and visit various community places for events or meetings. It also allowed them to create friendships with the partners, which allowed them to frequently visit places where other teenagers or peers would hang out.

Inclusive or equal bonds were developed between athletes and partners, as there was mutual respect, equality, and a focus on teamwork. The growth of friendships among the players was common, and some coaches deliberately encouraged this and helped foster it. When these bonds were absent with teams, there was less evidence of mutual participation in the community.

Positive perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities is a theme of Unified sports and throughout this study. Most parents and partners reported that having a disability in the community can be taboo, or people are ashamed. Throughout Unified sports, many partners' attitudes changed towards people with disabilities, and even families widen their vision of friends and family according to their child with a disability. Unified sports brought out the awareness of the athlete's talents and achievements, not their disability.

Building alliances is important among coaches, parents, and community members. These alliances allowed for some assistance with training, covering expenses, and support through these events. It also is to continue to promote inclusion within the schools.

There were some limitations throughout this study. The participants who were actively involved with Unified sports do not include those who may have dropped out. The selection of teams and the inclusion criteria used may have been biased towards using the best examples of

teams rather than a typical example. However, the study's main point was not to assess the program's overall impact but to gain insight into Unified sports promoting social inclusion. This study's strengths included two different sports and participants from five different countries and had various participants (athletes, partners, community members, coaches).

In summary, the four themes identified by this study all support the idea of social bonding and building networks and strong social ties. This bonding is especially crucial for athletes with a disability, who generally have more insufficient sporting competence and social skills, along with society's stereotypes associated with a disability. Unified sports provide a shared experience for athletes and partners to develop their sporting skills, value traveling opportunities, and promote inclusion. There is also mention about bonding the participants and bonding groups of people with resources or their community. Unified sports does promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Sullivan and Masters Glidden (2014) conducted a study of changing attitudes towards disabilities through Unified sports. Three questions were researched: (1) Can a cognitive/ affective/behavioral intervention implement result in more positive attitudes of persons without disabilities towards persons with a disability? (2) Do persons without a disability report benefitting from this intervention? (3) Do Special Olympic swimmers in Unified programming report they benefit from the experience, and if so, how?

Participants included 33 members of a college varsity swim team who participated over 6 weeks. Participants were assigned to an Intervention Group ($N = 16$, 9 female, 7 male, mean age $= 20$) or a Control Group ($N = 11$, 9 female, 2 male, mean age 19.45). Six members could not participate fully due to time commitments and were placed in a Non-randomly Assigned Control

Group (2 female, 4 male, mean age = 19.83). There were also eight Special Olympic swimmers participating (6 male, 2 female, mean age = 17.6).

The study's duration was 6 weeks, and the intervention consisted of one cognitive/ affective preparation session and four 1-hour sessions with Special Olympic swimmers, spaced one week apart. The participants all completed a pre-test, and then they were assigned to their groups. The Control group then participated in the cognitive/affective intervention session. This intervention aimed to allow the college participants to get to know the Special Olympic athletes before the first day through letters, videos, and pictures.

The Medical Student Attitudes Toward Persons with Disabilities Scale was used to measure college swimmers' attitudes. Another inventory using a Likert scale reported very good internal reliability (Chronbach α = .857). Special Olympic swimmers answered five questions after the final session.

Scores of attitude scores completed by the college swimmers were compared for male and female participants. An independent t-test indicated no significant difference between male and female, so further analysis conducted used the combination of male/female samples. The means and standard deviations for the pre-test and post-test were compared across the Intervention Group, the Randomly Assigned Control Group, and the Non-Randomly Assigned Control Group. The Intervention Group participants showed a substantial increase in positive attitudes at post-test, where the Control Group participants did not. A two-way mixed-design ANOVA was completed on data between-subjects Group factor (Intervention, Randomly Assigned Control, and Non-Randomly Assigned Control) and within-subjects Time factor (Pretest, Posttest). The three groups started with similar scores, which indicates similar attitudes.

A one-way analysis of variance showed that the groups' scores were significantly different on the post-test (F (2, 30) = 22.54, $p < .001$).

Post hoc comparisons showed the Intervention Group scores were significantly higher than the other two groups. The Intervention Group's attitudes were significantly more favorable than those of the other control groups after the intervention. In interviews conducted with Intervention Group, participants reported benefiting from this experience. Fourteen out of Sixteen claimed their attitudes had become more positive. The Special Olympic swimmers also reported they liked the program and wanted it to continue.

One limitation of this study was interpreting the success of the intervention. There was no measure for social desirability and control for measuring attitudes. Another concern is for the program to be scaled up in size, the 2:1 ratio of swimmers without a disability to swimmer s with disabilities allowed for optimal personal interactions and bonding. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that changes can be made to attitudes because of intervention with cognitive, affective, and behavioral components.

Allan and Persson (2018) researched Social capital and trust for inclusion in school and society. In September 2016, the United Nations human rights experts declared new guidelines saying, "Inclusive education is central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and the development of inclusive, peaceful and fair societies" (Allan & Persson, 2018).

The participants in this study attended a school that promoted a robust, inclusive learning environment during their lower secondary school years. The students are from Sweden and followed for 7 years, during their lower secondary school, and onto 33 different high schools. Social capital was used to assess students' sense of connectedness and guide making friendships.

Students were interviewed in their third and final year of high school, aged 18-19. Half of the students were female, and half were male. Half had chosen an academic program, and half a vocational program in high school.

Social capital is a concept based on the idea that social relationships make a difference. It is a value in promoting social cohesion and more engagement with diversity. Social capital was the basis for the structure of interviews with the students involved and focusing on school relationships. The researchers were interested in finding if the Swedish schools, when promoted to be inclusive, would be a social capital intervention and, if so, whether the students gained advantages through this resource (Allan & Persson, 2018).

Students were interviewed, and then they were asked to map out visually people and things that were important to them involving their school. This mapping activity stimulated the students' reflections on their school experiences. Values and norms that the students described as necessary were a focus. A thematic analysis of the students' transcripts and identifying patterns were examined. Some topics that came out of the initial interviews were categorized in this study as a *future-proofing success, diversity benefits, and high school survival.* Two elements of values and norms observed were trust and confidence.

Findings revealed an active social capital among the students, which gives them an outlook on life that is highly positive and benefit from engaging with diversity and people with diverse characteristics and experiences. Students considered the relationships with teachers to be important in their success. The students also considered the diversity with student abilities to be a valuable resource and taught them to be more accepting. Students with special needs learning within their mainstream classes proved beneficial. They also benefitted from a greater awareness

of what students with disabilities brought to a general education classroom. Students also felt a

sense of belonging that carried all aspects of their daily activities.

Table 1

Inclusion Programing/Interventions

Authors	Study Design	Participants	Procedure	Findings
Idol, (2006)	Qualitative & Quantitative	--8 schools within a district with well-developed sped programs.	--Data collected by interviews with educators. --Statewide test data analyzed.	--educators move more towards inclusion. --schools can fully activate the full potential of inclusion and LRE with special education.
Bota, Teodorescu, & Serbanoiu (2014)	Quantitative, Qualitative, SPSS, & Correlation	--92 subjects; 46 with a disability age 11-46 -- 46 without disability age 11-21.	--Identifying perception of self-concept and self-esteem among athletes related to social integration, the way non-disabled peers perceive athletes, and correlation of partners perception of athletes abilities	--athletes with disabilities have a high self-concept related to participation in sports. --Unified programming has a positive impact on students with and without disabilities. --partners view athletes with high athletic abilities and the ability to contribute to the community.
McConkey, Dowling, Hassan, & Menke (2013)	Qualitative data analysis.	--55 teams across five countries, --156 athletes, 106 partners, 65 coaches. --A small sample of parents and community members.	--Face to face interviews, --observations, --data analysis	--Unified sports resulted in greater social inclusion. --four main themes came from study 1)personal development of athletes and partners. 2) inclusive and equal bonds. 3) positive perceptions of athletes. 4) building alliances.
Sullivan & Masters Glidden (2014)	Cronbach, 1-way ANOVA, 2-way ANOVA	--33 college swimmers, -- 8 Special Olympic swimmers.	--Participants were given a pre-test, --Placed into 3 groups. (Intervention, Control, and Non-randomly Assigned). --The intervention was done. --post-test was given.	--Intervention group showed more positive attitudes towards people with a disability. --Special Olympics athletes enjoyed the program and wanted it to continue.
Allan & Persson (2018)	Quantitative	--20 students from a cohort of 148 in Sweden. --Age 18-19. ½ male, ½ female. --½ chose vocational programming, ½ chose academic programming in high school.	--Social capital was used to structure interviews and focus on school relationships over seven years.	--Students appreciated the diversity, inclusion in general education classes, sense of belonging, learned values of trust and confidence.

Effects on People in the School Climate

Siperstein et al., (2007) realized that in the past 50 years, many studies had been done on the attitudes of individuals towards people with disabilities, but wanted to research the specific demographic group of middle school children on their attitudes towards students with disabilities. Consistent findings among research have found that youth hold negative attitudes toward their peers with Intellectual Delay (ID)

They conducted a national survey and randomly selected 47 school districts from 26 different states in the United States. They selected 68 urban, 24 suburban, and 17 rural schools in these school districts. Two seventh grade and two eighth grade classes were selected from each school. Of these students, 5,837 responded with permission to participate in the survey. Teachers of mathematics and English administered the survey to the students and were given guidelines and materials.

This was a comprehensive survey and focused on many aspects of youth's attitudes on students with an ID, or Mental Retardation (MR) was used as a term in the survey as the authors felt this was a more accessible/understandable term. Exposure to Mental Retardation was a part of the survey along with five inclusion-related attitude scales that can be described as Perceived Capabilities Scale, Impact of Inclusion Scale, Behavioral Intentions Scale, Academic Inclusion Scale, and Nonacademic Inclusion Scale.

There were eight questions for exposure to MR that students answered on a yes/no scale. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency reliability was .623. Youth reported little contact with MR/ID students, with 20% having had to contact a student in elementary school. In middle school, 38% report having a classmate with MR, and 10% reported having a current classmate with MR. 10% of youth have a friend with MR.

Perceived Capabilities Scale had 16 questions that assessed youths' perceptions of students with MR and their capabilities. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency reliability was .824. The mean of this scale was 10.30, and the midpoint was nine, which can conclude that middle school youth have a relatively positive view of students' capabilities with MR.

The *Impact of Inclusion Scale* consisted of five questions that assessed the impact of inclusion on their class. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency reliability was .656. Many students in this survey believed that inclusion would impede their education, and some felt that the teacher would give more attention to the student with MR. On the other hand, students believe that inclusion can be positive by teaching equity, and students' differences can be accepted. Overall, results found that students believe that inclusion has both a positive and negative effect.

Behavioral Intentions Scale consisted of 12 questions to assess students' interactions with peers with MR. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency reliability was .932. Results showed that students without a disability had 35% that would invite a student with MR to their home, 32% would invite them to a movie, and 27% would talk about personal things. Generally, students without a disability do not see students with MR as potential friends.

The *Academic Inclusion Scale* consisted of two questions, the first asked student if students with MR could take part in a mathematics class with general education students, and the second question is if students with MR could take part in an English class. This scale's coefficient alpha was .784. The Academic Inclusion Scale's mean is .90, and the midpoint is 1.0. The *Non-academic Inclusion Scale* survey has two questions as well. The first question was if a student with MR could participate in an art class with general education students, and the second

question asked if they could participate in a physical education class. This scale's coefficient

alpha was .439. The mean of the Non-academic Inclusion Scale was 1.57, which is above the

midpoint of 1.0. Youth support is more inclusive in non-academic classes like Art & Physical

Education than in their academic classes like English and Mathematics.

One of the surprising findings of this research was that an assumption that youth would

report high levels of inclusion and contact with a student with MR/ID. In their findings, fewer

than 40% of youth reported having a student with ID in their previous elementary or current

middle school. Only 10% reported having a student with ID in their current classroom. Most of

the youth in this study were found to gain their knowledge of ID from secondary sources,

including media, teachers, and parents. Students often reported engaging with students with ID

superficially by saying help or lending a pencil versus interacting socially as friends.

Researchers' past assumptions are that contact and exposure to a student with ID will

influence youths' attitudes toward their disability. This study concluded that exposure and

contact do not directly affect those attitudes. The most important finding of this study is that

youths' perception of a person with ID is pivotal. Instead of just exposure or contact, students

without a disability need to witness the students with ID's competency. Although the education

systems and laws promote inclusive practices, this study shows that students are reporting

minimal contact with students with ID in their schools.

Carrol et al. (2011) did a qualitative study on school culture for students with significant

support needs. In this article, students with significant support needs include cognitive

impairments, often paired with sensory or physical challenges, who receive substantial education

support. School culture in this study is defined as the context in which education occurs and is

exemplified by the patterns of behavior, values, and embedded beliefs and assumptions shared by its members.

This qualitative study examined a school culture that experts recommended in the field as a school that displays exemplary, comprehensive, and inclusive education services for students with significant needs. A committee of experts established potential sites, and three schools were recommended, visited, and evaluated for this study. In the end, there was one suburban high school in the western United States that was selected for this study. Participants in this study included people who provided education and assistance to students with significant support needs. Ten people agreed to participate in this study, including two special education teachers, two general education teachers, two paraprofessionals, two parents, the principal, and one physical therapist.

For this study, interviews were given to the participants. Nineteen artifacts were collected and categorized for analysis: this included mission statements, minutes from meetings, school website, and student work. Field notes were recorded during weekly observations of day-to-day activities. Data reduction process data were first selected and sorted into a priori variable strands using the analytic framework.

Some artifacts collected showed that this school was often in the newspaper for student involvements, some of the teachers had received awards for excellence, and school spirit was displayed all over the school. This school's values showed a community-based school and promoted connections to its community. Many staff were alumni, and it valued connections to each student and problem solving, and a high priority to parent involvement and connectedness. This school's assumptions and beliefs are that the community has a small-town feel and makes

the school a hub of the community, ownership where people stay and are involved in this community, and a strong sense of belonging.

Some concerns in this study are that the authors believed that even though this school has a strong sense of community, it did not provide adequate academic instruction for students with significant needs. Effective education is an integrated system of academic and social supports. This study indicates that belief in community and a sense of belonging is a priority at this school, but exemplary education for students with significant support needs is not a priority.

Dimitrova-Radojchikj and Chichevska-Jovanova (2015) studied teachers' acceptance of students with disabilities in their classroom and the factors that influenced the acceptance. Although many laws have encouraged inclusion, inclusive education has not been fully implemented. Teachers do have experience with the inclusion of students with a disability, which is a reality in many classrooms. Inclusive education goes beyond the physical placement of children with a disability into a general education classroom. Inclusion involves all students having the right to be genuinely included, participate with others actively, be valued members of the school community, and access quality education.

The sample for this study included 122 teachers in Macedonia. The teachers' sample was recruited from six public general schools (for pupils 5 to 14 years old). The Diversity Acceptance Checklist (DAC) of students with Disabilities was administered to the participants. The DAC contains 20 questions using a Likert scale and took about 15 minutes to complete. In addition to this questionnaire, a collection of background information and experience was collected on each teacher.

The number of secondary teachers ($n = 69$) was more significant than the number of primary teachers ($n = 53$). Of the 122 participants, 82.2% were female. The participants' mean

age was 40.06 years old, with a range of 25-59 years. Participant's teaching experience ranged from 1 to 36 years. Only 22.9% of the participants reported that they did not have previous teaching experience with students with disabilities. 45.1% of the teachers do not have students with disabilities in their classroom in the current school year.

An independent t-test was conducted to determine the mean and compare the DAC of teachers with teaching experience and without teaching experience with pupils with a disability. The results implicated that both teachers have a similar DAC score with or without teaching experience. The standard deviation for teachers with experience was 0.56 and for teachers without experience was 0.43. This implies that teachers with experience were a little more homogeneous in their answers, while teachers without experience had more diversity in their frequency on the checklist. The mean difference in the DAC between teachers with and without experience was no significance ($t = -0.067$, $df = 36$, $p > .05$).

There was a statistical difference between younger and older teachers' acceptations on the fifth, thirteenth and twentieth questions. On the questions "*Do I attempt to determine students' diverse learning styles and teach with them in mind*" and "*Do I trust the administration to give me adequate support,*" older teachers have a better mean score. However, on the question, "*Do I view students with special needs as my students,*" the mean scores were statistically significant with younger teachers.

The research found that teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction through inclusive education participation. A teacher's role in ensuring that all students with a disability or without a disability participate actively in the classroom is vital for true inclusion. Some limitations with this study are that the inclusion policy is difficult to implement because teachers are not sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive

classrooms and schools. Inclusion required teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn and feel like they belong.

Shogren et. al. (2015) completed a study that examined the experiences of students with and without disabilities being educated in inclusive schools. They did this by documenting the students' perceptions of their school culture, inclusion and implemented practices to support them.

Data were analyzed from 11 focus groups (six with students without disabilities and five with students with disabilities) and two individual interviews with students with severe disabilities and a peer buddy across six schools. Eighty-six students participated, 53 without disabilities and 33 with disabilities. The students ranged from first to eighth grade. The focus groups were conducted at six Knowledge Development Sites (KDS), identified by the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) center as being exemplars of successful inclusive school reform in the United States. The six schools selected were visited two additional times over a 1-year period, where multiple forms of data were collected.

The research team developed an interview guide to promoting comparability across focus groups and facilitators. Two investigators (first and third authors) analyzed the interviews' data using a constant comparative method.

Students had very diverse interpretations of inclusion in this study and what structures or practices worked well at their schools to promote inclusion. Students described feeling like their school had a highly positive school culture and a sense of belonging. The highly positive school culture was related to high expectations, feeling supported, and connected to teachers and peers. Students described their principals as aware of what is going on and are champions for success. A majority of students described their teachers as a critical element in making them feel

supported and safe at school. Although students described their school as inclusive, students with and without disabilities reported bullying in less structured environments. Many participants described their recent school experience as better than their previous schools concerning bullying.

Students reported that their schools dealt with bullying proactively with security officers, playground monitors, and posters, reinforcing a positive school message and a sense of belonging. Many students without disabilities view helping students with a disability as a critical element of inclusion. Students with disabilities reported a preference for being with a peer without a disability and being included in learning environments with those peers.

Some limitations with this study are that even though a committee selected these schools, different school contexts and policies affect how inclusion is defined, and these differences may have influenced the findings. Another factor is five schools were elementary, and one school was middle school. The middle school students expressed some unique issues beyond the present analysis scope but should be researched further to examine differences between elementary and middle school.

Overall, all students reported feeling that they were a part of a unique school culture where they were supported, felt connected, and ready for success. Principals and teachers were a considerable force driving this positive school culture. The positive school culture seemed to create a safe space for students to celebrate differences and focus on inclusion. Overall, students described benefitting from implementing evidence-based practices in their classrooms. This included classroom-monitoring systems, strategies to promote self-determination, expression, and engagement. Students also described the importance of teachers' attitudes and students with and without disabilities spending time together.

Vaz et al. (2015) engaged in a study aimed to identify the factors associated with primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with all disabilities in regular schools. Inclusion is based on social justice, where all students are entitled to equal access to all educational opportunities.

In this study, data was collected from a cross-sectional survey. The study reached out to 250 mainstream primary schools in Australia. Classroom teachers in charge of students in their final year of primary school, or grades six or seven. These teachers catered for students with a disability who attended a regular class, with classroom support, for most of their school day. Cross-sectional data was collected from 74 primary school teachers across 74 schools in the inner city and regional areas. Information was collected via survey questionnaires.

The Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities scale (ORI) was an outcome measure. This scale measured teachers' attitudes toward integrating students with a disability in regular settings. In this study, the ORI scale was used as a unidimensional construct, with higher scores indicating a poor attitude to inclusion. The ORI score's internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).

Teachers reported details on the school's demographics, education, training, and general characteristics. Each school was assigned a socio-economic status (SEIFA index) based on postcode, Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations measure. The SEIF decile was used to measure mean school-SES, with a lower decile ranking indicative of greater disadvantaged relative to high decile rankings, which indicate more significant influence.

Bandura's Teachers Efficacy scale was used to assess teachers' efficacy beliefs. The scale measured perceived efficacy to influence decision-making, use of school resources, instructional practices, disciplinary practices, parent involvement, community involvement, and

positive school climate. Items are scored such that a higher score indicates greater efficacy. The average score for the 30-item score had strong internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.94$).

Statistical Data analysis was conducted, and the estimation maximization (EM) and Little's Chi-square identified data to be missing, with the probability level set at 0.05. Where data were missing, it was replaced by mean scores. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the profiles of participants. Multiple linear regression models were run to describe the relations between school, classroom, and teacher factors (Independent variables) and the teachers' attitudes to inclusion scores (dependent variables). An ANOVA was conducted to test whether the Dependent variable appeared to vary linearly across categories of the independent variables.

Four teacher attributes-age, gender, teaching self-efficacy, training-collectively explained 42% of the variability in teachers' attitude towards including students with disabilities (F (7,46) = 4.37, p < .001). Male teachers had a more negative attitude towards inclusion (Beta = -.25, p = .04). Teachers aged 55 years and over upheld more negative attitudes towards inclusion when compared to 35-55-year-old subgroup (Beta = -.55, p = .002). Teachers with low levels of self-efficacy in their teaching skills were more likely to uphold a negative attitude towards including students with disabilities (Beta = -.38, p = .003). Teachers who reported having training in teaching students with disabilities upheld positive attitudes towards inclusion (Beta = .29, p = .032). Items that did not show significant influence on the teachers' attitudes towards inclusiveness were classroom attributes, teacher attributes, and students' characteristics such as gender, and whether the child received support in school.

Despite recruitment efforts, 70% of the 250 schools declined to participate in the study, which may have introduced a possible bias. However, it is impossible to decide if the participating schools were negatively or positively biased toward the inclusion of students with

disabilities. Although the measured used in this study were psychometrically sound, they do not provide information that can explain why teachers uphold their attitudes.

There appears to be a broad consensus that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are critical in implementing the goal of inclusive schools. Attempts have been made to identify factors associated with teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, and the results have been mixed so far. This current study adds to the evidence that gender appears to be a predictor of teacher attitudes towards inclusion and that male teachers tend to have a more negative attitude than female teachers. Four teacher attributes = age, gender, teaching self-efficacy, and training collectively explained 42% of the variability in teachers' attitude toward including students with disabilities.

Li and Wu (2017) studied how the Special Olympics programs affect volunteers' self-esteem, and attitudes towards individuals with intellectual disability (ID) are limited. A quasi-experimental study was conducted to address this gap. In past studies, the authors have found that the social inclusion of people with ID is significantly predicted by the attitudes of people without disabilities. Negative attitudes towards inclusion prevail but are shifting in a favorable direction. People with ID commonly experience discrimination, such as reduced employment opportunities, poor education, and low-quality healthcare. Various interventions implemented have aimed to increase inclusion with students with ID. These interventions aimed to increase the participants'' knowledge of ID or their contact with individuals with ID. Participation in Special Olympics programs expose people without disabilities to individuals with ID. This organization offers a variety of sports and health-related programs for people with ID. Special Olympics also provides a platform for enhancing public attitudes towards individuals with ID.

A quasi-experimental design involving control and intervention groups and pre- and post-tests was used in this study. Participants were a sample of 243 undergraduate students (86 male,

157 females) was recruited from a university in south-eastern China. All participants were ethnically Chinese with a mean age of 20.60 years. None of the participants were studying special education or related subjects. The intervention group participants ($n = 120$) were volunteers for the Special Olympics Eunice Kennedy Shriver University Day. The control group participants ($n = 123$) were not. The participants were not randomized into two groups. There were no group differences in terms of sex and age, but the intervention group had more previous contact with people with ID than the control group.

Five demographic items were used to obtain information on the participants. Sex, age, education level, study major, and previous contact experiences with individuals with ID were measured. The Chinese version of the Self-Esteem Scale with 10 items was used to evaluate the participants' self-esteem. The reliability and validity of this scale in Chinese university students are supported by previous research.

The Social Distance subscale from the Mental Retardation Attitude Inventory-Revised was used to measure the participants' tendencies to be associated with individuals with ID. The subscale was comprised of eight items and used a four-point Likert scale. A higher score indicates a more positive attitude. The subscale had adequate internal reliability in the current study (α pre-test = .63, α post-test = .72).

All participants read information sheets and completed informed consent forms before the study. Pre-test survey packages were administered to the participants. Research assistants instructed participants on the correct completion of assessment tools. After the pre-test, intervention group participants who were volunteers for the Special Olympics EKS University Day remained in the classroom and undertook a pre-service training program. This was the first part of the intervention, and the second was the participants in a half-day volunteer service at the

Special Olympics EKS University Day. The whole intervention was designed to expose the

intervention group participants to information on ID and people with ID, which is believed to

provide a positive attitude towards people with ID. An attendance record showed that all

intervention group participants attended the pre-service training program. Interactions between

individuals with and without ID were observed during the service. Post-test for both intervention

and control groups was conducted one day after the intervention.

Data collected was analyzed using SPSS Version 21.0. The means and standard

deviations of self-esteem and social distance were computed. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)

was used to analyze the correlation between the pre- and post-test scores for self-esteem and

social distance. Independent t-tests were used to determine whether the two groups were

different at baseline for self-esteem and social distance. A series of 2 (group) X 2 (time) repeated

measured analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine whether intervention improved participants'

self-esteem and social distance. The previous contact variable was entered as a co-variable for

controlling the difference in all the outlined ANOVA tests because the intervention group had

more previous contact experience with people with ID than the control group.

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess whether a change in self-esteem can

contribute to a change in social distance. The change in results from pre-test to post-test was

computed for each participant by subtracting each individual's pre-test score from their post-test

score. Finally, a Cohen's d effect size was used to interpret the standardized difference between

the two means.

Descriptive results are that relationships between the pre- and post-test were strong for

self-esteem ($r = .63$, $p < .001$) and social distance ($r = .72$, $p < .001$), indicating a good test-retest

reliability for the two measures. The results of the independent t-tests indicated no group

differences at baseline for self-esteem, t (241) = -1.26, p = .21, and social distance, t (241) = -

0.79, p = .43.

The ANOVA tests results revealed a significant time effect for self-esteem, F (1,240) =

5.90, p = 0.02. An interaction effect between group and time was found for self-esteem,

F (1,240) = 18.47, p < .001. The follow-up simple effect test showed that the intervention group

had a higher self-esteem level than the control group, t (241) = -4.24, p < .001, d = 0.54. This

proved that participants' self-esteem was enhanced immediately after the event.

A marginal time effect was observed for social distance, F (1,240) = 3.87, p = .05. There

was an interaction effect between group and time on social distance, F (1,240) = 11.62, p = .001.

The follow-up simple effect test revealed a higher social distance score for the intervention group

than for the control group, (t (241) = -3.60, p < .001, d = 0.45. The pre-service training program

provided to the participants may have played a significant role in positive experiences during the

half-day volunteer service.

The regression analysis results of age, sex, and previous contact was not significant, F (3,

241) = 0.39, p = .76, R^2 = 0.01. After controlling for demographic data, a change in self-esteem

was a positive predictor for change in social distance (β = .33, p < .001). Enhanced self-esteem is

believed to contribute to positive psychological outcomes; ad substantial positive thinking and

emotions about individuals with ID are expected to be observed together with increased self-

esteem.

The following limitations should be acknowledged while interpreting the current

findings. A quasi-experimental design rather than a randomized experimental design was applied

because of setting-specific constraints. However, possible confounding factors like age, sex,

education level, and past contact experiences were controlled for the current study. No group

difference for self-esteem and social inclusion was determined at baseline. Another limitation is that the participants may have responded to the survey questions in a socially desirable manner despite emphasis made for honest responses. Finally, the intervention's lasting effect was unclear because the post-test was conducted one day after intervention.

Volunteers' self-esteem and attitudes of inclusion towards people with ID immediately improved after participating in the Special Olympics program. Enhanced self-esteem during the Special Olympics service may have contributed to positive attitudinal change.

Table 2

Effects on People in the School Climate

Authors	Study Design	Participants	Procedure	Findings
Siperstein, Parker, Norris Bardon, & Widaman (2007)	Qualitative	--47 school districts from 26 different states in the United States. --They selected 68 urban, 24 suburban, and 17 rural schools in these school districts. --Two seventh grade and two eighth grade classes from each school. --Of these students, 5,837 responded with permission to participate in the survey.	--comprehensive survey focused on many aspects of youth's attitudes on students with an ID, or Mental Retardation (MR) --Exposure to Mental Retardation was a part of the survey along with five inclusion-related attitude scales that can be described as: 1) Perceived Capabilities Scale, 2) Impact of Inclusion Scale, 3) Behavioral Intentions Scale, 4) Academic Inclusion Scale, 5) Nonacademic Inclusion Scale.	1) *Perceived Capabilities Scale:* conclude that middle school youth have a relatively positive view of students' capabilities with MR. 2) The *Impact of Inclusion Scale* consistent. Overall, results found that students believe that inclusion has both a positive and negative effect. 3) *Behavioral Intentions Scale* Generally, students without a disability do not see students with MR as potential friends. 4) The *Academic Inclusion Scale* asked the student if students with MR could take part in a Mathematics or English class with general education students 5) The *Non-academic Inclusion Scale* survey Youth support is more inclusive in non-academic classes like Art & Gym than in their academic classes like English and Mathematics.
Carroll, Fulmer, Sobel, Garrison-Wade, Aragon, Coval (2011)	Qualitative	--One school, 10 participants (2 sped teachers, 2 gen ed teachers, 2 paras, 2 parents, principal, and a physical therapist.	--Artifacts were taken --interviews of participants, --data analysis using the Priori method.	--This study indicates that community and sense of belonging are a priority at this school but do not provide an exemplary education for students with significant needs.

Table 2 (continued)

Dimitrova-Radojchikj & Chichevska-Jovanova (2015)	Qualitative Independent t-test	--122 teachers at 6 schools in Macedonia.	--Diversity Acceptance Checklist (DAC), --- statistical analysis,	--22.9% of the participants reported that they did not have previous teaching experience with students with disabilities. --The current school year, 45.1% of the teachers do not have students with disabilities in their classroom. With or without teaching experience, both teachers have a similar score on the DAC survey. The research found that teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction through participation in inclusive education.
Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Satter, Blue-Banning, & Hill (2015)	Qualitative	--86 students in 5 schools (elementary & middle) --53 without disabilities & 33 with disabilities	--Focus groups created, --2 interviews --data analysis	--students reported feeling that they were a part of a unique school culture --Principals and teachers were a considerable force driving this positive school culture to celebrate difference and inclusion. -Students described benefitting from implementing evidence-based practices in their classrooms. This included classroom-monitoring systems, strategies to promote self-determination, expression, and engagement. Students also described the importance of teachers' attitudes and students with and without disabilities spending time together.
Vaz, Wilson, Falkmer, Sim, Scott, Cordier, Falkmer (2015)	SPSS data analysis, chi-square, ANOVA	--74 primary school teachers in Western Australia	--Teachers' attitudes and efficacy toward integration of students with disabilities was measured --Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disability scale and Bandura's Teacher Efficacy scale.	--Four teacher attributes: age, gender, teaching self-efficacy, and training collectively explained 42% of the variability in teachers' attitude towards including students with disabilities.

Table 2 (continued)

Li & Wu (2017)	SPSS data, Pearsson correlation, independent t-test, ANOVA	--243 undergraduate students (86 male, 157 females) were recruited from a university in south-eastern China. --All participants were ethnically Chinese with a mean age of 20.60 years.	-Five demographic items were used to obtain information on the participants. Sex, age, level of education, study major, and previous contact experiences with individuals with ID --The Chinese version of the Self-Esteem Scale with ten items was used to evaluate the participants' self-esteem. --The reliability and validity of this scale in Chinese university students are supported by previous research. -The Social Distance subscale from the Mental Retardation Attitude Inventory-Revised was used to measure the participants' tendencies to be associated with individuals with ID. --The subscale was comprised of eight items and used a four-point Likert scale.	--Pre-test was given to an intervention and a control group. --An intervention was implemented to an intervention group through Special Olympics EKS university day. --participants' self-esteem was enhanced immediately after the event --Special Olympics program provided to the participants may have played a significant role in positive experiences during the half-day volunteer service.

Summary

In this chapter, 11 studies were reviewed that examined the effects of social inclusion programming and special Olympic programming and the effects on people in the school climate. Conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Educators have been studying school climate for over 100 years (Cohen, 2009). School climate influences how students feel, their willingness to get involved, and their excitement about their sense of self and others. Engagement or inclusion in an educational climate is not always evident with students with disabilities. Inclusion and engagement within school climates require schools that reflect respect, equity, dignity, honesty, justice, and safety. School climate requires engaging students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents/guardians, and community partners. This engagement from all members can allow for inclusion, acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students. Inclusion has historically meant students with a disability included in a general education classroom for academic instruction. Also, inclusion can mean social inclusion, where students with special needs can still receive their academic content in the special education classroom but gain social inclusion in environments or classrooms in their school.

Special Olympics programming has always focused on helping individuals with intellectual disabilities reach their full potential and providing additional opportunities to involve them within their communities. Special Olympics has evolved through the years, and within the last decade, has offered Unified Champion Schools. Unified Champion Schools was created to promote social inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting system-wide change. It involves a three-component model to create sports, classrooms, and school climates of acceptance. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in and feel a part of all activities, opportunities, and functions. This is done by implementing inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole-school engagement.

When students with and without disabilities are given the opportunity to interact in meaningful ways, like through UCS programming, and allow their similarities to be highlighted rather than accentuate their differences, they are valuable and have a positive attitude. Positive attitudes by all school members create environments where everyone can learn about each other, show acceptance, become leaders for change, and create a positive school climate.

Reports, studies, and legislation has emphasized the importance of a positive school climate. It has proven to reduce achievement gaps, enhance healthy development and skills, and a foundation for lifelong success (Special Olympics, 2020c).

This literature review aimed to show how Special Olympic programming or programming related to social inclusion impacts people within the school climate. In Chapter 1, I laid the foundation for school climate definition, the history of Special Olympics, education, and inclusion, also introduced Special Olympic programming such as Unified Champion Schools. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature to determine two main parts. First was Special Olympic or another programming that promotes social inclusion with students with intellectual delay or special needs. The second part was how social inclusion affects school climate. In the final chapter of the paper, I provide conclusions and recommendations for future research and social inclusion resources in the school climate.

Conclusion

Overall, inclusion is a priority of more educators, and schools can fully activate the full potential of inclusion and the least restrictive environment with special education. The school climate and inclusion make students appreciate diversity, inclusion in general education classes, a sense of belonging, and learned values of trust and confidence.

With Unified sports, athletes with disabilities have a higher self-concept related to sports participation. Unified Champion Schools and Unified sports positively impact a student with and without disabilities. When students are involved in Unified programming, they start to view athletes or students with disabilities with higher abilities and not see their disability. Unified sports results in greater social inclusion within school climates.

One study found that four main themes came from Unified sports. Personal development of athletes and partners promotes inclusive and equal bonds, has positive perceptions of athletes, and builds alliances. Studies also found that Special Olympics athletes enjoyed the programming and wanted it to continue.

School climate was emphasized as having all members involved; two prominent members came out through the research. These include students and staff and their perspectives on this topic. As far as students, research has found that middle school youth have a relatively positive view of students with special needs and their capabilities, and those students believe that inclusion has both a positive and negative effect. While some studies found that some students did not see students with a disability as potential friends, they did see them as students who could be included in general education classes. This was in a study that did not include Special Olympic or inclusive programming to promote friendships. Studies that did involve programming in inclusion or intervention were put in place, and self-esteem was enhanced immediately for all participants. Overall, research proved that experiences with Special Olympics and their programming have allowed for positive experiences.

Many students reported feeling that they were a part of a unique school climate and that the principals and teachers were a considerable force driving this positive school culture to celebrate difference and inclusion. Students described benefitting from the implementation of

evidence-based practices in their classrooms. This included classroom-monitoring systems, strategies to promote self-determination, expression, and engagement. Students also described the importance of teachers' attitudes and students with and without disabilities spending time together.

Throughout the research and findings of teachers' perspectives, four attributes were found. Teachers' age, gender, self-efficacy, and training explained the teacher's attitude towards inclusion with students with a disability. Some teachers reported that they did not have previous teaching experience with students with disabilities. Some teachers do not have classrooms with students with a disability in them. Many teachers did not feel confident or trained enough to be proficient in inclusive education. The research also found that teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction through participation in inclusive education.

Overall, throughout all research, it was evident that with strategies, interventions, social inclusion, or Special Olympic programming (Unified Champion Schools and Unified Sports), students and staff saw a benefit and enjoyed an inclusive environment. They also saw growth, acceptance, friendships, and more develop through the experience. It was also evident that this, in turn, promoted a positive school climate. However, it was evident that students and staff do need some training, experience, or interventions to continue to be successful and promote inclusion. In conclusion, Unified programming or social inclusion positively impacts school climate.

Recommendations for Future Research

For Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS, 2020b) programming, only a decade of research has been done. It is evident within those 10 years how successful providing inclusion school-wide programming affects change across school climate and communities, but I

would recommend more research. When talking to the local chapter of Special Olympics Minnesota (SOMN), this is a current research topic.

Also, studies have shown the Unified Schools program positively affects a range of outcomes for students with and without intellectual disabilities in the United States, including social inclusion, school environment, and participant attitudes. However, little is known about whether this program has been implemented with fidelity or has similar effects outside the United States. Special Olympics would like to improve their ability to evaluate their programming internationally and promote global programming and success (Special Olympics, 2020c).

Researchers have focused on estimating the relationship between inclusion and academic performance of students with disabilities by defining "inclusion" as inclusive placement in general education settings. Social inclusion, however, has received relatively lesser attention when thinking about improving academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Special Olympics). More research needs to be completed with a focus on social inclusion.

A growing number of reports or research has shown the importance of a positive school climate in reducing achievement inequities, enhancing healthy development, and promoting the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide the foundation for school and lifelong success. Research has also indicated that a positive school climate is a critical dimension of effective risk prevention, health promotion efforts, and learning (Special Olympics). I would like to see more research comparing how UCS has affected school climate directly

Implications for Practice

My current school is a Unified Champion School (UCS) through Special Olympics, Minnesota. Unified Champion Schools include inclusive clubs, Unified sports, whole-school

engagement, and youth leadership. We currently have Unified Basketball, a Unified Physical education, and a Unified music class. We have also done various campaigns for whole school engagement and speakers or activities that involve all students/staff. We also have the Young Athletes program, where students who are 3-8 years old with and without disabilities can come and practice athletics skills and activities. Young Athletes offers high school students with and without disabilities to work on leadership skills as a "coach." I have seen all of these programs in action and have assisted many of them. I constantly see little moments that make it all worthwhile. Through the programs, I see students gain confidence, leadership skills, friendship, acceptance, and much more. I have gained connections myself as an educator, and this has allowed another partnership with students without disabilities to get involved within my classroom as a teacher's assistant, which has allowed a few students to decide a path of further education in the field of special education. Special Olympics has found that 67% of seniors felt that their involvement in UCS influenced their future decisions. A dream of mine is to get this programming into all of our schools within our district and continue to spread the word, and use social media to inspire other schools in the area to get involved.

One part of my research was how members of the school climate perceive or get involved with UCS and inclusion. I feel we do a great job of promoting this among students in our school climate, but according to the research, it is evident that staff efficacy and perception are significant. I would also like to promote this among other teachers, principals, and community members by staff development, getting the word out to the community about the program through social media, newspaper articles, and local businesses, and involving families and connections outside of school.

Summary

It is essential and should be a goal of every school to establish a climate and culture of teamwork, inclusion, respect, and acceptance for all students regardless of their abilities. This can be possible through Special Olympics programming, such as Unified Champion Schools and social inclusion.

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