

Toward More Inclusive Classrooms

How to Most Effectively Move Toward More Inclusive Classrooms
for Students Learning Disabilities:
A Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract

Educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible has been part of federal law for educating students with disabilities since 1975. The most common term for implementing this mandate is *inclusion*. While this term and its practice have been used for years, there is still great diversity in how it is viewed, adopted, and implemented. This has led to varying degrees of success and the effective use of inclusion has proven elusive. This meta-synthesis looks at what the literature says about this controversial issue, and in particular what the barriers are to successful inclusion, what are the features of successful inclusion programs, and how to best set the stage for success in a school as it plans to move toward more inclusion than it currently practices.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Federal mandate to educate students with disabilities is clear. My very simplified summary is this: public schools must provide a free, appropriate education to every child with a disability in the least restrictive environment possible that is *optimal* for each child's educational needs. I base my summary on the history of the development of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which spans over 40 years, beginning in 1975 with the signing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act by President Gerald Ford, amended in 1976, added to in 1986, changed significantly in 1990 to include more disabilities, and again in 1997 to become the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and finally was amended in 2004 (Public Law 94-142, IDEA; <http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/art/history.spec.ed.law.htm>). Then interestingly, just last month, it was confirmed by the Supreme Court that IDEA must be interpreted so that children with disabilities are provided with an individualized education program that is "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances."

Educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible has been part of federal law for educating students with disabilities since 1975, and stated thus in 2006:

Each public agency must ensure that—(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, Part B regulations at §§300.114).

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Now, IDEA has been updated and replaced by ESSA, *Every Child Succeeds Act*, signed by President Obama in December, 2015, in which the requirement for a free, appropriate and least restrictive education for all students with disabilities remains.

The commonly understood and accepted vehicle for achieving the goal of Least Restrictive Environment is the practice of *Inclusion*. While the word 'Inclusion' does not occur in federal education law, it is what most practitioners use to refer to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Precise operating definitions of the term *inclusion* often vary dramatically. And while the term is broadly used to mean the application of Least Restrictive Environment, the large variance in definitions for the term certainly muddies the waters of discussion around the topic (Rice, 2006; Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011). How it is defined will have a large impact on how it is practiced (DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013). In addition, while the practice of inclusion is adopted at the policy level in many countries, effective use of inclusion has proven to be illusive to many (Gümüſ, 2015; Waitoller, Thorius; 2015; Naseer, 2013). Therefore, it seems that a common definition of inclusion is the first critical step to the discussion.

The question is not whether or not participating in the general education classroom as much as possible, should be part of a school's special education program. This is clearly mandated by law, but if inclusion is the name we shall give this practice, what is a definition we can broadly agree upon and how can inclusion be implemented to provide the least restrictive environment in the manner that is best for students in this special population. The historical evolution of free and appropriate public education (FAPE) practices has gone from placing students with disabilities into their own segregated schools, to segregation within schools using

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the special education wing, to a variety of current practices, many of which are valiant efforts to provide inclusive experiences for all students. It is important to note that while the ideal inclusive FAPE often seems illusive, it is not because there are not many, many dedicated educators pursuing the provision ardently. What, therefore, are the barriers? This meta-synthesis of the literature on implementing inclusive practices in the general education classroom investigates the best ways an Elementary school might define inclusive practices, name and illuminate the barriers, and make the transition from traditional special education services to the optimum amount of inclusive services possible in ways that will be successful for all involved.

1.2 Author's Experiences and Beliefs

Each school has its own unique constituency: student body, family demographics, general education teaching staff, special education staff, leadership staff, caseload of special population students, as well as other dynamic factors, such English Language Learners and staff, specialty programs, PTA, after school programs, etc. Some schools embrace inclusive practices more than others, and some seem to be less far along in the implementation thereof. (Shani, Hebel; 2016; Naseer, 2013; Fisher, Meyer, 2002). I would like to know the best way for a school to make changes toward best practice of least restrictive environment implementation and what the factors are that separate the schools who favor inclusion from those who don't. My desire for this information stems from the situation in which I now find myself.

As an Intermediate Resource teacher, teaching Special Education in a Title I Elementary school feeling pressure to increase inclusive practices, raise the scores of special education

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students and move students out of or beyond the need for Individual Education Plans, I am very interested in knowing what an ideal setting is for optimum inclusive practices. There seems to be a shake-up going on public schools and particularly in the Special Education departments. I know that IEPs (Individual Education Plans) are written with the least restrictive environment in mind in most instances. Special education staff members on the whole work very hard to design programs that will best meet the very individual needs of each student. Resource teachers have caseloads that are too large with more required minutes of service than there are hours in a day. While already overloaded and in need of another resource teacher, there is pressure to make quick and drastic changes in spite of IEP mandates. I am eager to find the best way to follow local instructions and yet stay true to federal IEP mandates, *and* still keep the needs of every student on my caseload first and foremost in priority.

With this meta-synthesis, I hope to explore three vital questions:

1. What is a universal definition of *Inclusion* that can be used to provide a firm basis for discussion of this controversial issue, at least for the purpose of this writing, and discussion of federal mandate?
2. What are the main obstacles that schools face in the implementation of inclusive practices?
3. What have proven to be the most effective and successful implementation strategies and models for inclusion in Elementary school settings?

1.3 The purpose of this meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis, which focuses on the topic of inclusive practices in Elementary schools, has the intended purpose to solidify some common language for the discussion, particular in regard to the term *Inclusion*. In addition, a review of the research in educational

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journals and articles related to the topic of inclusion was pursued with the hope of isolating the major obstacles to the implementation of inclusive practices, as it has clearly been a struggle for many years to properly apply the idea of Least Restrictive Environment since the inception of IDEA law. A third, and primary, goal is to scour the research to find the most effective model(s) of inclusion in order to make application of the concept as successful as possible for the students receiving services. Ultimately, I hope to synthesize these concepts, models and applications into fresh, applicable and successful practices that can be applied to my own professional pursuits of best practice for the students on my caseload in my Elementary school.

2. Methods

2.1 Selection Criteria

The 42 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following criteria:

1. The articles explored issues relating to inclusive practices for students with Individual Education Plans.
2. The articles explored issues related to inclusion models for students with disabilities in various types of schools.
3. The articles were published in peer reviewed journals related to the field of education.
4. The articles were published between 1994 and 2016.

2.2 Search Procedures

Database searches and ancestral searches were conducted to find articles for this meta-synthesis.

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2.2.1 Database Searches

Boolean searches were conducted within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using the following specific search terms:

1. (Push-In versus Pull-Out) AND (Special Education)
2. (Inclusion) AND (Effective)
3. (Inclusive Education) AND (Pull-Out)
4. (Inclusive) AND (Education)
5. (Least Restrictive Environment) and (IDEA)

These searches in the listed databases led to a total of 39 articles: (Whinnery, King, & Evans, 1995; Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011; Marston, 1996; Vann, 1997; King, 2003; Ryndak, 1952-Downing, 1950-Morrison, 1996; Edgar & Polloway, 1994; Weiß, Kollmannsberger, Lerche, Oubaid, & Kiel, 2014; Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014; Nishimura, 2014; Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2014; Frattura, & Capper, 2006; Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002; Fisher, Meyer, 2002; Harpell, Andrews, 2010; Gümüş, 2015; Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian; 2011; Hernandez; 2013; Shani, Hebel; 2016; Waitoller, Thorius; 2015; Gupta; 2016; Naseer; 2013; Donnelly; 2010; Villa, Thousand; 2003; Konza; 2008; Sposaro, Lensink, 1998; DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013; Mooney, Lashewicz; 2015; Hornby, Garry; 2015; Artiles, Kozleski, 2016; Veck, Wayne, 2014; Rice, Nancy, 2006; Wagner, Sheila, 1999; Huber, Rosenfeld, & Fiorello, 2001).

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2.2.2 Ancestral Searches

I conducted ancestral searches after reviewing articles from the above list of published works and their references. This yielded another article (Swartz, 2003) and three helpful artifacts (Heumann, Hehir, 1994; ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history ; Inclusive Schools Network –List of Terms, <http://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/inclusion-basics/>)

2.3 Coding Procedures

I used a coding procedure to organize the information found in each of the 42 articles. First, each article was organized by author and publication type. Then the research articles were organized by author, research design, participants, data sources and findings.

2.3.1 Publication Types

Each journal article was noted in a table by author and publication type (see Table 1). The publication types included research study, descriptive work, commentary, literature review, guide, case study, position paper, artifact and book. *Research studies* use a controlled scientific method to look for relationship(s) between variables by collecting and analyzing either qualitative or quantitative data. *Descriptive works* describe concepts and practices without using scientific method to contain data. A *commentary* is an author's effort to share his or her insight about a certain topic of research or practice, often making a recommendation based upon the author's opinion or belief. A *literature review* is intended to review and analyze previously published writings and research on a given topic. A *guide* is given as an instructional manual to explain the use of a particular concept or practice. *Case studies* are in depth studies on one particular situation or program in order to narrow down a broad topic or field of study. Position papers are an author's attempt to promote an action or choice in their field that they

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hold to. *Artifacts* are not articles, but instead are sources of definition, clarification or historical facts. And finally, *books* are longer, more detailed and possibly more thoroughly researched writings on any given topic. (Please see table 1).

2.3.2 Research Design

In addition to the sorting of articles by publication type, each research article was sorted by research design (such as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method). *Quantitative research* is that which measures and produces results can be numerically expressed. These methods of data collection include such things as surveys, observations, and others that can be counted and measured. *Qualitative research* is research that uses non-numeric measures to analyze a program or issue; interviews are a common data collection method for this style of research.

2.3.3 Participants, Data Sources, and Findings

In each study, the participants were identified. They included such groups as 'students in the resource classroom', '48 elementary students in grades 2 through 5, and 'special education resource teachers and 240 elementary students'. The data sources were also signified (interviews, observations, etc.). Then a summary of the findings of each research study is noted. (Please see table 2).

2.4 Data Analysis

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In order to analyze the data in these 42 articles, I pulled and recorded significant statements from each article. These were then sorted by relevance to the following topics: a) definition of *inclusion*, b) implementation of inclusive practices, c) models of inclusion, d) inclusive programs e) barriers or obstacles to the implementation of inclusion, f) teacher attitudes about inclusion, f) student progress in inclusive and non-inclusive settings, g) and required/strongly recommended components for successful inclusion implementation in Elementary Schools.

3. Results

3.1 Publication Type

I located 41 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each article is located in Table 1. Fifteen of the 42 articles (36%) included in this meta synthesis were research studies (Whinnery, King, & Evans, 1995; Marston, 1996,; Ryndak, Morrison, 1996; Weiß, Kollmannsberger, Lerche, Oubaid,& Kiel, 2014; Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014 ; Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2014; Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002; Fisher, Meyer, 2002 ; Gümüş, 2015; Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian; 2011; Shani, Hebel; 2016; Sposaro, Lensink; 1998; Rice, Nancy, 2006; Huber, Rosenfeld, & Fiorello, 2001). Nine (22%) were reviews of the literature (Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011; Edgar & Polloway, 1994; Nishimura, 2014; Harpell, Andrews, 2010; Hernandez; 2013; Gupta; 2016; Donnelly; 2010; Konza; 2008). Five (12%) of the articles are commentaries (King; 2003; Frattura & Capper, 2006; Artiles, Kozleski, 2016; Veck, Wayne; 2014; Swartz, S; 2003). Three (7%) are case studies (Naseer, 2013; DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013; Mooney,

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Lashewicz; 2015). Two (5%) of the articles were descriptive works (Vann, 1997; Waitoller, Thorius; 2015). Two (5%) were position papers (Hornby & Garry, 2015; Swicegood, Miller; 2015). Two (5%) were guides (Villa, Thousand; 2003; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). In addition, I discovered and have used three (7%) artifacts (Heumann, Hehir; 1994; Identification of Terms-Inclusion, ed.gov/policy/sped; History of IDEA brochure). And lastly, a book (Wagner, Sheila; 1999).

TABLE 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
WHINNERY, KING, & EVANS; 1995	Research Study
Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011	Review of the Literature
MARSTON, 1996	Research Study
Vann, 1997	Descriptive Work
King, 2003	Commentary
Ryndak, Morrison, 1996	Research Study
Edgar & Polloway, 1994	Review of the Literature
Wei, Kollmannsberger, Lerche, Oubaid, & Kiel, 2014	Research Study
Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015	Research Study
McLeskey & Waldron, 2015	Guide
Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014	Research Study
Nishimura, 2014	Review of the Literature
FUCHS, FUCHS, COMPTON, WEHBY, SCHUMACHER, GERSTEN, & JORDAN, 2014	Research Study
FRATTURA, & CAPPER, 2006	Commentary
Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002	Research Study
Fisher, Meyer, 2002	Research Study
Harpell, Andrews, 2010.	Review of the Literature

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Gümüş, 2015	Research Study
Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian; 2011	Research Study
Hernandez; 2013	Review of the Literature
Shani, Hebel; 2016	Research Study
Waitoller, Thorius; 2015	Descriptive Work
Gupta; 2016	Review of the Literature
Naseer; 2013	Case Study
Donnelly; 2010	Review of the Literature
Villa, Thousand; 2003	Guide
Konza; 2008	Review of the Literature
Sposaro, Lensink; 1998	Research Study
DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013	Case Study
Mooney, Lashewicz; 2015	Case Study
Hornby, Garry; 2015	Position Paper
Artiles, A.; Kozleski, E.; 2016	Commentary
Veck, Wayne; 2014	Commentary
Rice, Nancy; 2006	Research Study
Wagner, Sheila; 1999	Book
Huber, K. D., Rosenfeld, J. G., & Fiorello, C. A.; 2001.	Research Study
Ancestral Finds:	
Heumann, Hehir; 1994	Letter/Memo
Swicegood, Miller; 2015	Position Paper
Swartz, S; 2003	Commentary
http://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/inclusion-basics/	Identification of Terms

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Ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history/pdf.	Brochure
U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016)	National Statistics

3.2 Research Design, Participants, Data Sources, and Findings of the Studies

TABLE 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
WHINNERY, KING, & EVANS; 1995	Qualitative	48 Elementary Students in grades 2-5	Questionnaires	This study compared the attitudes of 3 groups of students: those with a learning disability educated in the 'regular' resource setting, those with a learning disability educated in classrooms with collaborative teaching, and

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				those without a learning disability and educated in the general education classroom. Results showed that the feelings of each group did not differ significantly from one another in the area of self-esteem and feelings of comfort with special educator support in the classroom or out.
MARSTON, 1996	Quantitative	215 SpEd Res. Teachers/240 Elem students	Questionnaires , Curriculum Based Reading Measures	Researchers wanted to measure which model would produce the best results: Pull-Out only, Inclusion only, or a combined services model. Findings indicated that teacher satisfaction and student progress in reading were greater when the combined services model was used.
Vann, 1997	Qualitative	One school's push-in, pull-out experience	Observation, performance data	This school ran a kind of self-analysis on the reading services being given its students with disabilities and found that the strongest program for their students was one that offered a combination of push-in and pull-out services.
Ryndak, Downing, Morrison, 1996	Qualitative	Parents of children with moderate or severe disabilities	Interviews	Findings: professionals need to modify the way they work with parents to lessen the frustration parents feel when advocating for change. Educational professionals need to realize that parents have a

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				critical role to play in the decision-making process. Educational professionals should show respect for, and support of, parents so that a child's educational program reflects <i>everyone's</i> input.
Wei, Kollmannsberger, Lerche, Oubaid, & KIEL, 2014	Qualitative	38 experts in Learning Disability, 34 experts in Emotion/ Behavior	Discussion	These professionals expressed the huge need for having an appreciative leadership, and a humanistic ethos regarding inclusion.
Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015	Quantitative	Principals of primary and secondary schools in Ireland	Survey	This survey attempted to measure how well Special Education funds were distributed to students with the greatest needs and concludes that there needs to be a greater amount of accountability in the allocation of funds for mainstreaming programs.
Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014	Qualitative	5 Head Teachers	Interviews	Discusses strategies that might make schools more inclusive and effective, according to the head teachers; also found democratic and inclusive practices are threatened by bureaucracy and divergent opinions in regard to inclusion.
FUCHS, FUCHS, COMPTON, WEHBY, SCHUMACHER, GERSTEN, & JORDAN, 2014		42 inclusion and 39 intervention students in Year 1; 23 and	Pre- and Post-Tests – Academic	To look at achievement gaps for very low performing students, fractions were taught using either inclusive or specialized intervention. In this study,

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		44 in Year 2, and 19 and 38 in Year 3.		results showed that specialized intervention was the most effective instruction tool for these LD students.
Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002	Quantitative	2 school programs, each in a different school	IQ, Demographic data, IEP Goals, Classroom Accommodations	The two programs differed significantly, and students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed no more behavioral infractions, and attended more days of school than students served in the pullout program.
Fisher, Meyer, 2002	Quantitative	40 students	Measures of child development & social competence	Moving instruction into inclusive environments "seemed to be beneficial for individual child learning outcomes."
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS. (2016)	Quantitative	Students aged 6-21 with disabilities served under IDEA, in US	National database	In the fall of 2013, 61.8% of students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their school day in a general education classroom (67.8% for students with a Specific Learning Disability designation). Also broken down by disability, and other types of placements.
Gümüş, 2015	Qualitative	32 Pre-service Special Education Teachers	Structured observation, interviews, weekly reflection logs, and group discussions	Pre-service teacher identified barriers for effective inclusive practices learned from their mentor teachers as: *lack of resources *lack of education and knowledge of special

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				<p>education, *lack of parents' interest in collaboration.</p> <p>Pre-service teachers themselves felt barriers were: *lack of willingness of professionals to be creative *not using available resources to best of ability</p>
Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian; 2011	Quantitative	Twenty Elementary School Teachers in Central and Eastern Virginia	Survey	<p>An examination of inclusion, benefits, limitations and best practices. The data collected from the survey indicated that although the overall views on inclusion for general and special education teachers are positive, there were varying opinions on inclusion and its effect on the students involved; the concern was for students who needed more support that can be provided in an inclusive classroom.</p> <p>Necessary elements of inclusion: Technology, collaboration, differentiated instruction</p>
Rice, Nancy; 2006	Qualitative	One urban High School's Administrators and Teachers	Interviews, Discussions	<p>Definition of Inclusion controversial and illusive. Effective communication among individuals was found to be an obstacle to change. Leaders "must model effective interaction among all members of the school community". Effective communication is a pre-requisite for leaders</p>

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				considering a large-scale change such as moving toward inclusion.
DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013	Qualitative	Five K-5 and K-8 Elementary School Principals	Observations and Interviews	<p>This study is a case description of a school district's special education inclusion policy implementation process. They found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *there are key issues of implementation that impact reform *challenges to reform are more complex than previously thought *data should be used to support and monitor progress *Incentives are needed for local schools increasing inclusive practices *professional development is vital to support teachers and to support inclusion *inclusion needs to be championed *how inclusion is defined can influence how schools develop and inclusive program
Sposaro, Lensink; 1998	Quantitative	85 Educators (Principals, teachers and social workers)	Survey	<p>Some barriers were felt in the lack of support for inclusion.</p> <p>Many felt their building lacked adequate training for inclusion implementation.</p> <p>High barriers were reported due to lack of time to plan between general education and SpEd teachers.</p>

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				<p>About half of the professionals complained of lack of time to create/implement adapted curriculum, and felt inadequate to meet needs of special education need kids</p> <p>Only 10% felt inclusion isn't beneficial to students.</p>
Mooney, Lashewicz; 2015	Qualitative	One student, grade 5 thru 11	Interviews and Observation	When high expectations for inclusion are not met with consistency, inclusive education can result in confusion and disappointment for all "stakeholders".

3.2.1 Research Design

Eight of the 17 studies (47%) used a quantitative research design (Marston, 1996; Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015; Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016); Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002; Fisher, Meyer, 2002; Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian, 2011; Sposaro, Lensink; 1998). Nine of the studies (53%) utilized a qualitative research design (Mooney, Lashewicz; 2015; DeMatthews, Mawhinney; 2013; Rice, Nancy; 2006; Gümüş, 2015; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014; Weiß, Kollmannsberger, Lerche, Oubaid,& KIEL, 2014; Ryndak, Downing, Morrison, 1996; Vann, 1997; Whinnery, King, & Evans; 1995).

3.2.2 Participants and Data Sources

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The majority of the 17 research studies included in this meta-synthesis collected and analyzed data from students with disabilities as well as the teachers and school leaders that work with them. Five of the studies (29.4%) analyzed data collected from students with disabilities (Whinnery, King, & Evans, 1995; Marston, 1996; Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2014; Mooney, Lashewicz; 2015; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Three of the studies (17.7%) analyzed data collected from school principals (Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014; DeMatthews, Mawhinney, 2013). Two of the studies (17.7%) collected and analyzed data from teachers who work with students who have a disability (Marston, 1996; Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian; 2011). And two studies (11.8%) collected and analyzed data from both school leaders and teachers (Rice, Nancy; 2006; Sposaro, Lensink, 1998). In addition to students with disabilities, their teachers and school leaders, data was also analyzed from other participants. These additional participants included data from existing inclusion programs, parents of children with disabilities, outside experts, and pre-service teachers.

The main sources of data used in the research studies were combinations of surveys, performance data, interviews, observations and questionnaire. Three studies (17.7%) used surveys (Banks, Frawley, & McCoy; 2015; Wilson, Ellerbee, Christian, 2011; Sposaro, Lensink, 1998). Three (17.7%) used performance data (Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Fisher, Meyer, 2002). Two (11.8%) used observations with performance data (Vann, 1997; Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002). Three (17.7%) used interviews with observations (Gümüş, 2015; DeMatthews, Mawhinney, 2013; Mooney, Lashewicz, 2015). Two

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(11.8%) used interviews (Ryndak, Downing, Morrison, 1996; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014). And two (11.8%) used questionnaires with performance data (Whinnery, King, & Evans, 1995; Marston, 1996). Other data sources included discussion, and interviews with discussions.

3.2.3 Findings of the Studies

The findings of the 17 research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows.

1. Differing definitions of and attitudes about inclusion can significantly impact the success of the implementation of inclusive programs.
2. There are certain strategies and components that are common to successful inclusion programs and perceived perception of success by teachers, students, parents and school leaders.
3. There are barriers to effective inclusive practices. Some of the most predominate of these include the lack of perceived support from administration, lack of needed resources and time to plan and collaborate, lack of expertise and training in general education teachers for instructing students with disabilities, large class sizes and growing numbers of students with disabilities.

3.3 Emergent Themes

Six themes emerged from analysis of the 42 articles included in this meta-synthesis.

These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) difficulty agreeing on a definition of inclusion; (b) the implementation of inclusive programs; (c) description of features of effective

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inclusive programs; (d) barriers or obstacles to the implementation of inclusive programs; (e) monitoring student progress in inclusive and non-inclusive settings; and (f) concluding recommendations for successful inclusion implementation in elementary schools.

TABLE 3

Themes	Formulated Meanings/Significant Statements
<p>Difficulty Agreeing upon a Definition of Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Definition of Inclusion is controversial and illusive. ● Tensions over definitions, eligibility criteria, service delivery models, and best practices, have been a part of inclusion’s history from the start. ● “Inclusive education means that all students in a school-regardless of their strengths, weaknesses, or disabilities in any area – become part of the school community”. (one definition) ● Inclusion, as operationally defined by York (1994), involves “students attending the same schools as siblings and neighbors, being members in general education classrooms.....” ● Inclusion is generally understood around the world as part of a human rights agenda that demands access to and equity in education. ● Inclusive education works to bring those in the margins into the center which always creates new margins; making it clear that inclusive practice always needs to continually adapt to keep being inclusive ● Inclusive education is a process in the making

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclusive education is not just another add-on school reform but a general education initiative that benefits all students. ● The way <i>districts</i> define inclusion and <i>where it takes</i> place is important ● Inclusion is usually defined "as a student with an identified disability, spending greater than 80% of his or her school day in a general education classroom in proximity to nondisabled peers". ● This term, although seemingly benign and even beneficial, is nevertheless the outcome of polarized and divided definitions. When defined as "spending 80% or more of the school day in a general education classroom in proximity to non-disabled peers", inclusion can actually be interpreted as 20% exclusive.
<p>Implementation of Inclusive Practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The assumption that students who are pulled out of classrooms for extra support in the resource room will suffer low self-esteem as a result does not have research to back it up and some research de-bunks that myth. ● There are three must-haves related to developing and sustaining successful inclusion schools: a commitment by teachers and administrators to a set of core values regarding success for all students and inclusive practices, an internal accountability system to monitor student progress and determine the effectiveness of interventions, and a school based system of professional development to improve teacher practice. ● How principals can promote inclusive practices: the importance of educational leadership through observation and participation ... flexibility in the solutions provided for students in need of special support special educational needs coordinators ● Inclusive education activities can be facilitated through coaching as a means of professional development. ● Implementing inclusive education is one of the major challenges facing the educational system. ● One of the main difficulties in implementing inclusive education is that general education teachers receive insufficient training ● Successful implementation requires a systems-level commitment and specific classroom-level strategies. ● Five systems-level practices that can help schools facilitate inclusive education: 1. Connection with other organizational best practices; 2. Visionary leadership; 3. Redefined roles; 4. Collaboration; and 5. Additional adult support. ● The pace of change is important because it requires tremendous resources (to develop data, accountability, and compliance systems).

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is a need for deeper understandings of parent and educator beliefs about inclusive education. ● Development of inclusive special education practice should include changes in policy, procedures, and teaching strategies, that will improve the education of all children with disabilities.
<p>Features of Effective Models of Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educators need to create more options for students with disabilities ● There are schools that have succeeded at making schools inclusive and effective for all students, including those with disabilities ● The combined model has been effective when there were administrators who understood & supported special education and its attempts at inclusion & allowed collaboration without withdrawing resources for pull-out rooms ● There is a need for a definition of <i>access to the general educational curriculum</i> that is based on empirical evidence of adequate learning—no matter where that access occurs – general education classroom or other locations ● Love for a child can be the meeting point for parents, educators, and other educational stakeholders who want to improve inclusive education. ● A good theory of inclusive special education includes a synthesis of the philosophy, values and practices of inclusive education with the interventions, strategies and procedures of special education. ● The practice of excluding special needs students from general education classrooms should only continue if there is a compelling reason to do so. ● The collaborative model is not a compromise, it is an assurance that all students can learn together. ● Co-Teaching between general education and special education teachers using authentic literature for reading instruction has proven effective <i>if</i> certain requirements are in place ● UNIVERSAL DESIGN ● A model of initial workshops followed by continued consultation in the school and classroom setting is a set-up for successful inclusive practices ● When working with students with disabilities, we should stay aware, ‘wearing our hearts on our sleeves’, have strong beliefs about equity and fairness. ● There is a need for further discussion about our beliefs about inclusion and it needs to include a greater emphasis on student outcomes and school accountability.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students should have the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school...and be placed in heterogeneous classrooms at their grade level alongside their peers. ● Good inclusive practice encourages independence in learning and <i>not</i> over-helping ● Least restrictive, least intrusive, and least disruptive in their daily lives ● The curriculum and instruction that students receive should address their learning needs and, at the same time, open the window to a rich, creative, nonrestrictive learning experience. ● When inclusive practices are successful, educators themselves move out of segregated, restrictive teaching environments and provide high quality curriculum and instruction in ways that tap each learner's gifts ● Foster self-esteem, and encourage the student's positive sense of self as a learner ● Educators can no longer ethically justify segregated service delivery ● Educational success for all comes from core principles, importance of location of services, curriculum and educators moving out of traditional roles ● Inclusive teaching models must provide access to the regular curriculum and assessment procedures, but also yield achievement gains in students ● Adopting inclusive models requires effective leadership strategies that empower teachers. ● Models must reflect values that are consistent with humanitarian principles ● Differentiated instruction and co-teaching appear represent two effective models
<p>Barriers or Obstacles to the Implementation of Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is still a wide variety of levels of support for inclusion among Educational professionals ● There are positives and negatives from teachers about inclusion ● We must reject movements that will continue to devalue our students ● There is a need for further discussion around how we understand special education in mainstream education. ● Most general educators feel that they lack the expertise to address the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms ● Democratic and inclusive practices are threatened by bureaucracy and differing opinions

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- Traditional professional development methods have not been successful in providing the necessary changes in attitudes to make inclusive schooling a reality
- The number of students who qualify for special education services is growing
- Research suggests that inclusive educational settings fail to generate a sense of empowerment among teachers
- Practicing teachers identified barriers for effective inclusive practices as: lack of resources, lack of education and knowledge of special education, and lack of interest of parents in collaboration.
- Although the overall views on inclusion for general and special education teachers are positive, there were varying opinions on inclusion and its effect on the students involved.
- General teachers do not feel prepared for the task of inclusive education
- One of the biggest factors in the lack of confidence using inclusive practice by teachers is inadequate preparation during the teacher training
- Least restrictive environment can be used as a reason to segregate students, maintaining that resource room classes are the least restrictive environments appropriate for certain students. But what is least restrictive needs to be determined on an individual basis for each student.
- A range of exclusionary practices have continued despite current efforts toward inclusion.
- Successful school-wide inclusive education is hampered by several challenges:
 - The absence of available student and teacher support services;
 - large class sizes and high student-teacher ratios; and
 - inadequately prepared general education teachers regarding the instructional needs of special education students
- For greater inclusion to take place, effective policies and provision for collaboration still need to be developed
- There is a growing number of students with increasing ranges of disabilities, so inclusive education presents a growing set of challenges to educators, including a shortage of special education teachers, larger class sizes with more special population students which leads to more professionals in the classroom, increasing disruptions and distractions, just to name a few.
- The literature has identified many of the challenges that face the full and successful implementation of inclusion.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successful inclusive programs exist, but require a range of conditions to be in place. ● Many felt their building lacked adequate training for inclusion implementation ● High barriers were reported due to lack of time to plan between general education and special education teachers ● Teachers complain of lack of time to create/implement adapted curriculum, and feel inadequate to meet needs of students with disabilities ● Only 10% feel inclusion isn't beneficial to students ● The <i>pace</i> of change is important because it requires tremendous resources to develop data systems, accountability systems, and legal compliance teams. ● Legal problems can arise when districts attempt to establish more inclusive schools ● Existing research regarding inclusion has typically ignored the policy implementation processes used by school districts when establishing more inclusive schools and improved special education programs. ● When high expectations for inclusion are not met with consistency, inclusive education can result in confusion and disappointment for all "stakeholders". ● Much remains to be done toward achieving an inclusive educational system ● There are concerning inconsistencies in educator beliefs and practices. ● Inconsistent educator view and practices yield a lack of shared vision ● Effective communication among individuals was found to be an obstacle to change ● When not conducted properly, inclusion within the public-school system can suggest not belonging. ● If the goal is the integration and inclusion of all students, teachers will need to model these behaviors
<p>Monitoring Student Progress in Inclusive and Non-Inclusive Settings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The strongest program for students is one that offers a combination of push-in and pull-out services. ● Issues of educational service delivery should be secondary to an emphasis on outcomes ● There is a need for greater emphasis on student outcomes and school accountability

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There has been a lot of commitment and legislation to make schools inclusive for all students but not much real progress in improving student outcomes. ● In math, results indicated stronger learning and smaller post-intervention achievement gaps for specialized intervention than for inclusive instruction. ● Students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed no more behavioral infractions, and attended more days of school than students served in the pullout program ● Inclusive teaching models must provide access to the regular curriculum and assessment procedures, but also yield achievement gains in students, which are, at least, as effective as traditional methods.
<p style="text-align: center;">Vital Components for Successful Inclusion Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● General education teachers are the key to success for inclusive classrooms but research shows that there is a big gap between their desire and their ability ● Teacher preparation is needed for successful inclusion ● Specific skills are needed by classroom teachers/special education teachers ● Needed from Leadership/Administration: appreciative leadership or authenticity, and to have a humanistic ethos ● School Preparation for implementing inclusive practices is critical ● It is a process to change to more inclusive practices and change takes time ● The combined model was successful when there were administrators who understood & supported special education and its attempts at inclusion & who provided collaboration w/o withdrawing resources for pull-out rooms ● Individualized professional development, using a coaching model, can help with attitude change and skill development in teachers ● Inclusive teaching models must provide access to the regular curriculum and assessment procedures, but also yield achievement gains in students, which are as effective as traditional methods. ● School principals can make or break the success of inclusive efforts ● Use “state-of-the-art validated intervention” ● Using inclusive models requires effective leadership strategies that empower teachers.

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- Achieving a sense of empowerment among teachers is crucial to effective implementation of inclusive instructional practices
- It is the responsibility of educational administrators to address problems and empower teachers with the skills and motivation necessary to embrace inclusion
- It is up to the administrators in a school building to enable teachers to be effective, comfortable, and happy with inclusive classrooms.
- Effective educational leadership represents a very significant factor in the successful implementation of inclusive practices in schools
- Responsibility rests on the shoulders of school leaders for successful inclusion
- The key element to the realization of successful inclusive practices lies in how we prepare teachers
- There needs to be strong commitment to inclusive education and a debunking of the myth of the normal child and normal school
- The universal design approach is an effective option available to educators to successfully manage differentiated instruction.
- A model of initial workshops followed by continued consultation in the school and classroom setting is a set-up for successful inclusive practices
- Schools must provide the underlying conditions for sustained if inclusion is to become reality for both learners and teachers
- The educational system needs to move towards genuinely meeting the needs of all learners, and fulfill the promise of inclusion.
- There is a need for deeper understandings of parent and educator beliefs about inclusive education
- Leaders must model effective interaction among all members of the school community for programs to be successful
- Effective communication is a pre-requisite for leaders considering moving toward inclusion.
- Co-Teaching between general education and special education teachers has proven effective if certain requirements are in place
- The basic 5-8 requirements usually mentioned include: 1) Know yourself 2) know your partner 3) know your students 4) familiar with the curriculum 5) familiar with effective and successful instructional strategies 6) co-planning time 7) progress monitoring 8) effective school leadership providing the needed supports

4. Discussion

In this section are summarized the six emergent themes from the analysis of the 42 articles included in this meta-synthesis. These themes were then connected to my own experiences with implementation of a more inclusive model in my practice as a special education teacher.

4.1. Difficulty agreeing on a definition of inclusion

Because the concept of inclusion is only implied in educational law, it is by nature illusive and hard to pinpoint as a measurable entity. Some would argue that inclusive education is simply a school setting in which all students are accepted members of the community, regardless of strengths or weaknesses. Or that an inclusive school is one in which all siblings and neighborhood children attend the same school. Or, even more generally, inclusion is defined as a human rights platform for equity in access to education. And I would agree that each of these statements is a component factor of an inclusive education. Yet, in order to have a helpful discussion on the topic, it seems vital to settle on a working definition that can be assessed as being presently provided and experienced or not. In order to do that, it must be measurable and the definition not dependent upon interpretation or feeling (e.g. feeling of acceptance, or value; although they may be a desired outcome).

The nature and purpose of inclusive education practices is to make sure that each child, with or without a disability, has the best possible access to the grade-level curriculum and other school experiences available to students of that age. The complexity of the issue, even from the basic definition, is clear as it can be argued as an educational as well as rights issue. This

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concept has been bandied about since the beginning of IDEA mandates and has evolved as previously outlined. This makes for a potentially volatile discussion as parents, teachers and students bring their own set of experiences and frustrations to the conversation. For a student with a disability, it is acknowledged that there is a reason that he might be removed from the general education classroom in order to receive supports such as medical services or other necessary interventions that are not appropriate to be received in a large classroom setting. It is also important to note that inclusive practices do not necessarily have to take place in the general education classroom setting. It may be that interventions or services are provided elsewhere without exclusivity. For these reasons, I will use the measurable definition of inclusion as: “spending greater than 80% of the school day in a general education classroom in proximity of non-disabled peers”. This will allow discussion to proceed with common understanding and, hopefully, without emotion-laden tension.

4.2. The implementation of inclusive programs

The implementation of inclusive programs can take on many different forms and appearances. The goal is to have students with disabilities learning alongside their same-age peers to the greatest degree that is advantageous for that child. The gray area is in deciding what is the greatest degree possible and what is advantageous, that is of the greatest benefit, for each student. Because of the very nature of an *Individualized* Education Plan, these both must be determined on a case by case basis for each individual student. And the effect upon all other students must also be considered. It is my opinion, that this is one of the causes of

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dissenting regarding the best practice for inclusion implementation. Each professional involved may have a differing opinion of the best application of these guidelines.

The factors that need to be considered are many. We must remember that pulling students out of the general education class for necessary interventions is not damaging to their self-esteem as was previously thought, when done in their best interests. This is a controversial statement supported through a study by Whinnery, King, & Evans (1995).

And when administrators and teachers have common values, and practices that clearly have students' best interests at heart, this care is a determining factor in the success of inclusive and pull-out practices. And while many teachers have trepidation about the prospect of including children with disabilities into their classroom, if they are well supported, appreciated and provided with professional development training to prepare and train them for operating a fully inclusive classroom, it is shown that they will be able to attain these goals. And finally, the administrator who desires to meet the mandate of giving each student the most inclusive education in their power to provide, has the weight of a great deal of research showing that they are the ones who can make that available by providing teachers and parents with their support, encouragement, appreciation, trust, accountability, needed training and support staff, and concrete ways to track and document progress.

4.3. Description of types of successful inclusive programs

There have been many successes and failures as districts, schools, and teachers tackle the challenge of implementing inclusive practices in order to provide the most appropriate education for all students in their purview. These experiences have revealed specific program

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types with practices that have shown effective from all levels - district level program practices, administrative level program practices, collaborative practices between special education staff and general education staff, and classroom practices in the general education classroom.

Successful district level programs tend to involve some sort of combined model. A combined model would be a combination of small group activities for all students for instructional intervention, and all-inclusive grade level classroom learning. The important factor seems to be a double pronged approach that employs the right combination of inclusive practices in the general education classroom with small groups that meet in the resource room for explicit, pointed, and short interventions. It is important to provide options that enable instructors to give each student the specific combination that will work best for them. This idea of a combined model has been effective when the leadership in a district is supportive of inclusive classrooms without withdrawing resources for pull-out classes. The theory of a combined model of inclusive education synthesizes the philosophy of inclusive education with research based interventions and strategies of special education. Instead of being a compromise, this model, in fact provides the best of both worlds with the assurance that all student can learn together with the best program for each; access to the regular curriculum in the general education classroom and least disruptive, least restrictive and least intrusive interventions. When a student is in the general education classroom, he participates as all other students, when grouped for interventions, each goes to the appropriate classroom without the stigma of being pulled to the back table for 'extra help'. I have seen this combination work very well, with inclusive classroom time and grouping for walk-to-math and reading interventions which involves every student at the grade level.

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On a school-wide level, administrators play a key role in successful inclusive programs. One of the most important factors for the involvement of school administrators is an understanding and support for special education and special education teachers, who allow the collaboration needed between special education teachers and general education teachers *without* withdrawing resources for pull-out rooms. Especially effective are schools whose administrators provide initial workshops followed by continued consultation in the school and classroom setting. It is vital that effective leadership strategies empower teachers, giving them the support and regard for their skill that frees them to do their job to the best of their ability. In addition to supporting their staff, a good administrator will be adept at understanding the concerns parents and teachers alike have concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities. The wise administrator will hear, acknowledge and address the beliefs, doubts and concerns of all stakeholders.

Finally, there are characteristics of teachers who are successful in their inclusive practices. The first of these is an obvious value and belief in the potential of each child that is obvious to child and parent alike. This is referred to as “love of the child” or an ‘humanistic ethos’ which is commonly understood as a belief in the value of *each* child as an individual with great potential and who is worthy of and deserves the best educators have to offer. In addition to this kind of commitment, excellent general education inclusive teachers are willing to collaborate frequently with special education teachers, work as a team and be willing to co-teach, team teach and use other known strategies of collaborative teaching. Finally, successful teachers, general education and special education teachers alike, have a solid understanding and skill using Universal Design teaching techniques to involve all students in the

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regular grade level curriculum. The combination of these traits in teachers is related to successful inclusive practices.

The most succinct description of a program that includes all of these critical components for inclusion is Sheila Wagner's book about the Emory Autism Resource Center model, *Inclusive Programming for Elementary Students with Autism, 1998*. She describes an overview of this program model that includes almost every component mentioned in the research. They employ staff that hold the belief that all students need and deserve opportunities to learn along with their typical peers. They provide administrative support to the special education department that includes assistance with scheduling, consultation and problem solving support as well as moral support and acknowledgment for teachers. Teachers are given training on the characteristics of disability, behavior management, and teaching strategies and an inclusion coordinator. Time to collaborate is valued and provided and classroom support is given based upon the need of the individual child instead of a mandated number of hours of inclusive education.

4.4. Barriers or obstacles to the implementation of inclusive programs

While it is helpful to understand the characteristics of successful inclusive programs and teaching personnel, it is also valuable to take a look at some of the most common barriers to a successful inclusion program. These come in many forms and settings, and the most common occur in relation to attitudes of educators, the degree of support given to the professionals involved, administrative and bureaucratic barriers, insufficient training and professional development, and lack of sufficient resources.

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Attitudes whether positive, negative or neutral, will have an effect on the success of any worthwhile task. And there are many positive as well as negative attitudes from educational professionals regarding inclusion. The predominant attitude that proves to be a significant barrier is that so many general education teachers feel that they are inadequate to meet the needs of students with disabilities. They are intimidated at the prospect of meeting the needs of students with a wide variety of skill need levels. In addition, many teachers are not comfortable or confident sharing their classroom and students with other professionals that may come in and out of their classroom, or sharing teaching responsibilities with special educators. They feel that they lack the expertise to address the needs of students with disabilities in their classroom. In addition to these types of self-doubting attitudes, there is the additional complication when some of those teachers do not believe in the value of inclusive education.

Lack of teachers' confidence in their ability to handle an inclusive classroom is probably strongly related to another common and concerning barrier to effective inclusive practices which is a lack of, or insufficient, training and professional development. It has been found that traditional professional development methods have not been successful in providing the necessary changes in attitudes to make inclusive schooling a reality. In particular, general education teachers often have a lack of understanding of special education in general, and of inclusion theory and practice more specifically. Many also feel that their teacher training experience was inadequate in preparing them for the need for inclusive education. Thus, many general education teachers do not feel prepared to handle the instructional needs of students with disabilities. There is also documentation that teachers often feel there is a lack of training

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in their particular school for the inclusion implementation that is expected to take place in their building. It is not surprising then, that the research suggests that inclusive educational settings fail to generate a sense of empowerment among teachers.

Barriers to inclusion that come from bureaucracy and the administrative level can add to the difficulty as well. Sometimes differing opinions of school bureaucrats can threaten inclusive practices. Ineffective policies and lack of provision for collaboration can hinder greater inclusion. In addition, the pace of change can be in issue due to the need for the large amount of resources required to develop data systems, accountability systems, supervisory positions and legal compliance teams. Districts and administrators can push for quick changes to comply with federally mandated least restrictive learning environments without taking the time, thought and expense to first put the needed foundational supports in place. These important infrastructures are often not considered valuable or implemented by school districts when schools try to move to more inclusive school models and improve special education programs in general. These barriers can lead a school or district to experience failure and frustration for all involved, and can potentially land them farther from the goal than when they started.

Related to barriers from inefficient or misinformed bureaucracy or administration, are the barriers that result from the lack or shortage of resources. The challenge here is manifold. While there is a growing number of students who qualify for special education services with increasing ranges of disabilities, there is an inversely coinciding shortage of special education teachers to serve these students. This leads to large class sizes, overly-large caseloads for special education teachers, more professionals in the classroom to support the greater number of students with a wide range disabilities which all leads to increased disruptions and

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distractions to general education classroom - circling back to the idea that many general education classroom teachers do not feel supported or confident and up to the task.

4.5. Student progress in inclusive and non-inclusive settings

Another theme that commonly occurs in the inclusion research is the idea of how to monitor the effectiveness of the program. There is a clear call for a greater emphasis on student outcomes and school accountability. A long history of legislation and commitment to making schools more inclusive for all students is contradictory to the amount of real progress in improving student outcomes. If inclusive practices are going to meet their expectations, they must provide access to the regular curriculum and assessment procedures, but also yield achievement gains in students which are at least as effective as traditional methods.

The research that addresses and measures outcomes of inclusive versus pullout programs is not consistent. Some studies show that the strongest program for students with disabilities is one that offers a combination of push-in (inclusive) and pull-out services. Others indicate stronger learning and smaller post-intervention achievement gaps for specialized intervention than for inclusive instruction. Even others show that students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed fewer behavior infractions and attended more days of school than students served in pullout programs. Clearly, the results of inclusive efforts in schools are as varied as the amount of support teachers receive, how confident they feel, how much training and ongoing professional development they receive, and the quality of all the other program components that are needed.

4.6. Summary of recommended components of successful inclusion implementation

Finally, there are some vital components that are common to the successful implementation of effective inclusion programs. Not surprisingly, these turn out to be components implied by all the previous findings already reviewed. Particular teacher characteristics and teaching strategies, certain characteristics and practices of school leadership, the realization that changing to more inclusive practices takes time and preparation, and effective and ongoing teacher training and professional development opportunities.

The general educator is definitely the key factor to the success of an inclusive classroom, and second to her, is the special education teacher working with that classroom teacher. With the combination of desire and ability in a classroom teacher and special education teacher, inclusive education tends to be very successful. In order for this to be true, there are certain skills needed by both teachers and it should never be assumed that they are present just because the desire to succeed is there. These teachers must know themselves, know the teacher with whom they will be partnering, be familiar with the curriculum and the students, and be trained, competent and successful with the instructional strategies needed. This is a very tall order and clearly requires a great deal of ongoing training and support for both. This training should include learning teaching models that provide access to the regular curriculum and assessment while producing achievement gains that exceed those from traditional methods. It should also include learning state of the art intervention and progress monitoring techniques, universal design theory and techniques, and teaching strategies such as co-teaching, team teaching and others.

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It is apparent that in order to have teachers with these characteristics and skills requires an impressive investment from a district and a school's leadership to provide the support for these requirements. In addition, a clear message comes through the research that teachers who are successful in this endeavor also require school leadership who will endow them with a sense of empowerment to implement the strategies and a trust and value that releases them to do it according to their own ability.

This leads right into the findings regarding school leadership and what is needed from them in order to achieve successful implementation of inclusive classrooms. This can be broken down into three areas of focus. The first is in the support provided by school leaders for teachers of inclusive classroom. The second is teacher sense of value and empowerment mentioned above and needed from school leadership, and the third is the requirement for planned collaboration among the teachers working together to provide inclusive education for all.

Beside the need for ongoing professional development and training for teachers of inclusive classrooms which will be discussed shortly, there are certain other supports that school leaders must provide. School principals can make or break the success of inclusive efforts if they are not able to motivate teachers to embrace inclusion. In order to this, they must be able to model effective interaction among all members of the school community, including parents, for programs to be successful. In addition, leaders are the ones responsible to create and reinforce a school climate that enables teachers to be effective, comfortable and happy with inclusive classrooms. This is a huge amount of responsibility and success of inclusion clearly rests mostly on the shoulders of school leaders, but the research is very clear

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on this point, using inclusive models requires effective leadership strategies that empower teachers.

One can see why the next needed component for successful inclusive practices in a school is the understanding that changing to more inclusive practices takes time and a great deal of preparation. Teachers need to be encouraged to change their paradigm of teaching, to be willing to imagine collaborative teaching models, to become excited to learn to co-teach, especially if they have been teaching in an autonomous classroom for some time. They will need encouragement and training to understand the benefits to students and themselves that will result. School leadership needs to embrace the changes required as well as the fact that they may take more time than they would like to fall into place. It before the can see inclusive practices flourish, which they will do only if that school leader provides the needed school atmosphere and teacher supports. And the educational system as a whole needs to make the changes necessary to move toward genuinely meeting the needs of all learners and fulfill the potential of inclusion. Unless leaders take the time to work from the foundation up in the building of an inclusive school, I am afraid we will continue to see fumbling, ineffective and shallow efforts at inclusion fall far short of that potential.

The leader or leaders of a school are in the position to create and foster a healthy and inclusive school and classroom atmosphere. They are also capable of frustrating and squelching the very same. It can be expressed strongly enough how much the success of inclusive programming rests on the practical and relational support of the school principal toward the teachers and teacher's aids that must implement this challenging method of teaching. Without the go-ahead and understanding support, success is likely to be dicey at best.

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The last critical component for successful inclusion implementation to discuss is the vital need for teacher training and continuing professional development in the area of inclusive education. This need has three components: pre-service teacher training, initial training of teachers when inclusive models are being implemented, and ongoing professional development for practicing teachers.

As teachers are trained in colleges everywhere, it is a shame to not make sure they are taught about inclusive practices and provided with the opportunity during student teaching to experience it first-hand. If the misunderstandings or fears of inclusive teaching models are existent at the college and university level, then the barriers are even bigger. The key element to the realization of successful inclusive practices is in how we prepare teachers, but it is not yet a common practice. This would allow teachers to join schools in any state of inclusion implementation and be able to immediately be a productive part of the program in place.

When a move toward the implementation of more inclusive classrooms is in the beginning stages is also a critical time to provide training to teachers. A model of initial workshops can set a school up for successful inclusion. This is the perfect time to address and encourage attitudes toward and fears about inclusion. Data and successful examples can be shared, as well as a well-planned program for encourage and support so that teachers will know that they are not expected to go out and perform miracles on their own, doing something they don't know how to do. This is the perfect time to debunk the myth of the normal child and normal school and inspire a school staff embrace their students as individuals with great potential.

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Along with pre-service training and initial training, it is of the utmost import that teachers involved in inclusive classrooms receive regular and specific ongoing professional development. These PD opportunities should provide help with attitude change and skill development in teachers. For it to be effective, it should provide individualized training and coaching as well as team building. Ongoing consulting opportunities are necessary for successful inclusive practices. It is the loudest, most frequently requested support one is likely to hear from teachers, next to the plea for collaboration time. They are both part of the critical undergirding and foundation of a successfully inclusive school experience for student and teacher alike.

5. Conclusion

In reviewing and considering the great amount of literature and research on and around the practice of inclusive education for school children with disabilities, of which this study merely scratches the surface, there are clear guidelines that must be considered and acknowledged in order to move into more effective inclusive practices. These guidelines relate to every level of education – district policy, school leadership support and understanding, teacher attitudes and collaboration, parent support and trust, right on down to student feelings of acceptance and safety as well as improvements in achievement.

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There is no simple three-, or five-, step path to a miraculous solution to the current state of good inclusive practices being too few and far between. But neither is the solution out of reach, which is the good news. The challenge is to get all levels of local education on the same page. With certain systems-level practices in place, schools would find inclusion an easier pursuit than it has been in my experience. If districts want to follow federal mandates to provide the least restrictive learning environment as dictated by federal law, they simply need to provide principals with access to training in best practices for quality program requirements. Principals will then be able to be supportive and visionary leaders who have the resources to provide their teachers with the time to collaborate and the training to perfect universal design, and differentiated instruction techniques. These teachers will then have the confidence to accept, care for and educate all their students with energy and skill. Then all of their students will know that they each have strengths that are important to and needed by their school community, which is a safe place for them to relax so that they can learn to their full potential.

Every educator I know is hard working, dedicated and has a strong desire to be able to help prepare every student that comes through their door to be successful in school and in life. But like a craftsman without the right tools to create the masterpiece he can picture in his mind, teachers without the tools they need to give the best of themselves to meet each of their students' individual needs, the outcome will be disappointing to all involved. But with the tools of leadership support, insightful and relevant training, time and opportunity to collaborate and co-teach with special educators, manageable progress monitoring methods, along with the confidence to wield all of these, teachers will be able to fulfill their calling to bring each of their students to their academic potential; to be the masterpieces they were meant to be.

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