

INCLUSION OPINION'S FOR THE CLASSROOM

Inclusion Opinions for the Classroom:

A Meta-Synthesis

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**Abstract**

Despite all the information available about inclusion, teachers are still not receiving adequate training and support on how to efficiently execute inclusive practices within their schools. This lack of quality training and preparation, results in inclusion being met with sour attitudes and unrefined implementation. In addition, students are often not represented or given a voice on their feelings towards inclusion. This meta-synthesis of the literature on inclusive education investigates the realities of powerfully carrying out and supporting inclusive practices for the special and general education teachers and students in the general education classroom.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1. Background*

In the past, many students were removed from their general education classrooms and placed in a special education classroom if they had been identified as having exceptional learning needs (ELN). However, this is not the case for some students anymore. Students with disabilities are being placed into their general education classroom and the material is being modified to meet their needs. The general education teacher and the special education teacher are asked to work together to support the students with ELN through an inclusive setting. Inclusion is not achieved overnight. It takes a lot of effort by the teachers to organize and implement. When beginning inclusion, the teachers are not asked or trained on how to implement it. They are just told to work together to make inclusion happen in their classes. The stress on the teachers' increases and causes confusion about which teacher does what in the classroom setting. It is important to understand and know the teachers' views on inclusion. Teacher perceptions have long been believed to play a central role in how policies and curriculum are implemented. It seems logical to explore teacher views on the process of inclusion in order to gain a more informed idea of what works and does not work.

When issues relating to inclusion are discussed, one of the most important is LRE (least restrictive environment) for students. Is it simply what the administrators and parents want for their student or are the students wanting to be in an inclusive education. The assumption is often made that the general education classroom is better than more restrictive environments that may

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also segregate students with disabilities. Special education students are not being asked if this is the setting they would like to be placed in; the adults in the student's lives are making all of their decisions. While it may appear like a wonderful environment, it is important to be sure that the placement of a student is not based on emotions or the latest educational trends. The determination needs to be made if the environment is the least restrictive for that student.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PI 108-446), a least restrictive environment is determined on a case-by-case basis. This allows the student with special needs to have the maximum possible exposure to students without disabilities, as well as having the opportunity to participate in the general education curriculum. The least restrictive environment is the degree to which a learner can make "appropriate" progress and be successful. The word "appropriate," refers to what is right or fitting for your student. Sometimes placing a student in the general education classroom is not appropriate because a specific service or curriculum cannot be provided (Dempsey & Thomas, 2010). It is up to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the student, to determine the least restrictive environment.

Inclusion can be a very controversial topic. Many schools are implementing inclusion but are not providing support or training for their staff. Some teachers are indifferent about inclusion as are the students who are being impacted. However, inclusion is not just a word but a right for all people young and old. It allows a person to participate without restriction in all aspects of life and culture. (Braunsteiner, & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). In the educational setting, "Inclusion is not a decision about the placement of a student but rather as a school-wide

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philosophy dedicated to the spirit and resources needed to truly provide education for all”

(Braunsteiner, & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014, p1). I will discuss in greater depth through this review of literature the impacts of inclusion, thoughts about inclusion from the general education teacher, special education teacher, and the student with disabilities.

### *1.2. Author's beliefs and experiences*

As a resource teacher, it is my privilege to support students who need extra help academically, behaviorally, and socially. Some of this support comes through inclusion. For the past 2 1/2 years, I have been practicing inclusion by team teaching with general education teachers in my school. We accommodate and modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. I want to explore the various viewpoints of the student, special education teacher, and the general education teacher in relation to inclusive classrooms. What are the benefits and problems associated with inclusive classrooms? How are the problems being addressed for both the student and the teacher, and how are changes being implemented from the special education classroom to inclusive practice?

Since I grew up attending resource classes, I have a unique perspective on how it feels to be the student that was pulled out of the general education classroom and placed into another classroom to receive additional academic help. I remember feeling stupid, and frustrated because I had to leave the regular classroom to receive my teaching in a different location. So, is there an emotional component to consider when taking a student out of the classroom? Sometimes when my resource teacher would arrive to get me, I was angry and did not want to leave. I wanted to be just like everyone else and not need special attention. Now as a resource

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teacher, I feel even more strongly about adapting the curriculum to allow special education students to experience their education with the general student population. I realize at times I will need to work individually because their needs require it, but my hope is that the bulk of their academics are supported in the general education classroom setting.

At the age of 5, my kindergarten teacher felt that I was mentally retarded (or slow mentally) and had a conference with my parents in to discuss my academic options. My parents refused to believe that I was mentally disabled and sought additional opinions. After consulting an audiologist, it was discovered that I was hearing impaired. At the age of six I was able to hear for the first time. Due to the lack of oral and hearing skills, I was severely behind my peers. In subsequent years, I played catch-up with the help of tutors, and speech teachers. They gave me the skills to graduate with my same aged peers.

Today as I ponder my own life experiences, I wonder just what life would have been without the support of my parents and teachers. I could have been placed in an educational setting that was inappropriate for me, and my hearing disability may not have been discovered until much later. This would've placed me further behind academically, and I probably would not be writing a belief statement for a master's thesis. These experiences, though hard, have made me a more compassionate advocate, and understanding resource teacher. I want to support my students and help them have a wonderful academic experience. I believe that when students' have a teacher encouraging them to do their best: including them in the general education population, and never giving up on the student, the sky's the limit.

### *1.3. Purpose of this meta-synthesis*

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This meta-synthesis, which focused on ideas and thoughts on inclusion from general education teachers, special education teachers and special education students. One purpose was to review journal articles that researched the opinions of others in regard to the effect of inclusion in the general education classroom. Specifically, are the teachers feeling like inclusion is a successful process? Do they feel equipped to implement inclusion, and are they supported in their efforts? The second purpose was to review journal articles related to the perspective of the special education student; Is there an emotional component to consider for special education students that are taken out of the classroom? Are their IEP goals being met, and do they want to be in the general education classroom for instruction or would they rather be in the resource classroom? My final purpose in conducting this meta-synthesis was to identify significant themes in these articles, and to connect them to my own classroom experiences in teaching in an inclusive setting to special education students in Alaska.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1. Selection criteria*

The 41 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria.

1. The articles explored issues related to special education students, special education teachers, and general education teacher's thoughts and ideas pertaining to inclusion.
2. The articles explored issues related to public education concerning inclusion.
3. The articles were published in peer reviewed journals related to the field of education.
4. The articles were published between 1995 and 2017.

## 2.2. Search procedures

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

### 2.2.1 Database searches

I conducted Boolean searches within three databases that index articles related to special education teacher's opinions, general education teacher's opinions, student's opinions, and inclusion. The four databases included the: (a) Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost); (b) Professional Development Collection (Ebscohost); (c) Education Journals (ProQuest); using these specific search terms:

1. ("Inclusion") AND ("Does It Work").
2. ("Inclusion") AND ("Teachers Opinions").
3. ("Inclusion") AND ("Teachers") AND ("Opinions").
4. ("Teacher vs. Students perspective on inclusion").
5. ("Inclusion") AND ("Teachers") AND ("Opinions").
6. ("Teachers Attitudes toward Integration")
7. ("Special Education Teachers") AND ("General Education Teachers") AND ("Inclusion").
8. ("Special Education Teachers") AND ("Inclusion Thoughts").
9. ("General Education Teachers") AND ("Inclusion Thoughts").
10. ("Changing Attitudes of Teachers") AND ("Inclusion").

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11. ("Inclusion") AND ("Stigma from Teachers").
12. ("Special Education Students") AND ("Inclusion").
13. ("Special Education Students") AND ("Opinions about Inclusion")
14. ("Special Education Students") AND ("Inclusion Practices")

## 2.2. *Ancestral searches*

An ancestral search involves reviewing the reference lists of previously published works to locate literature relevant to one's topic of interest (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). I conducted ancestral searches using the reference lists of the previously retrieved articles. These ancestral searches yielded three additional articles that met the selection criteria (Bouer, 2013; Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006; Braunsteiner, & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014).

## 2.3. *Coding procedures*

I utilized a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 40 items. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (e) data sources; and (f) findings of the studies.

### 2.3.1. *Publication type*

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive work, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* use a formal research design to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* use existing literature to analyze, expand, or further define a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption.

*Descriptive works* describe phenomena and experiences, but do not disclose particular methods for attaining data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain, justify, or recommend a particular course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. *Guides* give instructions or advice explaining how practitioners might implement a particular agenda. An *annotated bibliography* is a list of cited works on a particular topic, followed by a descriptive paragraph describing, evaluating, or critiquing the source. *Reviews of the literature* critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

### 2.3.2. *Research design*

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* research utilizes numbers to convey information. Instead of numbers, *qualitative* research uses language to explore issues and phenomenon. *Mixed methods* research involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to present information within a single study.

### 2.3.3. *Participants, data sources,*

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., general education teachers' opinions on inclusion, special education teachers' opinions on inclusion, special education student's opinions on inclusion, general education student's opinions on inclusion, administrator's opinion on inclusion, parent's opinions on inclusion). I also identified the data sources used in each study (e.g., observations, surveys, interviews). Lastly, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

### 2.4. *Data analysis*

I used a modified version of the Stick-Colizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 40 articles included in this meta-synthesis. I first identified significant statements in each article. For the purposes of this meta-synthesis, I considered statements to be significant when they addressed issues related to: (a) opinions on inclusion; (b) training for inclusion; (c) inclusion of special needs students in the resource setting; (d) inclusion of students with disabilities; (e) the impact of inclusion; (f) the impact of inclusion for teachers; (g) the impact on general education and special education students in the classroom. I then developed a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping (verbatim) significant statements with (paraphrased) formulated meanings. These (paraphrased) formulated meanings represented my interpretation of each significant statement. Finally, I grouped the formulated meanings from all 41 articles into theme clusters (or emergent themes). These emergent themes represented the essence (or content) of the entire body of literature. (Table 3).

### **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. Nineteen of the 41 articles (46.3%) included in this meta synthesis were research studies (Maitah, & Alsarayreh, 2012; Avramidid, 2010; Bergren, 1997; Bouillet, 2013; Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, & Nazareth, 2017; Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006; Gilmore, 2012; Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017; Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014; Melekoglu, 2013; Nichols, J., Dowdy, A., & Nichols, C; Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001;

Pavlovic, 2016; Petersen, 2016; Sanberg, 2017; Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015; Townsend & Hassall, 2007; West, Novak, & Muelleer, 2016; Whitburn, 2014). Three of the articles (7.5%) were guides (Dempsey & Munk, 2010; Harding & Darling, 2003; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). Three of the articles (7%) were theoretical works (At-Turki, Aldmour, Maitah, & Alsarayreh, 2012; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Seven of the articles (17.5%) were descriptive works (Ang, 2016; Dare, Nowicki & Felimban, 2017; Gerber, 1995; Koller & San Juan, 2015; Kurth, Gross, Lovinger, & Catalano, 2012; Thornton & Underwood, 2013; Whitburn, 2017). Nine of the articles (22.5%) were reviews of literature (Allan & Persson, 2016; Armstrong, 2016; Avramidid, 2002; Bouer, 2013; Braunsteiner, & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Elton-Chalcraft, Cammack, & Harrision, 2016; Kargin, Guldenoglu, & Sahin, 2010; Katz & Sokal, 2016; Moreno-Rodriguez, Lopez, Carincero, Garrote, & Sanchez, 2017).

**Table 1**

<b>Author(s) &amp; Year of Publication</b>	<b>Publication Type</b>
Ang, 2016	Descriptive Work
Allan & Persson, 2016	Review of the Literature
Armstrong, 2016	Review of the Literature
At-Turki, Aldmour, Maitah, & Alsarayreh, 2012	Theoretical Work
Avramidid, 2010	Research Study
Avramidid, 2002	Review of the Literature
Bergren, 1997	Research Study
Bouer, 2013	Review of the Literature
Braunsteiner, & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014	Review of the Literature
Bouillet, 2013	Research Study
Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014	Research Study
Dare, Nowicki & Felimban, 2017	Descriptive Work
Dempsey & Munk, 2010	Guide
Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014	Theoretical Work
dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, & Nazareth, 2017	Research Study

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Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006	Research Study
Elton-Chalcraft, Cammack, & Harrision, 2016	Review of the Literature
Gilmore, 2012	Research Study
Gerber, 1995	Descriptive Work
Harding & Darling, 2003	Guide
Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017	Research Study
Kargin, Guldenoglu, & Sahin, 2010	Review of the Literature
Katz & Sokal, 2016	Review of the Literature
Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014	Research Study
Koller & San Juan, 2015	Descriptive Work
Kurth, Gross, Lovinger, & Catalano, 2012	Descriptive Work
Melekoglu, 2013	Research Study
Moreno-Rodriguez, Lopez, Carincero, Garrote, & Sanchez, 2017	Review of the Literature
Nichols, J., Dowdy,A., & Nichols, C, 2010	Research Study
Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001	Research Study
Pavlovic, 2016	Research Study
Petersen, 2016	Research Study
Sanberg, 2017	Research Study
Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013	Guide
Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015	Research Study
Townsend & Hassall, 2007	Research Study
Thornton & Underwood, 2013	Descriptive Work
Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013	Theoretical Work
West, Novak, & Mueller, 2016	Research Study
Whitburn, 2014	Research Study
Whitburn, 2017	Descriptive Work

### *3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies*

As stated previously, I located 19 research studies that met my selection criteria (Avramidid, 2010; Bergren, 1997; Bouillet, 2013; Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014; dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, & Nazareth, 2017; Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006; Gilmore, 2012; Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017; Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014; Melekoglu, 2013; Nichols, J., Dowdy, A., & Nichols, C, 2010; Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001; Pavlovic, 2016; Petersen, 2016; Sanberg, 2017; Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015; Townsend & Hassall, 2007; West, Novak, & Mueller, 2016; Whitburn, 2014). The research design, participants, data sources, and findings of each of these studies are identified in Table 2.

Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Avramidid, 2010	Qualitative	566 students from 7 elementary schools	Surveys	Special education students need to be taught and given chances to practice appropriate social connections with their non-disabled peers. The practice gives students a more real life opportunity for appropriate social interaction.
Bergren, 1997	Quantitative	150 special education and general education teachers	Surveys	Teachers who have been trained in co-teaching and inclusion have a better attitude when teaching students with disabilities. This allows for a more favorable outcome for special education students in the general education classroom.
Bouillet, 2013	Mixed Methods	69 primary school teachers	46 item Transition Planning Inventory (TPI)	Teachers need more support and training with teaching students with disabilities. Teachers like to collaborate, but feel inadequate to co-teach without training and supports in place for students.
Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014	Mixed Methods	46 teachers/administrators from Brazil & 43 teachers/administrators from the United States	Mixed-methodology/ observations, surveys, interviews	Teachers agree that inclusion has a positive effect on special education student's social skills. However, they are conflicted on the effects of the student's academic success in the inclusion model.
dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, &	Qualitative	64 teachers/administrators	Surveys	Inclusion does not just effect students with disabilities. It also effects the poor, social

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Nazareth, 2017				groups, cultural groups, and institutional life.
Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006	Quantitative	364 high school students	Surveys	Both general and special education students had positive attitudes toward inclusion. This attitude increased the special education student to like their school, teachers, and classmates more. It also increased their motivation to want to learn with their non-disabled peers.
Gilmore, 2012	Mixed Methods	90 Teachers and Pastoral staff	Interviews, Surveys, Documentary Analysis	Inclusion rooms for students with high discipline behaviors has decreased the number of students being expelled from school. This allows students to continue to learn academics and social skills.
Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017	Quantitative	1000 Lower Secondary Students 1348 Upper Secondary students 332 Teachers	Surveys	Teachers felt that they needed more training when developing co-teaching lessons, and their responsibility in the lesson. Students had a difficult time describing their role in the general education classroom and the resource classroom.
Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014	Quantitative	81 Teachers	Surveys	Teachers attitudes toward inclusion and disabilities shifted to be more positive after they had received the appropriate training.
Melekoglu, 2013	Mixed Methods	56 College Students (Teacher Candidates)	Surveys & Interviews	College students studying education found it helpful to complete the Interaction Project with special education students. They felt it increased their knowledge of special education students. This knowledge changed their attitude towards these students

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				by giving them the skills they need to be successful when teaching special education students in their general education classrooms.
Nichols, J., Dowdy, A., & Nichols, C, 2010	Quantitative	24 School Districts	Surveys	Co-teaching/inclusion is being implemented without proper staff development or training.
Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001	Quantitative	90 Teachers	Surveys	Teachers feel it is important to make changes within their schools to meet the needs of the special education students in their buildings. They also feel that they need more training and support on how to make these changes within their schools.
Pavlovic, 2016	Quantitative	300 Upper Elementary Students	Surveys	Over one half of the upper elementary students felt that students with disabilities inhibit their learning in the general education classroom and need to be placed in their own classrooms. Students attitude towards disabled students have been impacted due to the lack of exposure and education of different disabilities.
Petersen, 2016	Qualitative	21 Teachers	Focus Group Interviews	Teachers were confused on how they were to teach IEP goals, Common Core goals, Alternative Assessment goals, and general education curriculum concededly. They felt they needed more training and time to collaborate with their colleagues.
Sanberg, 2017	Qualitative	16 Elementary Students	Interviews	Students with and without disabilities would like to have more say in their learning

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				process, school demands, and peer social interactions.
Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015	Mixed Methods	86 Students with and without disabilities ranging from 8-11 years' old	Focus Group Interviews	Students with disabilities wanted to be taught with only the inclusion model. They did not want to be pulled for any related services. They wanted the services to come to them. They also wanted more supports with making friends and how to act during social interactions. Students with and without disabilities like the co-teaching model and found it helpful to have two teachers to help them.
Townsend & Hassall, 2007	Mixed Methods	170 Students ranging from 6-16 years' old	Focus Group Interviews, Surveys	The younger the student the more accepting the student was of their disabled peer. Girls were more likely to play alongside their disabled peers then boys.
West, Novak, & Mueller, 2016	Quantitative	52 college instructors	Survey	Teachers need more training on different disabilities so they are better able to accommodate and modify their lessons.
Whitburn, 2014	Qualitative	5 Visually Impaired Students -1 girl and 4 boys ranging from 13-17 years' old	Focus Group Interviews	Secondary students with visual impairments would like to be allowed to attend their neighborhood schools with their nondisabled peers, and taught to take public transportation instead of being bussed to different schools.

### *3.2.1. Research design*

Eight of the 19 studies (42%) used a quantitative research design (Bergren, 1997; Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006; Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017; Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014; Nichols, J., Dowdy, A., & Nichols, C, 2010; Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001; Pavlovic, 2016; West, Novak, & Mueller, 2016). Six of the studies (31.5%) utilized a mixed methods research design (Bouillet, 2013; Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014; Gilmore, 2012; Melekoglu, 2013; Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015; Townsend & Hassall, 2007). Five of the studies (26%) used a qualitative research design (Avramidid, 2010; dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, & Nazareth, 2017; Petersen, 2016; Sanberg, 2017; Whitburn, 2014).

### *3.2.2. Participants and data sources*

The majority of the 19 research studies included in this meta-synthesis analyzed data collected from students of all ages with and without disabilities, special and general teachers in the elementary and high school levels, administrators, college students studying education, and parents of students with disabilities. Seven of the studies (36.8%) analyzed data collected from students with and without disabilities (Avramidid, 2010; Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, & Lewis, 2006; Pavlovic, 2016; Sanberg, 2017; Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Slatter,

Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015; Townsend & Hassall, 2007; Whitburn, 2014). Six of the studies (30%) analyzed data collected from general and special education teachers (Bergren, 1997; Bouillet, 2013; Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014; Nichols, J., Dowdy, A., & Nichols, C, 2010; Opdal, Wormnaess, & Habayeb, 2001; Petersen, 2016). Five of the studies (26%) analyzed data collected from general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators (Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana, & Jones, 2014; dos Santos, de Melo, Santiago, & Nazareth, 2017; Gilmore, 2012; Ianes, Cappelo, & Demo, 2017; West, Novak, & Mueller, 2016). One of the studies (5%) analyzed data collected from college students becoming teachers (Melekoglu, 2013). In addition to scale-based assessments and interviews, other sources of data were also used in many of the studies; these additional sources of data included: focus group meetings; participant journals; surveys; questionnaires; and pre-and-post measures.

### *3.2.3. Findings of the studies*

The findings of the 19 research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows.

1. Teachers are expected to teach in an inclusive model but have not been given the proper training on how to teach inclusion. Special education teachers and general education teachers want more training on how to teach inclusion. Training is needed in order for inclusion to be implemented, and understood by everyone involved.

2. Special education and general education teachers want to learn how to increase acceptance of students with disabilities in social and academic interactions among their

non-disabled peers. Teachers and students need to change their attitudes about inclusion in order to make it a more positive interaction.

3. The understanding and responsibilities for co-teaching needs to be discussed and understood by both the special education and general education teacher. Both teachers benefit from additional planning time on how to successfully implement inclusion into the general education classroom. Special education and general education teachers need more time during the day to plan together for inclusion. The perspective and realistic desire from the teachers should be reflected in the inclusion process.

### *3.3. Emergent themes*

Six themes emerged from my analysis of the 41 articles included in this meta- synthesis. These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) special and general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion/co-teaching; (b) teachers need to be trained on how to implement inclusion/co-teaching; (c) preparing students in special and general education for inclusion; (d) teachers responsibilities for implementing inclusion and/or co-teaching; (e) placement for students with disabilities; and (f) the perspective of the special education student about inclusion and/or co-teaching. These six theme clusters and their formulated meanings are represented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

<b>Theme Clusters</b>	<b>Formulated Meanings</b>
Special and General Ed. Teachers Attitudes Towards Inclusion/Co-Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful integration of special education students is affected by the attitude of the teacher.</li> <li>• Student acceptance of special education peers is an important step towards inclusion.</li> <li>• General and special educational teachers are being forced to co-teach without being trained. This is causing negative feelings towards inclusion resulting in negative teacher attitudes.</li> <li>• Research shows that having students in the general education setting does not negatively affect other students' academic growth.</li> <li>• In order to teach students in an inclusive setting, teachers require support and skills to confidently teach students with disabilities.</li> <li>• Research shows that the more time students with disabilities spend in the general education classroom the higher their academic performances are, less absences, and fewer behavioral disruptions.</li> <li>• Teachers are being expected to teach students with disabilities without being prepared with "appropriate" instructional support.</li> <li>• Teachers who have been properly trained on how to effectively support students with disabilities have a better attitude when including them in the general education classroom.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research shows that general education teachers have a more positive attitude in teaching students with mild disabilities.</li><li>• Teachers attitudes towards inclusion or co-teaching play a critical role in implementing it.</li><li>• Teachers must maintain a nondiscriminatory attitude towards students with disabilities.</li><li>• By allowing time for both teachers and students to adjust to the inclusion in the regular classrooms; gives time for everyone to feel comfortable and have a more positive attitude towards one another.</li><li>• According to research, the most important element to the success or failure of inclusion or co-teaching is the teachers attitude.</li><li>• The more understanding of the disability the greater the positive interaction between students and teachers.</li><li>• In order to have a positive process in inclusion or co-teaching, all attitudes who are related to the process need to be positive and upbeat.</li><li>• Developing a personal relationship with your students increases a more positive opinion for both the teacher and the student.</li><li>• Misunderstanding the disability of students creates confusion and distrust between students and teachers.</li><li>• Co-teaching in the same classroom with a special and general education teacher reveal a strong positive attitude for inclusion.</li><li>• Research shows that years of experience as a teacher does not make an impact on the attitude towards including students with disabilities into the general education classroom.</li><li>• Teachers negative or cynical opinions about a disability may be a lack of inadequate information on that disability.</li><li>• Multiple supports for the disabled student need to be made available to the student. A lack of support for the student and the teacher is the number one cause for a negative attitude towards inclusion and co-teaching.</li><li>• Positive team work equals a more progressive attitude for inclusion.</li><li>• Understanding the term, “inclusion” determines the attitude of the teacher.</li></ul>
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<p>Teachers Need To Be Trained on how to Implement Inclusion and Co-teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers require additional training to feel that they can adequately be prepared to teach inclusion to special needs students.</li> <li>• Teachers need support to know how to accommodate students on different disabilities.</li> <li>• Districts require additional money to pay for special education support equipment in classrooms but are having a difficult time knowing where the money will come from to pay for it.</li> <li>• Training needs to occur for special and general education teachers on how to effectively co-teach.</li> <li>• Significant changes are being made in schools requiring inclusion without proper training and support for teachers.</li> <li>• It is assumed that general education teachers lack the knowledge and training how to successfully teach non-disabled students.</li> <li>• Due to large class sizes and non-flexible curriculum, general education teachers find it difficult to accommodate and modify the curriculum to meet the needs of their students with disabilities.</li> <li>• Training special educators to teach in a general education classroom is just as important as teaching general education teachers to teach special education students in the general education classroom.</li> <li>• Before starting inclusion or co-teaching, teachers need educated in how to execute appropriate teaching methods to meet the needs of the non-disabled and disabled students in their class.</li> <li>• Teachers need training in preparing educational, social, personal, or daily living skills curriculum to meet the needs of the disabled students in the regular education classroom.</li> <li>• Training is very important in order to make co-teaching and inclusion work within the general education classroom.</li> <li>• Co-teaching is successful when both teachers are properly educated on how to implement it.</li> <li>• Staff development needs to be supported by the administration to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers who co-teach and practice inclusion.</li> </ul>
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## INCLUSION OPINION'S FOR THE CLASSROOM

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to teach students in an inclusive setting teachers require support and skills to confidently teach students with disabilities.</li> </ul>
Preparing Students in Special and General Ed. for Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student acceptance of special education peers is an important step towards inclusion.</li> <li>• Students with disabilities are taught how to compensate their disability by being taught alternative strategies.</li> <li>• Improving students' behavior towards inclusion can help with the transitioning process.</li> <li>• Students that experience inclusion starting in kindergarten have more positive interaction with their disabled peers increasing in progressive skills and social interactions.</li> <li>• Disabled students need to become self-advocates and effectively communicate their needs to their teachers.</li> <li>• Students need to feel comfortable to communicate their strengths and weakness to teachers and each other.</li> <li>• Prepare students on what type of inclusion they will be participating in: all the lessons are in the general education classroom, all lessons are in the special education classroom, or some classes in the special and general education classroom.</li> <li>• Let students know if the special and general education teachers will be co-teaching before implementing the change so students are aware of what is being done.</li> <li>• Co-teaching/inclusion classes allows for the special education student to access more of their grade level curriculum through modifications and accommodations made for them by the special education teacher. This permits the student to access their education in the general education classroom.</li> </ul>
Teachers Responsibilities for Implementing Inclusion and Co-teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is the responsibility of the special education teacher to prepare disabled students to act, "normal" in a normal classroom setting.</li> <li>• Both teachers need to discuss what types of methods they would like to use when teaching inclusion/co-teaching together.</li> <li>• Meaningful collaboration between special and general education teachers allows for positive communication about responsibilities in the classroom.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is critical that teachers discuss what the classroom rules will be before starting inclusion/co-teaching.</li> <li>• Co-teaching is successful when both teachers understand their responsibilities in the classroom, curriculum, grading, and rules.</li> <li>• Collaboration and communication between both teachers is a tool for achieving co-teaching within the general education classroom.</li> <li>• It is a team approach model that works best for co-teaching. Both teachers take responsibilities for the disabled and non-disabled students.</li> <li>• Many other supports given to the disabled student such as a speech therapist, will need a one-on-one or small group environment. Some social skills can be taught as a whole group in the classroom. Collaboration between all teachers responsible for the student will make a more positive experience.</li> <li>• Both teachers have the responsibility to help all students in the classroom.</li> </ul>
Placement for Students with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research shows that having students in the general education setting does not negatively affect other students' academic growth.</li> <li>• Research shows that the more time students with disabilities spend in the general education classroom the higher their academic performances are, less absences, and fewer behavioral disruptions.</li> <li>• Simply placing students in a general education classroom is not enough. All students need to learn to work together to break down the hierarchy orders of disabilities vs. abilities.</li> <li>• Students with disabilities must be given the necessary supports in the classroom to help them be successful.</li> <li>• Members of the deaf community would like for their deaf child to be educated with other deaf children. The parents of students with lower IQ's want their children to be placed in a classroom with non-disabled peers. Giving their student more chances for social experiences.</li> <li>• Classroom based interventions have proven to be successful for disabled students.</li> <li>• Research shows that smaller schools have better acceptance for inclusion.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the law, no child regardless of their disability can be turned away from school.</li> <li>• Just because a student has a disability does not mean that they have to sit at the front of the classroom.</li> </ul>
<p>The perspective of the special education student about inclusion and/or co-teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The research revealed that most special education students like being included in the classroom environment.</li> <li>• Students like inclusion when they are being engaged and treated just like any other student in the classroom.</li> <li>• Positive school belonging makes a big impact on special education students.</li> <li>• Students want to learn what their non-disabled peers are learning in the classroom and prefer if their special education teacher came to them to provide services so they would not have to leave the classroom.</li> <li>• Co-teaching is a desired method for inclusion so students will not be separated from their peers.</li> <li>• More opportunities and supports need to be implemented to help students know how to make friends.</li> <li>• When in the classroom, students want to feel like their non-disabled peers and not singled out.</li> <li>• They want their curriculum to look as close to their non-disabled peers so they do not stand out.</li> <li>• Special education students would like to have a say in their education and not have everything decided for them</li> </ul>

#### **4. Discussion**

##### *4.1. Special and general education teachers attitude towards inclusion*

The research shows that to have successful inclusion depends greatly on the attitudes of the special and general education teacher. Their attitudes affect how inclusion is implemented into their classrooms; be it positive or negative. Teachers want administrators to understand that inclusion does not just affect the students but it also affects the teachers as well. When teachers do not feel supported, are not equipped with the skills to know how to teach the different disabilities represented in their classroom, or are not trained on how to implement inclusion, then their attitudes are not positive towards inclusion. General education teachers are concerned that the placement of special education students in their classroom will bring down their testing scores for their class and make them look like they are not an adequate teacher. Teachers are concerned that the added responsibility and lack of more time is going to make their workload

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even more taxing. On the other hand, teachers who have been trained on how to implement inclusion with their special education teachers have had great success with their student's growth. By planning the lessons together, they are able to implement the lesson effectively in a co-teaching inclusive model. When they are trained, they feel better equipped, and are able to see the positive potential using inclusions which makes for a favorable attitude towards implementing it.

The past six years both of the schools I taught in were working on becoming an inclusive school. The first three years I taught as the general education teacher, and the past three as the resource teacher. I feel that this has given me a very unique perspective about inclusion. As a general education teacher, I wrote all of the lessons their adaptation and modifications for all of my students. I would deliver all of the lessons and the resource teacher would assist the special education students as I was teaching. The special education teacher did not feel comfortable co-teaching because she felt that she did not know the curriculum well enough nor did she have any training on inclusion. I felt comfortable teaching both groups of students because I had taken classes in special education and had prior experience with special education students. Now that I am a special education teacher, for inclusion I want to co-teach with my general education teachers. Some teachers have a difficult time sharing their teaching load with me or understanding that I am not an aid in the classroom. A couple of teachers only want me to work with the resource student in the back of the classroom or in the resource room because they feel that they are unable to give adequate help to the student. They see their student as needing more one-on-one attention that they are not able to give in the general education classroom due to their

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large class size. Well two others embrace co-teaching and welcome the collaboration. All of the teachers feel like they would benefit from training, more administrator support with inclusion and test scores, and additional time to collaborate. I too would like more training etc., but I feel like the teachers own fears of the unknown are the biggest barrier for the prospects of co-teaching in an inclusive setting.

#### *4.2. Teachers need training on how to implement inclusion and co-teaching*

Significant changes are occurring within the teaching profession without the proper training and supports for teachers. Teachers are being expected to teach in an inclusive setting without being trained on how to implement inclusion, how to co-teach, and little to no knowledge of how to adapt and modify their already non-flexible curriculum. To further discourage teachers they are given larger class sizes, and high-stakes testing. Teachers need training on different disabilities in order to understand how to execute appropriate teaching methods, social interactions, personal and daily living skills, and how to meet the needs of the students with disabilities in their regular education classroom. It is important not just for the general education teacher to be trained on inclusion/co-teaching but also the special education teacher. When both teachers are trained, it makes co-teaching more successful and easier to implement.

I feel that more pressures are being placed on all teachers to teach in an inclusive setting. However, little to no training is accompanying these requests. Simply wanting inclusion and implementing inclusion are two very different concepts. Without the knowledge and the skills on how to co-teach, it can cause a lot of frustration and negative attitudes for teachers. There needs to be staff development or additional training that teaches the skills to teachers who

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co-teach and practice inclusion. The past six years of teaching in inclusive schools I have only received training through video twice. I have never had a supervising teacher who could give me tips and ideas on how to successfully implement co-teaching. Nor have I had any additional training to the video's. The remainder of my knowledge has come through research, collaboration, and trial and error. However, I am still required to co-teach each year with one or more of my colleagues through and inclusive classroom model. My hope is that in the future we will receive training as a staff on how to successfully implement co-teaching/inclusion into our classrooms without having to guess how to do it.

*4.3. Preparing students in special and general education for inclusion*

When preparing special education students for inclusion several skills need to be taught to the student with disabilities. Students with disabilities need to be taught strategies on how to compensate their disability, how to ask for help, and how to be part of a solution. They need to learn how to become self-advocates and effectively communicate their needs to the teacher. Research shows that when students start at a very young age being taught through and inclusive model, both the disabled and non-disabled student have a higher rate of accepting inclusive practices. Students with disabilities from an inclusive classroom have a higher rate than students in non-inclusive classroom in developing social, academic and progressive skills. Both the disabled and non-disabled student need clarification on what type of inclusion they are going to participate in: are all lessons taught in the general education classroom with supports from the special education teacher and aids, are classes in both the special and general education classroom, or are the special and general education teachers co-teaching. Having acceptance of

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inclusion for both groups of students is vital in the transitioning process and attitudes of the students on inclusion.

When preparing my resource students for inclusion and co-teaching, I assure them that I will be modifying their work so they are able to access the curriculum that their non-disabled peers are working on. I provide the supports needed in the class to help the student feel comfortable and successful in the classroom. I briefly check in daily with each resource student and their teacher to be sure they are being accommodated and productive in the general education classroom. I assist the general education teacher in modifying lessons and accommodations, co-teaching or teaching lessons, and understanding the needs of their students.

*4.4. Responsibilities of the special and general education teachers on implementing inclusion/Co-teaching*

The literature revealed that to have effective co-teaching both teachers need to discuss and define their roles and responsibilities in the inclusive classroom setting. They need to have meaningful collaboration between all teachers working with the students, open communication about co-teaching, students, curriculum, modifications and adaptations. Both teachers need to take responsibility for all of the students in the classroom. If additional supports are needed, both teachers need to discuss which supports, and determine where the child should receive those supports.

The past three years I have been participating in some kind of inclusion model with the intermediate general education teachers in my school. Each teacher has had a very unique perspective on the responsibilities each of us have in incorporating inclusion. This past year has been truly the most productive co-teaching experience I have had at my current school. I believe

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this is because we have defined our roles and responsibilities in how we are implementing inclusion and co-teaching. The general education teacher and I have meaningful collaboration on a weekly basis. We discuss weekly lessons, any modifications that need to be made, groupings of students according to their needs not their disability, and who is teaching what and grading it. We have found that inclusion through co-teaching is successfully implemented when both teachers respect each other, collaborate, define the rules ahead of time, and treat both the disabled and non-disabled students equally.

*4.5. Placement for students with disabilities*

Students with disabilities have the right to be educated in the classroom with their non-disabled peers. Research shows that students with disabilities who have been educated with their non-disabled peers have higher academic performances, less absences, and fewer behavioral disruptions than disabled students who have not been educated in the general education classroom. It is important to not single out a disabled student by always placing them in the front of the classroom. Parents of students with lower IQ's and parents of students with mild disabilities want their child educated in the classroom with their non-disabled peers. When a placement of a disabled student is determined, it is not enough to just place that student into the classroom setting. The student needs to be given the supports necessary to be successful in the classroom. For inclusion to be successful all students must learn to work together to break down the hierarchy of disabilities vs. abilities.

When placing students in an inclusive setting, I am sure to meet with the IEP team to determine if the setting in the classroom is the least restrictive environment for that student

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before I begin. During this meeting, I also discuss with the student if they would like to be placed in an inclusive setting with support in the classroom or pulled out for a small intervention with other disabled peers. I feel that it is important to receive the thoughts and concerns of each of my students before making the final decision. I am careful to look at any harmful effects of the educational placement before implement it.

*4.6. The perspective of the special education student about inclusion/co-teaching*

The research shows that special educated students like being included and treated just like anyone else in the general education classroom environment. They would prefer that their special education teacher provided services in the classroom through co-teaching or inclusion with special education supports. Special education students need more social supports provided in and outside of the classroom. Special education students would like for their voice to be heard and not everyone else making decisions for them.

Working with resource students I have found that there are very mixed feelings about inclusion. I have students who have excelled in the inclusive model through co-teaching while others tend to fall further behind. Many of my students have loved inclusion model but also want to have small group with just me in the resource classroom without their classmates who receive instruction in the general education environment. Still other students want to be in the resource classroom with me all day and never go back to the general education classroom. After discussing thoughts and ideas of inclusion with my students, I have found that student's attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by the teachers' attitude regarding inclusion. Students whose

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work has been modified, and have felt accepted, have had greater success than those who have not had this same work modifications made for them.

Students with disabilities and teachers who work with them prefer a partial-inclusion model instead of a full-inclusion model.

### **5. Conclusion**

The findings of this is meta-synthesis highlight that inclusion isn't just for students with mild disabilities found within the resource classroom. Inclusion is for all disabled and non-disabled students!

At first it was a bit overwhelming and frustrating to read differing viewpoints on inclusion since I really only wanted to look at mild disabilities and how to successfully implement teaching practices that would benefit my students within my resource classroom. I realized how narrow minded my ideas were on inclusion and started to think about other students who are impacted by isolation and neglect within their own schools. I wanted to know, "Have they ever been asked how they feel about inclusion and its implementation in their classroom?" Throughout this review, I noticed a lack of input from students with disabilities. This led me to believe that more data needs to be collected on how students feel about inclusion and co-teaching.

As a resource teacher in an inclusive classroom, I have asked my students if they prefer it when I co-teach with their general education teacher or would they prefer to stay in the special education classroom with me. I have had mixed reviews pertaining to this topic. I have students who love that I teach with their general education teacher, including modifying their lessons within the general classroom. Other students felt the general education classroom is much too noisy, distracting, and that they have a difficult time concentrating on their work. Most of my students preferred partial inclusion.

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Just because administration, parents, and maybe even a teacher, feel that a student should be in the general education classroom does not mean it is the best fit or the least restrictive environment. There is a need to ask the student for their opinion, take time to listen to what they feel works best for them, and then make a decision. Students who are unable to verbally share their opinions, also need an opportunity to learn alongside their same age peers through academic and social activities in the classroom. The Meta-Synthesis confirms that not many severe and profound students have had the opportunity for social interaction with their same age non-disabled peers.

This study shows that inclusive education will not work without properly training your teaching staff. Parents, administrators, teachers, support staff, and all students in both the general education, and resource classrooms must be given some form of blueprint as to what an inclusive classroom looks and functions like. Way too often many of these very important parts of inclusive education are neglected. By not working together to define and refine the vision of inclusive education in a school causes confusion, frustration, and sour attitudes on implementation. Without proper training, staff are left to “guess” how to implement inclusion. Guessing leads to teachers having a bad attitude towards inclusive education. Many times, the special education teacher is treated as an aid and not as another teacher in the classroom. The students with disabilities are thought to be included because they are in the physical classroom space, but they are in the back of the room isolated from their peers, which is not inclusion. Inclusion is meant to include all students working together, having access to modifications and accommodations.

The more I've learned about inclusive education the more I realize how much I still need to learn. This study has reminded me that my attitude, positive or negative, has a huge impact on the implementation of inclusive practices and co-teaching in my school. I will work each day teacher by

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teacher, and classroom by classroom to instill a positive attitude about inclusive education with the students and the general education teachers alike.

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