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Inclusion Of Students With Mild To Moderate Disabilities In Grades 1-5 Mainstream Language Arts Classrooms

Jodi Lyn Smith
Hamline University

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INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES IN GRADES 1-5 MAINSTREAM LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

By

Jodi Lyn Smith

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

August 2017

Primary Advisor: Susan Manikowski
Secondary Advisor: Lana Talberg
To my five children Sierra, Fayese, Caleb, Eshetu and Miranda. Thank you for being patient with me over the years while I have been completing my education. May you share my love of learning and follow your dreams throughout life. I love you all.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

About This Capstone

For my capstone project, I will be researching *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*. In this chapter, I will share my journey in the field of special education as well as what lead me to research my topic. In addition, this chapter will discuss the importance of designing a successful inclusive language arts setting for staff members and students. This chapter will end with a summary of my journey and an introduction to my literature review in chapter 2.

My Journey to Discover What Makes a Successful Inclusive Language Arts Model

It was the summer after my first year of college, and I had accepted a job working at a group home for severely handicapped adults. A good friend of mine worked there and encouraged me to work there with her, saying for a part time job, it paid well and it was ‘fun’. So I did, and I fell in love with the individuals who lived there. It was my first experience working with anyone who had a disability. The individuals who lived there had multiple severe disabilities; most were non-verbal, many non-ambulatory, and they all needed assistance with most aspects of their lives. I learned to feed someone using a feeding tube, I learned about their special diets, how to puree all types of food and how to add thickener to the food so they would not choke. I loved the people who worked there because they were caring and laid back people, who I believed I was similar to.
**Time to choose a major.**  I also discovered at this time what I wanted to major in: special education. Up until this point, I had no idea what I wanted to major in. I had just been taking my generals and was not too worried, because there were many things I was interested in, it was just a matter of choosing. Everything happens for a reason. I have been told that many times, and now I was experiencing it. My friend encouraging me to work at a group home with her was meant to be, because it was that experience that lead me to my major, my passion, my future. It was then I chose my major: special education.

**A great opportunity.**  I finished another year of generals and transferred to St. Cloud State University where I finished my Bachelors of Science in Special Education and Elementary Education. Soon after I began classes there, I was informed about a special program being offered to students in education. This program, entitled Inclusive Teacher Education Project, or ITEP, as we referred to it, was a two year program that allowed students to double major in Specific Learning Disabilities and Elementary Education in the same amount of time that it would have taken us to major in one or the other. It was only offered one time, as a result of grant money, and only twenty students would be admitted into the program. Although I had intended on majoring in Emotional Behavioral Disorders, I knew I could not pass up this opportunity. I was one of the twenty fortunate students chosen for the program, and in May 1996, I graduated with my BS in Elementary Education and Specific Learning Disabilities.

**Starting my career.**  Immediately after graduation, I went back to my comfort zone, and accepted a position working with high functioning adults living on their own, but who required assistance with daily living skills. Although I liked this job, I knew I wanted to be back in the classroom. In February 1997, I accepted my first teaching position at an alternative school in a major metropolitan city. To date, this was probably my favorite place I have taught. The
staff and students taught me so much, and I definitely grew as an instructor and a human being. I was surrounded by more diversity than ever before, and I loved it!

After a year and a half of teaching experience under my belt, I moved on to the public school system, where I have been ever since. I have taught in inner city schools, as well as first, second and third tier suburban school districts. All of these settings, except for my current, functioned on the belief that students on an IEP should remain in the mainstream for core academic instruction and be pulled out at a different time of the day for supplemental support in the area(s) they qualified in for special education services. That was my norm for nine years, what I had been prepared for in college and what I believed was the right way to service my students.

A Different philosophy for service. Then I moved to my current school district and accepted a job at the local elementary school as a learning disabilities teacher. I quickly discovered that my new district functioned on a different philosophy for our special education students. My new district serviced students on an IEP in the resource room in the areas they received service (reading, writing, math) at the same time their peers received their instruction in these areas in the mainstream setting. Our students did not get a “double dose” of service in the areas they had a disability, but rather they received “replacement” instruction.

I have to admit, I had a difficult time adjusting to this model of service. I was always advocating for our students to remain in the mainstream for core instruction and come to a resource room later for extra support in the area(s) of specialized need. My suggestions did not go over well with general education teachers, special education teachers or with administration. After all, change is difficult; it is always easier to just keep doing what we had been doing instead of changing our mindset, our teaching practices and our curriculum.
A welcome change. Three years ago, a new principal came to our school. He shared my belief that students should receive their core instruction in the mainstream, and told us we would be working towards that model. I was excited! Two weeks before the 2016-2017 school year started, we were told this would be the year we would start the transition. We were to select our “higher functioning” students to be placed in our supplemental groups, meaning they would stay in the mainstream for core instruction in Language Arts, then come to special education resource rooms at a different time of day for supplemental service. It was finally happening!

Although I had been waiting for this moment for years, it came on quickly and without time to prepare. The general education teachers felt they were especially unprepared. The special education teachers felt equally unprepared. This has been a year filled with questions and concerns: who is responsible for grading these students? How can these students be in my class when they are failing? What kind of accommodations and modifications should be made for these students? Who is responsible for these accommodations/modifications? What is the point of special education if these students are still in the mainstream for instruction?

It has also been a year of growth for the staff, as well as the students. My fifth grade students who are now in the mainstream for core instruction are PROUD to be there! I hear weekly how much they like being in the mainstream for Language Arts. I have never once heard them complain that it is too difficult for them in the mainstream or that they wish they could be back in a small group. They have never once said they feel out of place or like they do not belong in the mainstream. Their grades may not match their effort and enthusiasm, but I believe wholeheartedly that they are benefitting from being in the mainstream.

Action Research Question
This glimmer of hope for moving towards a more inclusive setting, along with my own personal beliefs, has lead me to my research topic and project: *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*. I feel this is an important topic to research as our school begins the process of switching to a more inclusive service model of serving our special education population. We owe it to our students to provide them with the best possible learning environment. We owe it to our students’ parents to provide their children with an appropriate education. We owe it to ourselves to create an environment that we feel comfortable in, and where we have the supports in place to help us succeed.

The other elementary school in our district already moved to an inclusive language arts program three years ago. I have discussed with special education staff at the other school and asked how their transition was from a pull out model to in push model. I have heard what went well, as well as what areas could be improved. Obtaining this information from them was helpful because it can help our school as we begin this transition.

I believe by designing an effective inclusive language arts model at our school, our students will benefit from not only being with their peers for more of the day, but from being taught their core language arts instruction from their mainstream teachers, who are the masters at teaching that curriculum. I believe the parents would also be happy knowing their children are receiving not only supplemental instruction in their area(s) of need, but by also receiving instruction at their grade level, and being exposed to grade level expectations.

My final project for my capstone was to create a PowerPoint presentation regarding the inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in language arts classrooms at an elementary school. I used this information to help the staff members transition from a pull out model of service for language arts to an inclusive model our elementary school. I will have
presented my PowerPoint to the staff at our school at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

Summary

In summary, I am grateful for my first experience of working with individuals with disabilities the summer after my first year of college. It was then that I discovered my passion for advocating for individuals that could not advocate for themselves. It was then that I chose my major of special education. Upon graduation from college, I began my career in special education. For the past 20 years, I have been working with students of varying ages in different settings within several school districts. I have seen successful inclusive settings for my students and am excited to begin the transition to an inclusive language arts program at my current school where I work as a learning disabilities teacher. I am excited to share with my colleagues my PowerPoint on the history and benefits of inclusion and help transition to an inclusion based language arts model.

In the following chapter, I will conduct a literature review on the topic of inclusion. Included subtopics will consist of the history of special education and inclusion, least restrictive environment and how to determine it, both benefits and barriers to inclusion and finally, strategies for creating an effective inclusive language arts setting for grades 1-6.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will research the topic *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*. First, a history of special education and inclusion will be reviewed. Specific legislation and case law will be addressed, as well as a basic guide to the process of identification of a student with special needs. Second, a review of least restrictive environment (LRE) will be conducted. Specific legislation will be discussed as well as strategies to help teams determine the LRE for a child. The benefits and barriers to inclusive education will then be researched. Finally, strategies for creating an effective inclusive setting will be included.

Historical Background

In this section, the history of special education and inclusion will be reviewed. Since 1975, there have been key legislation decisions made regarding special education services, least restrictive environment (LRE) and inclusion of students with disabilities in educational settings. Some of the more recent and well known legislature are the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1975 and the No Child left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002. In addition, there have been numerous court cases that have impacted inclusion and LRE, including Brown vs Board of Education (1954), Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) and Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (1972), It is important to learn from past and current legislature and legal hearings in order to better help us understand how to service our students with disabilities in educational settings.
History of special education. The education of students with disabilities has drastically changed in nature over the years. As Scalf (2014) stated, initially, school districts were able to deny enrollment to students they felt they were unable to learn which meant students with disabilities were often denied access to public education. Some students with disabilities were given the opportunity to receive an education, but they were often educated in separate schools, away from their peers. Slowly, parents and other advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities began to push for students with disabilities to be educated in the same settings as their non-disabled peers.

Special education is defined in the statutory language as “specially designed instruction…..to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. Sec 1404[a][16]). Although this may seem like a clear definition, there has been much debate in recent years regarding what constitutes “specially designed instruction”.

Each state has its own criteria for qualifying for special education and related services. However, all states require an evaluation process in order to determine eligibility. The evaluation process may include identification of a student who is not making adequate progress in the general education setting, pre-referral interventions, standardized testing, student file reviews and interviews with the parents, teachers and students (if they are able to participate). At the conclusion of the evaluation process, the selected team members, usually consisting of the parents, special education teacher, general education teacher, school psychologist and other support personnel identified at the beginning of the evaluation (school social worker, speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, autism consultant, etc.), meet to go over results and determine eligibility.
The state of Minnesota currently recognizes thirteen categorical disability areas for special education and related services. This requires educators to have some basic knowledge about these very diverse areas which some of their students may be receiving services. According to the Minnesota Department of Education website (2016), there are thirteen categorical disability areas in which a student may qualify for special education and related services. The list of these thirteen areas, along with the number of students serviced in each area in the state of Minnesota, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education website with data collected from the 2015-2016 IDEA section 618 Part B Child Count and Educational Environments is listed in appendix A.

**History of inclusion.** Inclusion is a term used in special education which brings up mixed emotions among parents, students, as well as special and general education teachers alike. Inclusion has several different interpretations, depending on the source. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) defines regular class placement (inclusion) as one in which students with disabilities receive special education and related services outside the regular class for 0%-20% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education). Others see inclusion as students with disabilities spending their entire school day in the mainstream setting with their non-disabled peers. Both definitions involve having students identified as having a disability educated in the same environment as their non-disabled peers to some extent. However, when using the OSEP’s definition of inclusion, inclusion can also entail some form of exclusion.

Inclusion of students with disabilities is a fairly recent concept. Education of students with disabilities was first formally addressed in 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This act, also referred to as EAHCA, EHA or Public Law (PL) 94-142, “...required all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education and
one free meal a day for children with physical and mental disabilities” (Wikipedia, 2016). This law was passed to meet four main goals:

1. To ensure that special education services are available to those who need them
2. To guarantee that decisions about services to disabled students are fair and appropriate
3. To establish specific management and auditing requirements for special education
4. To provide federal funds to help states educate disabled students

EAHCA addressed the placing of children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the first time in history. This was the beginning of the push towards inclusion and of least restrictive environment. To date, the term LRE is not well defined and interpreted differently by states, school districts, schools, parents and individuals with disabilities, causing many uncertainties.

The EAHCA was a step in the right direction in regards to educating students with disabilities. However, in 1990, President George W. Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) into law. According to Callanan (2012), IDEA was not only the new name for the previous EAHCA, but it also added two new disability categories (autism and traumatic brain injury) and a school transition requirement to the IEP for students by the time they are in 9th grade and older (P.5).

IDEA consisted of four parts: A, B, C and D. According to Scalf (2014), Part A consisted of a general overview of the Act. Part B contained guideline for students ages 3-21 as well as the six principles of the act which states must follow in order to receive funding. These six principles addressed the following areas: designing an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Free Appropriate Education (FAPE), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), appropriate evaluation, parent and teacher participation and procedural safeguards (IDEA, 1997). Part C pertained to children from
birth to two years of age. Part D consisted of grants and resources to support programs to improve the education of children with disabilities (p.13).

Two major amendments to IDEA were the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004. Scalf (2014) stated that NCLB required students with disabilities to meet the same high academic standards as their nondisabled peers (p. 27). The passing of this Act had some school districts changing the way their students with disabilities received their education. Students who were traditionally receiving their instruction in separate resource rooms, using alternate materials and curriculum, were now being pushed back into the mainstream. This allowed the students to receive the same high level of rigor as their same age peers. According to Scalf (2014), “The result of this act was to push for full inclusion to prepare all students to reach proficiency, thus requiring changes in special education services” (p. 27).

As noted by Scalf, in 2004 Congress reauthorized IDEA and renamed it the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). IDEIA gave the public school systems the money needed to provide students with disabilities the opportunities to be successful in their education. Students were provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in exchange for federal funding (2014).

**Judicial Hearings**

According to Hyatt and Filler (2011), “Early court decisions and legislative actions regarding the education of children with disabilities followed a path similar to that of racial segregation” (p.1034). “The 1954 landmark Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education, set a precedent prohibiting segregation in public schools based on race” (Callanan, 2012, p. 4). Turnbull & Turnbull went on to explain that “Brown was a major judicial decision that not only
fueled the civil rights movement, but also offered significant support to the disability rights movement (Hyatt & Filler, 2002, p. 1034).

Since the Brown case in 1954, many other court cases involving students with disabilities and their educational rights have made history. Two such cases are Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 343 Fed. Supp. 279, (1972) and Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (1972). According to Special Education and IEP Advisor (2010), “In both PARC and Mills the judges struck down local laws that excluded children with disabilities from schools. They established that children with a disability have a right to a public education and access to an education” (p. 1).

“In Board of Education v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982), the Supreme Court rendered its first opinion regarding the contours of the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and, importantly the “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) mandate within it” (Crane, 2014, p.2). The court’s ruling determined that special education and related services need to be reasonably calculated to enable the student to receive educational benefits.

Other major rulings were made regarding court cases such as Irving Independent School District v. Tatro, 478 U.S. 675 (1984), stating a school must provide all supportive services necessary unless a physician is needed to provide those services, and Daniel R.R.v. El Paso, 874 F.2d 1036 (5th Cir. 1989), which stated in order to determine if a school followed IDEA LRE requirements, courts must ask if a student can receive their education in the general education classroom with the use of supports and aids, and if the student is placed in a more restrictive setting, are they integrated to the maximum extent possible?

Summary
In summary, the education of students with disabilities first started to emerge in 1975 with EAHCA. Before this time, schools had the right to turn away students with disabilities if they felt they could not properly educate the child. Future amendments to EAHCA include IDEA of 1990, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and IDEIA of 2004. These amendments continued to provide guidance and clear expectations for schools, families and students with disabilities. Numerous court cases have emerged over the years in regards to the education of students with disabilities. The rulings on these cases have provided additional guidance to schools and parents alike.

**Determining the Least Restrictive Environment for Services**

Placing students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is a state mandate under IDEA. LRE states that:

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 not disabled, and that separate classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services can not be achieved satisfactorily. [IDEA, 2004].

In the state of Minnesota, 61.8% of students ages 6-21 with disabilities spent 80% or more of the school day in the general education setting as reported by National Center for Education Statistics (2016).

**Definition of LRE.** Although IDEA is clear about placing students in the LRE, it does not state how to specifically determine it. According to Marx et. al., (2014), “The lack of a
definition in federal legislation or by the U.S. Supreme Court leaves room for interpretation of what constitutes LRE for each student” (p. 45). Marx et. al. (2014) continues to argue that “Thus, a student determined to be receiving FAPE in the LRE in one district may find his or her LRE different within another district” (p.45).

Some of the terms and phrases used in IDEA are also not clear. One such phrase is “satisfactorily educated”. What is satisfactory to one person, school or district may not be to another. As stated by Center for Parent Information & Resources, “The IEP team determines if a child’s education is appropriate and if it is being achieved satisfactorily”.

Another phrase that could use clarification is “supplementary aids and services”. The term “supplementary aids and services” is defined at §300.42 as follows:

Supplementary aids and services means aids, services, and other supports that are provided in the regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate in accordance with §§300.114 through 300.116.

Supplementary aids and services can be accommodations and modifications to the curriculum such as an alternate grading method or mode of presentation. Other common accommodations and modifications include: providing extra time for assignments and tests, reduced homework, having tests read aloud, providing alternate forms of response from the student, alternate assignments, communication aids, paraprofessional support and use of technology. Although these are some of the more common accommodations and modifications,
by all means, this is not an extensive list, and accommodation and modifications should be chosen specifically for each individual child.

**Setting options.** According to Marx et. al., (2014), literature supports two opposing ideologies in regards to LRE: one supports the LRE always being the general education setting and the other holds that the LRE is the setting in which the child’s needs can best be met (p. 46). Hyatt and Filler (2011) argue that, “Clearly, there is strong legal support for the idea that the regular classroom is the preferred setting but not the required setting in all cases” (p. 1037). Callanan (2012) goes on to say, “The least restrictive environment does not have the same meaning as the terms ‘inclusion’ or ‘mainstreaming’ which refer to actions which put the students into the regular education classroom” (p. 7). This means that the LRE is not always the mainstream setting, but an option on a continuum of alternative placements (CAP).

**CAP.** As stated in IDEA, schools must provide a continuum of alternative placement options for students with an IEP. IDEA also stresses that the regular education classroom should be the setting of choice whenever possible. Rozalski, Stewart and Miller (2010) state, “If the general education setting has been considered and the school feels that it cannot provide an appropriate education in that setting, then the school can consider another, more restrictive placement option” (p. 156). Most professionals agree the CAP goes in order from least restrictive to most restrictive in this order: general education, general education with accommodations and modifications, separate classes, separate schools, homebound instruction, and finally hospital or residential institutions.

**Determining the LRE.** Rozalski et al., (2010) states, “Having to understand federal legislation and years of case law, which at times creates complicated or contradictory procedures or benchmarks for schools, is not an easy undertaking for IEP teams” (p. 153). According to
Tyler (2011) courts do not see inclusion as an entitlement for students with disabilities, although the courts favor inclusive practices (p.27).

So how should schools determine the LRE for students with disabilities? Once a student qualifies for special education and related services, the evaluation report will have given the child’s IEP team valuable information regarding the student’s strengths, weaknesses and present levels of performance. This information, along with what services the child needs, should be the starting grounds for determining the LRE.

Marx et al., (2014), suggests four strategies special educators can use to guide an IEP team to determine the LRE for a student (pp. 47-49). The first strategy Marx et al., suggests is understanding case law. Marx et al., (2014) describes the three most commonly known cases regarding LRE as follows: The Roncker Portability Test suggests an IEP team consider the general education setting if it appears that a segregated setting is being considered. It states IEP teams need to consider the feasibility of providing the same services in the non-segregated setting. The Daniel Two-Part Test requires an IEP team to consider using supplemental aids and services in the general education setting in order to integrate a student with disabilities into the general education setting to the greatest extent possible. The Rachel H. Four-Factor Test requires an IEP team to consider the impact of having the student with disabilities in the general education setting on their classmates along with the cost of this placement. It also requires the team to look at the benefits of placement in the general education setting versus a special setting (p. 47).

The second strategy suggested by Marx et al., is using a list of guiding questions as a discussion during the IEP meeting. Explain to the team that you will be using these questions to
guide the team in determining the LRE for the student. A list of these questions, including the appropriate time to consider them, supplied by Marx is included in the appendix of this paper.

The third strategy is to start with general education as the possibility for the LRE. If the team determines that is not the appropriate setting, move to the next level on the CAP. Continue to discuss the possibility of each setting individually, in order, until the LRE is determined. It is also important to consider each environment with the use of supplementary aids and services before moving to the next more restrictive environment,

The fourth, and final strategy Marx et al. suggests is to remember that special education is a service, not a placement. Marx et al., (2014) argues that, “By removing the perception of special education as a placement, we can begin to first view special education as individualized services provided in the general education setting before considering more restrictive settings” (p. 49).

Rozalski et al., (2010), offers additional support for IEP teams in determining the LRE for students using the ruling in Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H. (1994). Schools need to consider what are the educational benefits of the special vs. general education setting, the social benefits of being educated with his or her peers, the negative impact of the student with disabilities in the general education classroom, and the costs of the general education placement? (p. 158).

Rozalski et al., (2010) also suggest a LRE decision tree for IEP teams to use in systematically determining the LRE for a student. This tool is similar to CAP and has the team look at each possible setting for the student, beginning with the mainstream setting, and determining if that setting is appropriate with or without accommodations and modifications.
The team continues this process with each subsequent more restrictive setting until the proper placement is determined. Rozalski et al., reminds IEP teams that the initial IEP planning meeting is not the only place this tool should be used. The LRE of a student should be determined yearly (or more often if necessary) at the IEP meeting to ensure the student’s current needs are being addressed (2010).

Summary

Determining the LRE for a student is an IEP team decision. Not only does the LRE need to be considered at the initial IEP meeting, but it also needs to be reevaluated at all subsequent IEP meetings for the student. Case law has provided teams with guidelines to consider when determining the LRE. In addition, other tools have been developed such as the LRE Decision Tree to guide teams in making these decisions. Providing a student their education in the LRE is mandated by IDEA and needs to not be taken lightly. The general education setting should always be considered as the LRE to begin with. The use of supplementary aids and services is required to be considered in each setting along the CAP.

Benefits and Barriers to Inclusion

Educators tend to feel strongly one way or another in regards to inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Research is also available to support these contrasting viewpoints around inclusion. Benefits of inclusion are apparent for both students with and without disabilities. These benefits are both social and academic in nature. However, as McCurdy and Cole (2014) point out, “Despite the benefits of inclusion, there are also barriers that arise during the implementation of inclusive practices” (p.883). Both research and myself, through personal experiences having taught in the field of special education for twenty years,
have noted concerns in the areas of gaining support from administration and staff, professional
development around the area of inclusion and time for collaboration between special and general
education staff as some of the barriers to inclusion.

**Social benefits for children with disabilities.** In a 2002 study conducted by Wiener &
Schneider comparing the social and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities
was compared based on the types of educational settings they were in during the school day. The
four types of settings involved in this study were: in-class support, resource room, inclusion class
and self-contained. The students in the in-class support and resource room settings were for
children with mild to moderate learning disabilities. The inclusion and self-contained classes
were for students designated with severe learning disabilities. The study found that children
receiving in-class support were more accepted by peers, had higher self-perceptions of
mathematics competence, and fewer problem behaviors than children receiving resource room
support. These students also had more satisfying relationships, had positive social and emotional
experiences, and had fewer problem behaviors than children in self-contained special education
classes (p.20).

Hirsch noted other researchers had found similar findings, stating “Ruppar (2013)
reported an increase in student socialization when in regular education preschool programs.
Students with disabilities were “more likely to be engaged in learning in the general education
classrooms than in special education classrooms” (2015, p.46). Scalf (2014) reported that in a
1994 study conducted by Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, even though students in
inclusive settings may be working well below grade level, the social benefits justified the
inclusion placement, providing positive experiences which improved self-esteem (p. 39). Barton
(2016) reports that students in inclusive settings get to learn appropriate behaviors by modeling
other students and have the opportunity to build relationships with other students. Inclusion creates a community where no one feels excluded (p. 4).

**Academic benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities.** According to Katz and Mirenda (2002), “Most research studies that have studied the relationship between class placement and educational outcomes have found positive effects for inclusion” (p. 15). Kidstogether.org (2010) lists some of the academic benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities as peer role models for academic skills, increased achievement on IEP goals, enhanced skill acquisition and generalization, and higher expectations. Additionally, Katz & Mirenda noted that integration (of students with disabilities into inclusive settings) “…provided academic, functional and basic skills instruction that was equal to that provided in more segregated settings” (2002, p. 15).

In a 1998 study conducted by Waldron & McLeskey investigating the effects of an Inclusive School Program (ISP) on the academic achievement of students with mild to severe learning disabilities (LD), found, “…that students with LD who were educated in inclusive settings made significantly more progress on a curriculum based measure of reading than did students who were educated in non-inclusive, resource settings” (Waldron & McLeskey, 1998, p. 401-402). The study found there was comparable progress made with students in inclusive and non-inclusive settings in the area of math. As cited in Scalf (2014), many other studies have supported the findings that students with disabilities placed in inclusive settings scored higher on standardized testing and made higher education gains than students receiving their instruction in a pull-out setting (Hogan-Young (2013) & Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002).

**Social and academic benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities.** Kidstogether.org (2010) lists some of the benefits of inclusion for non-disabled students as
developing meaningful friendships, preparing students for adult life in an inclusive society, and increasing understanding and acceptance of diversity, as well as opportunities to master skills by practicing and teaching others. Additionally, as noted in Hirsch, “typical peers are not harmed by or disadvantaged in inclusive classrooms; rather, they grow and develop as a result of relationships they cultivate and sustain with their diverse counterparts” (2014, p. 21). Finally, Chandler-Olcott & Kluth (2009) state that all students’ conceptions of literacy expand when in an inclusive setting.

**Barriers to inclusion.** Although there are many benefits to inclusion, there are also barriers which should be addressed. As Hirsch (2015) points out, “Teachers need to be able to discuss the barriers and find ways to work around them for the greater good of all” (pp. 21-22). A re-occurring barrier presented in this literature review was lack of training for general education staff. Hirsch noted that making sure all staff have the training to feel confident working with all children in the classroom is one of the challenges of inclusion (2015). Barton (2016) pointed out the general education teachers may only have been required to take a limited number of courses in special education, and “they may not have the ability, need or patience to work with one or more children with an IEP in a class of thirty” (p.5).

Another barrier to inclusion may be the challenging behaviors of students which sometimes occur. McCurdy & Cole (2013) stated, “Another potential barrier to the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in general education classrooms is the presence of disruptive or off-task behaviors” (p.884). The authors go on to state that these disruptive, off-task behaviors often interrupt instruction and result in decreased opportunities for all the students in the class. Barton (2016) shares similar concerns; “In some instances, students can be unsafe and at times may harm other children in the classroom or they could require a quieter setting than
what may be provided in the general education classroom” (p. 5). Finally, Grider (1995), stated “It is also argued that the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms, by demanding disproportionate attention from classroom teachers, will negatively affect the education of students without disabilities (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014. P. 20).

The time needed to develop and implement an effective inclusion setting is another possible barrier to inclusion. Time for collaboration, planning, differentiating and staff development can be difficult to come by. Barton (2016) mentions it can be exhausting for general education teachers to spend more time on differentiating lessons to meet the needs of all students instead of planning quality lessons that meet the general needs of students (p. 5).

Summary

In summary, benefits of inclusion are many. Studies have shown that academically, students with disabilities who are part of an inclusive classroom tend to score better on standardized tests, curriculum based measures, make higher educational gains and achieve higher on their IEP goals. There are also plenty of social benefits for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Some of these benefits include being exposed to positive role models, improved self-esteem, fewer problem behaviors, and developing lasting friendships. Inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also those without. Students without disabilities who are part of an inclusive classroom have an increased understanding of diversity and acceptance, have opportunities to be a ‘teacher’ and explain and model information to other students, and develop meaningful friendships.

Although the benefits are many, there are also barriers to be considered and overcome. Finding time for collaboration between special and general education teachers is often difficult. Time for staff development on the topic of inclusion and best practice is not always easy to come
by. Students with disabilities included in mainstream classrooms may exhibit difficult and challenging behaviors, which may distract others from learning. Finally, general education teachers may not have the training and experience of teaching students with disabilities. This may cause them to feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed. However, when barriers are addressed, teams can often find ways to overcome these barriers, and make the experience of inclusion beneficial and manageable to all involved.

**Strategies for Implementing an Effective Inclusion Setting**

There is no doubt that when carried out effectively, inclusion is beneficial to both students with and without disabilities. Research over the past several decades provides educators with ideas, strategies and best practices for implementing a successful inclusion model. Throughout this literature review, it was evident that many of the same strategies and components resurfaced in regards to creating an effective inclusive environment: ongoing staff development on inclusion, the need for collaboration among special and general education staff, differentiated instruction and assessment, and accommodations and modifications. Teaching in an inclusive setting is not an easy task, but with the right attitudes, supports and training, it can be done.

**Staff development.** Staff development in the area of inclusion is necessary in order for staff members to remain effective. Vaughn and Schumm (1995) suggest staff development may occur as school based workshops, university coursework, or teacher-to-teacher mentor programs (p.268). McLeskey & Waldron (2002) stated that “…most teachers benefit from visits to sites that have successfully developed inclusive programs, as well as in participation in situation-specific problem solving sessions” (p. 70). The authors suggest topics such as reasons for implementing inclusion, collaboration, teaming and co-teaching, instructional strategies and curricular
adaptations, and school wide discipline and social skills training be addressed during staff development sessions (p. 70). King-Sears (1997) suggests that staff training needs to be not only prior to the implementation of inclusion, but also after teachers have had time to work in an inclusive setting and can target areas of challenge for themselves (p. 4).

**The need for collaboration.** If done correctly, effective collaboration can yield results that could not have been attained by any one individual. Eccleston (2010) states collaboration between special and general education teachers is critically important due to students with special needs being placed in the general education classrooms increasingly more often (p. 40). Similarly, according to Pugach, in order to have the children with disabilities become full members of the learning community, special and general educators need to seek more interactive relationships, coordinate teaching arrangements, have flexibility in organization, learn new skills and take on new role definitions (Wood, 1998).

Effective collaboration is not necessarily an easy skill to come by. Eccleston (2010) suggests four essential traits needed by special educators for effective collaboration. These traits include thoughtfulness, knowledge, compassion, and leadership (p. 41-43). Eccleston feels a special educator must continually improve these traits in order to be an effective collaborator (p. 45), although it could be argued that these are traits in which both the general and special educator should have and continually improve.

Finding time to collaborate is not always an easy task. School days full of lessons, lesson planning, staff meetings, and communicating with parents leave little time for collaboration between general and special education staff. Morgan (2016) suggests using technology such as Google Docs, Google HangOut, virtual planning and other resources to facilitate collaboration
whenever appropriate (p. 54). If possible, there should be scheduled time set aside in the weekly school schedule for general and special educators to meet and collaborate.

**Flexible teaching, learning and assessment.** In inclusive settings with learners with varying needs and abilities, it is important for teachers to be flexible in their teaching practices, assessment and learning options. Katz and Mirenda (2002) state: “The most commonly mentioned adaptations in this literature include the use of flexible groupings, co-operative learning and peer tutoring, choice-making opportunities, multi-modality instruction and flexible response activities, curriculum/performance based assessment, and collaborative teaching” (p. 19). According to Vaughn & Schumm (1995), “For students to be not merely *in* the general education classroom, but active members of it, considerations for enhancing planning and instruction to effectively meet the needs of all students need to be in place” (p. 268). Altman & Kanagawa (1994); Helmstetter et al. (1998); and Muyskens and Ysseldyke (1998) all found the use of small group and 1:1 instruction, such as peer tutoring, has shown to result in higher levels of engagement and achievement for both students with and without disabilities as compared to whole group or independent seatwork (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Katz and Mirenda (2002) argue that, “in a cooperative learning program, instructional methods such as direct instruction, small group instruction, individualization of roles and accountability, and independent practice are combined in a team-based learning approach” (pp. 19-20).

Flexibility requires the use of accommodations and modifications for students. Downing et al. found when students are provided with choices in activities, modes of response, materials and groupings, the performance of children with disabilities improved (Katz & Mirenda, 2002, p. 20). Accommodations and modifications such as giving oral responses instead of written ones, providing graphic organizers when new materials are presented, preferential seating, reduced
problems on homework, assigning note takers, providing extra time for completion of assignments and tests, providing visuals, and required use of a planner to help stay organized are some of the most commonly used (Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Morningstar, Shogren, Lee & Born, 2015; Sayeski, 2009;). However, it is important to choose accommodations based on each student’s individual needs.

Assessment of students with disabilities serviced in inclusion settings can also be an area of concern for teachers and parents alike. With the move towards standards based report cards, it is often the case that the general education teacher gives the student in the inclusive setting the grades on the student’s report card and the special education teacher provides a supplementary IEP progress report. Jung & Guskey (2003) suggest a five step method for grading students with disabilities using grade level standards: Step one involves determining whether the standard is an appropriate expectation without adaptations. Step two involves determining what adaptations need to be made if the standard was not appropriate. Step three entails determining the appropriate standard if the standard needs modification. Step four states to base the student’s grade on the modified standard versus the grade level standard. The final step, step five, is to communicate the meaning of the grade (such as an asterisk stating the grade is based on a modified standard) (p.33-34). Using standards based report cards for students with disabilities a clear way to communicate how the students are performing with grade level requirements, whereas IEP progress reports should still be used to report progress towards IEP goals.

Summary

Much research has been conducted in regards to best practices for inclusive educational settings. Common themes surfaced throughout this literature review. Staff development is necessary before and after the implementation of inclusion. Staff need the necessary skills and
information concerning inclusion before they begin the process in order to feel comfortable with the change. Once staff has had time to experience inclusion, they will discover areas of challenge which could be addressed in further staff development. Collaboration between general and special education staff is a necessary component of inclusive educational settings. Although it may be difficult to find the time needed for effective collaboration, the use of technology along with scheduling time for regular collaboration can make this requirement possible. Flexibility with teaching strategies, learning options and assessment is required. Teachers should continually reflect on what is working and what could be improved, keeping in mind the students’ needs. Accommodations and modifications for students can make the inclusive environment a success.

**Conclusion of Literature Review**

Through conducting this review of literature, it has been discovered that there is a long and eventful history of special education and inclusion. Students with disabilities who were once not offered an education in the public schools are now included in many mainstream classrooms across the country. The first major piece of legislation directly addressing education of students with disabilities was the EAHCA of 1975. Other important legislation has since emerged including IDEA, NCLB and IDEIA. Each of these acts help guide schools and parents in providing a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities.

Determining the LRE for a student with an IEP can be a difficult task for IEP teams. Many laws are in effect to ensure these students are with their non-disabled peers as much as possible, however, there is not a clear answer as to what the LRE is for each student. Because of this, school districts have many different views of what constitutes the LRE, so a setting considered the LRE in one school district, may not be considered the LRE in another school
district. Predetermined guidelines and questions are options for teams to use to help determine the LRE for each child.

Benefits of inclusive education for students with disabilities are many and include both social and academic gains. Research has shown that students with disabilities who are part of an inclusive classroom score higher on standardized tests, curriculum based measures of achievement and make more progress towards their IEP goals. Socially, these same students have been able to make friendships with non-disabled peers, learn appropriate social skills, and reduce problem behaviors when part of an inclusive classroom. Studies have found that non-disabled students in inclusive settings also benefit from learning to appreciate differences and being provided with multiple modes of instruction and assessment.

Although there are many benefits to inclusive education, there are also barriers which should be addressed. General education staff may not have adequate training and experience working with children with disabilities and may find this task overwhelming. Disruptive behaviors can interfere with the learning of all students. It may also be difficult to differentiate instruction, especially in the beginning, to ensure all children are learning.

Flexibility in teaching, assessing and learning is essential for teachers in inclusive settings. Teachers should use multiple modes of instruction, such as large group, small group and peer tutors to reach the learning styles of all learners. It is also necessary to allow students multiple ways of responding. Examples include giving oral book reports, using computers or iPads for writing activities and allowing other forms of work and assignment completion such as PowerPoint presentations or the use of pictures to tell a story.

Strategies to help create an effective inclusive setting are many. One important strategy is to provide sufficient staff development opportunities for all staff. It is important to provide this
training both before and after implementing the change to inclusive education. Collaboration between general and special education staff is another strategy required for an effective inclusive setting. Although it may be difficult to find time for collaboration, technology such as Google Docs and Hang Out in addition to scheduling regular time during the weekly school schedule will make this task easier.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the specifics in regards to my project: the research paradigm I used, the audience and setting where the project was delivered, as well as the timeframe for my project. I will also discuss the current model of special education service at our school and the importance of the project to myself and the school where I teach. In addition, I will explain why I chose the mode of presentation that I did.
Chapter Three

Project Description

Introduction

My literature review examined the topic *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*. In this chapter, I will describe my final capstone project, the audience and setting for my project, along with the timeframe of the project, the current model for special education services our school uses and why I chose the specific mode of presentation which I did. For my final capstone project, I will create a PowerPoint presentation on the topic of inclusion to share with staff at our school at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. This presentation will be available in the appendix of this capstone.

Principles of Learning

The primary purpose of this project was to deliver information in regards to creating an effective inclusive language arts program at a specific elementary school serving students in grades 1-5 to improve the educational outcomes of students who have been identified as needing special education services in the areas of reading and writing. My goal of my final project was to create a presentation for the staff at a specific school regarding the history, barriers, benefits, and justification for an inclusive language arts program at our school. By allowing students with disabilities to remain in their mainstream language arts classroom for instruction, they will have the opportunity to be instructed at grade level with material that will likely be on the standardized tests they are required to take.
My project is based on adult learning principles (or andragogy) identified by adult learning specialist Malcolm S. Knowles. Knowles, Holton III & Swanson identify the six principles of andragogy as (1) The learners’ needs to know (2) self-concept of the learner (3) prior experiences of the learner (4) readiness to learn (5) orientation to learning and (6) motivation to learn (2015).

Knowles (1970) describes seven needed conditions for learning to take place with adult learners. First, the learners must feel a need to learn. Make them feel excited about the new possibilities for self-fulfillment. Second, the learning environment must be characterized by physical comfort, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression and acceptance of differences. The instructor must remember to respect the learners’ ideas, concerns and feelings. Third, the learners should perceive the goals of a learning experience as their goals. To do this, involve the learners in formulating the learning objectives as much as possible. Fourth, the learners should have a share of the responsibility for planning and operating of the learning experience, and therefore they have a feeling of commitment towards it. The teacher should give options for further learning and the adult learners can choose among the options. Fifth, the learners need to actively participate in the learning process. This can be accomplished by the use of project groups, learning-teaching teams and/or independent study. Sixth, the learning process is related to and makes use of the experiences of the learners. The instructor can use discussion and case studies to accomplish this. Seventh, the learners should have a sense of progress towards their goals. The instructor can assist the learners in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress towards the goals (p.57-58).

Audience/Setting
This capstone has been designed to be used with approximately 80 licensed staff at a suburban elementary school serving approximately 800 students. The school district is approximately 40 miles northwest of a major metropolitan city. The number of licensed staff will change slightly for the 2017-2018 school year due to the kindergarten program moving to a new building serving students in pre-k-kindergarten. The licensed staff members at this school are a mix of both veteran teachers and teachers with less than ten years of teaching experience. Approximately thirty percent of the student population at this school receives free and reduced lunch. There are currently 134 students on IEPs receiving special education services.

**Timeframe**

Information for this project was collected between March 2017-August 2017. The presentation of the project is scheduled for August 2017 during the back to school workshop week. The presentation is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. There will be ongoing check ins with general education teachers regarding the process of including special education students in their core language arts classes as well as monthly informational handouts focusing on a specific disability each month.

**Current Model for Special Education Services**

At our school, once students are identified as meeting criteria for special education, the student’s IEP team determines what areas of service are needed and where those services will take place. Up until the 2016-2017 school year, if a student qualified for special education services and it was determined there was a need in the area of language arts, they were automatically serviced in the special education resource room. This instruction took place at the same time as their peers were receiving their language arts instruction in the mainstream setting. This meant that the students were receiving replacement instruction, not supplemental. The
special education teacher was responsible for grading the students in their classes, and the grade was based on the work the student produced at their instructional level, not their grade level standards. This was often thought of as ‘deceiving’, as a student identified as having special education needs and who was not at grade level academically, was now often receiving A’s and B’s in language arts on their report card due to the fact that the grade was based on their instructional level performance.

During the 2016-2017 school year, administration decided to change the way some of the students on IEPs with academic needs were serviced. The special education teachers were to choose students in grade 1-5 who we thought had the skills necessary to remain in the mainstream for their core language arts instruction. These students would then come to the special education resource room at an alternate time during the school day for supplemental language arts instruction from a special education teacher for up to sixty minutes per day. The mainstream teachers are now responsible for the language arts grades for these students. There were approximately 3-7 students per grade level selected for this new service delivery model. The special and general education teachers were made aware of this new change approximately two weeks before the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year.

Needless to say, there have been many concerns and many questions regarding this new model of service. The overall response from the students in these supplemental groups has been positive. They state they enjoy being with their mainstream teachers and peers for language arts instruction. However, there are still concerns from mainstream teachers. Some of these concerns are: “What is the point of special education services if these students are still in our rooms during instructional times? Why are we responsible for grading these students because now their report cards will have failing or poor grades? These students are not capable of doing the work required
in my class.”. The special education teachers are wondering how to effectively choose which students to mainstream. Change is difficult for all involved, and the questions and concerns of staff members are justified. Now the job is to answer these questions and address these concerns and justify the need for this new model.

Fortunately, administration at our school is behind this new language arts inclusion model. The plan and goal is to move more students with IEPs and identified academic needs back into the mainstream language arts classes. In order for this to be successful, staff members need to be provided with professional development around the topic of inclusion. My final project developed for this capstone will be one of first steps in this direction.

**Project**

My project will be in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. I am choosing this type of presentation because it will be easy for me to share the PowerPoint with staff during a staff meeting at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. A PowerPoint presentation allows me the ability to combine information both through text and graphics for a large group of people. I will also be there to explain any unclear information and answer any questions that may arise as I go through the presentation.

My PowerPoint presentation will be on the topic of inclusion. Topics covered will range from the history of inclusion and important legislation addressing this topic, barriers and benefits of inclusive education, data comparing scores between students in an inclusive language arts program and those who receive their instruction in the resource room, how the LRE for each student is determined, and specifics related to our school such as grading, staff responsibilities and professional development. This topic is of importance to our school at this time because we
are transitioning to an inclusive language arts model of service for students with language arts goals on their IEPs from a pull out/replacement model of instruction.

Because this PowerPoint presentation will be approximately 30 minutes in length, and given in a single setting, I will be following up the presentation with other information on special education and inclusion throughout the school year. Concise monthly information sheets on a specific disability will be prepared and given to staff members in their mailboxes. These information sheets will include a definition of the disability area, characteristics of the specific disability, areas the students with this disability may struggle with and suggestions for accommodations and modifications for these students. A copy of these disability specific information sheets is provided in appendix C.

In order to measure the effectiveness of my project, I will have the teachers complete a short four question evaluation. The evaluation will ask if the presentation was helpful, what new learning will they be able to take and use this year, what changes could be made to make the presentation more useful and what other topics staff would like to have addressed in future inservices on the topic of inclusion and special education. A copy of this evaluation is included in Appendix C.

Summary

In conclusion, my final capstone project I created is a PowerPoint presentation on the topic of inclusion for roughly eighty staff members at a suburban elementary school serving approximately 134 students with IEPs. In addition to addressing issues specific to our school such as roles of staff members, grading, and staff development, the presentation will also cover a brief history of inclusion, legislation surrounding inclusion and how to determine the LRE for a student. My project was created in order to assist our school in the transition from a pull out
model of service delivery for our students with academic needs on their IEPs to an inclusive language arts model. This topic is important to me because I believe all students should receive their core language arts instruction in their mainstream classrooms, with supplemental services provided as needed at an alternate time of day. After all, these students are required to take grade level standardized assessments, and need to be exposed to grade level curriculum in order to have a fair chance at passing these assessments. Inclusion is a new practice at our school, and the change is difficult for some staff members. By providing staff with a background on inclusive education along with best practices, the goal is to create an effective inclusive language arts program. The timeframe for the design and completion of my project was February 2017-August 2017. The appendix will share the completed PowerPoint.
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

For this capstone project, I researched the topic *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*. The final project consisted of a PowerPoint presentation to be used as staff development during back to school workshop week and is included in Appendix C. In this chapter, I will reflect on new learning that took place as researcher, writer and learner as result of this capstone project. The literature review will be revisited with specifics that proved to be the most important and why. Possible implications of my project will be discussed, as will limitations and future/related research projects. This chapter will end with a summary of how the results of this project will be used.

New Learning

Through the process of completing this capstone, new learning took place for me as a researcher, writer and learner. As a researcher, I learned the value widening my search criteria when looking for information on my topic. I originally searched for specific terms and ideas and came up with minimal results. Once I started experimenting with different words and phrases, I came across even more useful articles and information. As a researcher, I also learned the importance of searching for scholarly articles and research for my literature review. There can be overwhelming amounts of information on a topic, but not all of it is reliable. By searching for scholarly articles on a topic, it is more likely that the information is reliable. Finally, as a researcher, I have learned the value of others’ prior research in a field. Being able to confirm or question my beliefs through others’ research has been a valuable experience.
This was my first time using technical writing to write a major paper. I really had minimal experience using technical writing prior to this capstone. I believe this is the area where the most learning took place for me. I was able to learn about how to cite information from authors, produce a quality reference list, and the importance of keeping my writing objective and non-narrative. Because this was the area where the most learning took place, it was also the area that caused me the most stress and difficulty. However, I am quite proud of the progress that was made in this area.

Completing this capstone project has caused me to grow as a learner. I have learned how to write academic papers, how to search for scholarly articles, broadened my comfort zone with technology, and the value of other professionals who were able to assist me in my journey. Completing this capstone project is one of my biggest accomplishments to date.

**Literature Review Revisited**

My literature review provided me with the information I needed to complete my final project for my capstone. Through my literature review, I was able to gather valuable information on the topics of the history of special education and inclusion, determining the least restrictive environment for special education services, benefits and barriers to inclusion as well as strategies for creating an effective inclusive environment. I was able to incorporate information from each of these topics into my final project in such a way as to provide staff members with useful information on the topics, but not overload them with useless information.

**History of special education and inclusion.** The passage of EACHA in 1975 was the beginning of the movement to address the needs of children with disabilities in the school system. Before this time, schools had the right to turn away students with disabilities whom they
believed they could not properly educate (Scalf, 2014). Future amendments to ECHA such as IDEA (1990), NCLB (2001) and IDEIA (2004), continued to provide guidance and set clear expectations for schools, families and students with disabilities. It is important for staff members to understand the history of educating students with disabilities in order to see the progress that is being made.

**Determining the LRE.** IDEA clearly states that placing students in environments other than the mainstream setting should only occur if the nature of the disability is such that even with the use of aides and services, the student could not achieve satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004). Determining where a child with a disability receives their education is an IEP team decision and should be considered regularly, not just when the child initially qualifies for services (Rozalski et al., 2010). Case law has provided guidelines for IEP teams to consider when determining the LRE (Marx et al., 2014; Rozalski et al., 2010). The mainstream setting, with or without the use of supplementary aides and services should always be the starting point for services. My final project addresses these points for staff members to consider.

**Benefits and barriers to inclusion.** Research has uncovered both benefits and barriers to inclusion, for disabled students, non-disabled students and teachers alike. Studies have shown that some of the academic benefits for students with disabilities who receive their instruction in the mainstream are higher scores on standardized tests and curriculum based measures, higher achievement on IEP goals, and higher overall educational gains. Social benefits for students with disabilities who are educated in inclusive settings include being exposed to positive role models, improved self-esteem, fewer problem behaviors, and developing positive friendships with non-disabled peers (Wiener & Schneider, 2002; Hirsch, 2015; Katz and Mirenda, 2002; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Inclusive settings also benefit students without disabilities by providing them
an increased understanding of diversity and acceptance, having opportunities to be the teacher and practice what they have learned, being exposed to multi-modes of instruction and response and developing friendships with their disabled peers (Kidstogether.org., 2010; Hirsch, 2015).

Although the benefits are many, there are also barriers to inclusion. Some of these barriers include time needed to effectively collaborate between regular and special education staff, time for staff development on the topic of inclusion, difficult and challenging behavior which is sometimes exhibited by students with disabilities and lack of training for working with students with disabilities (Hirsch, 2014; Barton, 2016; McCurdy & Cole, 2013). However, if the barriers are acknowledged and addressed, there are often ways to overcome them when teams work together.

My final project addressed both the benefits and barriers to inclusion. It is important for staff to realize the benefits and be aware of the barriers. By knowing these, we can continue to work towards building an effective inclusive language arts environment for our students and staff.

**Strategies for implementing an effective inclusive setting.** Throughout my literature review, the many of the same strategies for creating an effective inclusive setting emerged. If our school environment is aware of these successful strategies, we can make a conscious effort to address them. One strategy is to provide sufficient staff development on the topic of inclusion (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; King-Sears, 1997). This staff development is necessary both before and after implementation of inclusion. This provides staff with the necessary skills before the move to inclusion and allows time to address concerns after the change. A second strategy to utilize is effective collaboration among general and special education staff (Eccleston, 2010; Wood, 1998; Morgan, 2016). Although it may be difficult to
find the time to collaborate, it is necessary in order to best meet the needs of the students, scheduling regular time for collaboration is recommended and strongly encouraged. A third strategy is to practice flexible teaching, learning and assessment (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Reflecting on what is working and what could be improved is necessary in order to create an effective inclusive environment. Accommodations and modifications should be used and can help to make the inclusive environment a success for a student with disabilities Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Sayeski, 2009; Katz and Mirenda, 2002; Morningstar, Shogren, Lee & Born, 2015).

The literature review I conducted as part of this capstone provided me with valuable information that I was able to use in my final project. I was able to use the information to provide staff members with a building block as to why inclusion of students with disabilities is necessary and strategies to make the inclusive environment a success.

**Implications of Project**

Completing this capstone and project has allowed me to gain the historical and background information on the topic of inclusion that was needed to understand and explain to others why it is important and necessary. Through the literature review, I was also able to learn about LRE and how to use case law to determine LRE for students with IEPs, the benefits and barriers of inclusion and strategies to help create an effective inclusive environment. Test scores of students with active IEPs were also compared with an elementary school who already practices the inclusive language arts model. These scores confirmed the benefits of including our students with disabilities in core language arts instruction. I was able to use this information to create a PowerPoint presentation for approximately 80 licensed staff members who are moving towards an inclusive language arts model for students in grades 1-6 at a suburban elementary
school with approximately 800 students. Information for this capstone project was collected between March 2017 and August 2017.

This project has the possibility of helping general education teachers feel more comfortable with the change from pull-out special education services for all students identified as needing extra support in the area of language arts on their IEPs to having these students in their classrooms for core mainstream language arts instruction.

Limitations

Time is one of the limitations of this project. Due to the high volume of required trainings during the school year, the presentation of this project had to be kept under 30 minutes. This required the presentation to focus on the most useful information and specific topics of interest and benefit to staff members. It should also be noted that at this time, there is no additional training on the topic of inclusion scheduled.

Future Possibilities for Related Research Projects

There are several possibilities for future related research projects. It would be beneficial to develop staff development opportunities on topics addressed in this capstone. One topic for future research is collaboration between general and special education staff. Areas which could be addressed include the how, why and where of collaboration, roles and responsibilities of staff members and effective communication between staff members. Another topic for future research is accommodations and modifications in the classrooms. Areas which could be researched include specific accommodations and modifications for different subject areas and for specific needs. A final topic for future research projects is overcoming the barriers to inclusion. It is often what are perceived as barriers which cause the resistance to inclusion. By researching ways to
overcome the barriers, support could be provided to classroom and special education staff, making inclusion less intimidating.

**Results**

Information obtained from the exit survey that staff members complete after the presentation will be used to gather the information staff felt was helpful as we make the change to inclusive language arts. In addition, the exit survey will provide special education staff and administration an insight into what topics related to inclusion staff would like to see covered in future staff development. Follow up email check ins to general education staff will be used to see what areas are going well and what areas additional support is needed in with regards to students with IEPs in the core language arts instruction. If common themes emerge regarding areas of concern or areas of strength, these can be communicated with others and addressed. Also, as part of this project, staff will receive monthly handouts on specific disability areas which address how the disability manifests itself in the classroom along with ideas for accommodations and modifications that may prove to be helpful.

**Summary**

In summary, by completing this capstone project on *Inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 1-5 mainstream language arts classrooms*, I was able to improve myself as a learner, writer and researcher. I was forced to learn and write outside of my comfort zone as well expand my skills in the area of technology. I learned the importance of completing a literature review on my topic of interest and the value of scholarly articles and research. I was able to create a project that benefitted a large group of staff members on a topic of importance at our school, inclusive language arts programming. The project allowed me to share valuable
information in a condensed amount of time and at a level that was not overwhelming to learners. I have learned that lack of available time for the presentation impacted how much information I could include in my project and in return cause me to choose only the most helpful information to include in my project. In addition, I learned there are many other areas of interest for future research options including collaboration among special and general education staff, using accommodations and modifications in the classroom and overcoming barriers to inclusion.
REFERENCES


Individuals with disabilities education act. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individuals_with_Disabilities_Education_Act


http://www.kidstogether.org/inclusion/benefitsofinclusion.htm


doi:10.1080/09362835.2010.491991


Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (16,084): ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how an individual processes information and interprets the world.

Blind-Visually Impaired (399): Blind-Visually Impaired requires a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by limitations in sight that interfere with acquiring information or interaction with the environment to the extent that special education instruction and related services may be needed.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) (2,072): Children and youth who have varying types and degrees of hearing loss may be eligible to receive special education and related services.

Deaf-Blind (71): Deaf-Blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments that causes severe communication and other developmental and education needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD) (7,503): DCD is defined as a condition that results in intellectual functioning significantly below average with concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior.

Developmental Delay (DD) (2,745): Children up to age seven who experience a measurable delay in development may qualify for special education services.
Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) (14,736): Students who require specialized services for emotional or behavioral support for a wide range of complex and challenging emotional or behavioral conditions may qualify for special education and related services. Medical, biological, and psychological conditions as well as genetic dispositions can affect these students’ ability to learn and function in school.

Other Health Disabilities (OHD) (18,679): OHD includes a wide range of chronic or acute health conditions that range from mild to severe. Medications, treatments, therapies and repeated hospitalizations can affect a student’s ability to learn and function at school.

Physically Impaired (PI) (1,456): In order for a student to qualify for special education and related services under PI, they must have a medically diagnosed, chronic, physical impairment, either congenital or acquired, that may adversely affect physical or academic functioning.

Severely Multiply Impaired (SMI) (1,421): Students with SMI meet the criteria for two or more of the six categorical areas: deaf or hard of hearing, physically impaired, developmental cognitive disability (severe/profound), visually impaired, emotional or behavioral disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (30,298): SLD is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using written or spoken language. The disability may be exhibited as an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
Speech or Language Impairment (16,491): IDEA defines speech/language impairment as a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a student’s educational performance.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (420): TBI refers to an acquired injury to the brain caused by external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.
### Table 1. Least Restrictive Environment Checklist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to Ask</th>
<th>Appropriate Time to Ask</th>
<th>Case Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What supplemental aids and services would be necessary for the student to be served in the general education setting?</td>
<td>When considering the general education setting</td>
<td>Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If the student is educated in the general education setting, how will the placement affect others' learning?</td>
<td>When considering the general education setting</td>
<td>MR v. Lincolnwood Board of Education (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is the student making adequate progress? Do the student's supplemental aids and services need to be adopted?</td>
<td>If the student is already placed in the general education setting.</td>
<td>Clyde K. v. Payallup School District (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Could the services feasibly be provided in the general education setting?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>Roncker v. Walter (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What are the benefits of the special versus general education setting?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H. (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Will the student have an increased chance for success in a special program with a structured program and support versus a general education setting?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>MR v. Lincolnwood Board of Education (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Will mainstreaming provide the best education access for the student?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>Plook v. Bishop (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How will we integrate the student into the general education setting to the maximum extent possible?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989); Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Is this the “maximum extent,” or can we determine other ways to integrate the student?</td>
<td>If a child is already placed in a segregated environment or a more restrictive environment is being considered</td>
<td>Daniel, R. R. v. State Board of Education (1989); Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What is the closest school at which appropriate services can be provided? Is this the closest school to the student’s home?</td>
<td>If considering a placement outside of the home school or district.</td>
<td>Floor Bluff School District v. Katherine M. (1996); Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills School District (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Does the school closest to the child’s home, or in which the child is zoned, have the supports and resources necessary for the individualized education plan?</td>
<td>If considering a placement outside of the home school or district.</td>
<td>Floor Bluff School District v. Katherine M. (1996); Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills School District (1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Link to PowerPoint presentation:

https://docs.google.com/a/hamline.edu/presentation/d/17NNqwc7hiy6ENw8u4Lw18I8zJ_OkLqY5BGuZh80U88M/edit?usp=sharing
HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

• Before the 1970’s, school districts were allowed to refuse to enroll students with disabilities that they believed were unable to learn (Scalf 2014).
• Some students were given the opportunity to learn, but it was often in separate schools away from their peers (Scalf 2014).
• Slowly, parents and other advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities began to push for students with disabilities to be educated in the same settings as their non-disabled peers.

LEGISLATION RELATED TO INCLUSION

**EAHCA**
Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975
- This was the first time the education of students with disabilities was formally addressed.
- The law required schools to:
  - Ensure that special education services were available to all who needed them.
  - Guarantee that decisions about services to disabled students were made with the input of parents.
  - Establish specific management and staffing structures for the program.
  - Provide federal funds to help states educate disabled students.

**IDEA**
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990
- Added new category labels and moved from IEPs.
- Required a school transition requirement.
- Part of IDEA addressed the need to move students from special education into general education settings.
- Required that students be educated in the least restrictive environment.
- Requiring inclusion education (IEE) programs and inclusive classrooms.
- Ensured that students with disabilities were not separated and educated in separate schools.

**NCLB**
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
- This act required that students with disabilities meet the same high academic standards as their non-disabled peers.
- This program encouraged districts to improve the academic performance of all students, including students with disabilities, by providing additional resources and support.
- It emphasized the importance of inclusion in the educational system.
HISTORY OF INCLUSION

- Definition of Inclusion
  - The term inclusion has several different interpretations, depending on the source.
  - The Office of Special Education Programs defines inclusion (regular class placement) as one in which students with disabilities receive special education and related services outside of the regular classroom for 0-20% of the school day.
  - Others see inclusion as students with disabilities spending the entire school day within the mainstream setting with their non-disabled peers.
  - Both definitions involve having students with disabilities educated in the same environment as their non-disabled peers to some extent.

DETERMINING THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR SERVICES

- Placing students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is a state mandate under IDEA. LRE states:
  - 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 not disabled, and that separate classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services can not be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004).
MORE ON LRE

- In the state of Minnesota, 51.8% of students ages 6-21 with disabilities spent 80% or more of the school day in the general education setting as reported by the National Center of Education Statistics (2016).
- Supplementary aids and services are accommodations and modifications to the curriculum such as using an alternate grading method or mode of presentation, providing extra time for assignments and tests, reduced homework, having tests read to them, providing alternate forms of response for the student, alternate assignments, communication aids, para support, and/or the use of technology.

LRE CONTINUED

- Continuum of Alternate Placements (CAP)
As stated in IDEA, schools must provide a continuum of alternate placement options for students with an IEP. Most professionals agree that CAP goes in order from least restrictive to most restrictive in this order:
- general education
- general education with supplementary aids and services
- separate classes
- separate schools
- homebound instruction
- hospital or residential institutions
DETERMINING LRE FOR STUDENTS

- There are many factors to consider when determining the LRE for students:
  - Can supplementary aids and services provided in the mainstream allow the student to remain there successfully?
  - What is the impact of placement in the general education setting on classmates?
  - What is the impact of removing the student from the general education setting?
  - What is the cost of placing the student in a specific setting?

REMEMBER........

- “By removing the perception that special education is a placement, we can begin to first view special education as individualized services provided in the general education setting before considering more restrictive settings” (Marx et. al., 2014).
**Benefits of Inclusion**

**Social Benefits**
*Studies have found that students who receive in-class support are more accepted by peers, have fewer problem behaviors, have improved self-esteem, and have more satisfying relationships with their peers (Scelf, 2014 and Wiener & Tardif, 2002).*

**Academic Benefits**
*According to Kats and Menkasa (2002), "Most research studies that examined placement and educational outcomes have found positive effects for inclusion." (p.10).*
*"A study investigating the effects of inclusion on the academic achievement of students with disabilities who were included in general education classrooms found that students in inclusive settings made significantly more progress on a curriculum-based measure of reading than did students who were educated in resource room settings." (Rubin & McKenney, 1998)*

**Benefits for General Education Students**
*Students develop an increased understanding and acceptance of diversity.*
*Students can develop meaningful friendships with students with disabilities.*
*Prepares students for adult life in an inclusive society.*
*Opportunities to master skills by practicing with and teaching others.*
*Exposure to multiple modes of teaching.*

---

**Barriers to Inclusion**

**Lack of Training**
*"Lack of training and skill development are the major challenges to inclusive practices (McDermott, 2010)."*
*"Research (2010) also revealed that most teachers and leaders reported not having enough time to participate in these training sessions due to the lack of resources." (Johnson, 2010)*

**Challenging Behaviors**
*"Challenging behaviors often interrupt instruction and result in limited opportunities for all students to learn (Kastner & Cates, 2010)."*
*"In some instances, students with disabilities may be excluded from the general education classroom and they could receive a greater benefit when they are placed in the general education classroom." (Johnson, 2010)*
*"Students with disabilities in the general education classroom may feel more comfortable and confident when their classroom teachers understand their needs." (Johnson, 2010)*

**Time**
*"It takes time to develop and implement an effective inclusive setting."*
*"Time for collaboration."*
*"Time for planning."*
*"Time for differentiating instruction."*
*"Time for staff development." (Johnson, 2010)*
STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AN EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE ARTS SETTING

Staff Development
- Can be school-based workshops, university coursework, or professional development programs (Vaughn & Schumm, 1999).
- Visit to other sites where inclusive language arts programs are being successfully implemented and whether options are available to participate in training or professional development sessions (McCleary & Waldron, 2003).
- Topics for staff development include literacy, learning disabilities, special education, cooperative learning, and social skills training (McCleary & Waldron, 2003).

Collaboration
- Effective collaboration involves special and regular educators to coordinate lesson plans and instructional strategies.
- The school provides opportunities for all teachers to work together to improve instruction.
- New skills and role definitions and flexibility in organization (as cited in Wood, 1999).
- If possible, set aside scheduled time for general and special education staff to meet and collaborate.

Flexibility
- Flexibility requires the use of accommodations and modifications, such as flexible groupings, peer tutoring, choice making opportunities, re-teaching, preferred seating, taking breaks, etc. (maples 2003).
- The school encourages activities, curriculum, performance-based assessment, graphic organizers, reduced homework, assigning notes, providing visuals, and collaborative teaching (Kull & Fernando 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A (Inclusion in LA)</th>
<th>Grade 3 Reading MCA</th>
<th>School B (no inclusion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>% receiving E, M or P</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>% receiving D</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>% receiving E, M or P</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>% receiving D</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>% receiving E, M or P</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>% receiving D</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A (Inclusion)</td>
<td>Grade 4 Reading MCA</td>
<td>School B (no Inclusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>% Receiving D</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>58.1%</td>
<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>% Receiving D</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>School A (Inclusion)</th>
<th>Grade 5 Reading MCA</th>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>81%</td>
<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
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<td>16.9%</td>
<td>% Receiving D</td>
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<td>72.7%</td>
<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
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<td>27.3%</td>
<td>% Receiving D</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>66.7%</td>
<td>% Receiving E, M or P</td>
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<tr>
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<td>% Receiving D</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
HOW DO WE CHOOSE STUDENTS FOR INCLUSION IN LANGUAGE ARTS?

- The majority of students with IEPs at Little Mountain have mild to moderate disabilities and benefit from being in the mainstream for core Language Arts instruction.
- Students who will remain in the mainstream for core Language Arts instruction have been chosen by their case manager.
- These students will be taking the regular Reading MCA, usually without any accommodations, therefore, they need exposure to what is on the test.
- It is believed that these students will make greater gains in Language Arts by receiving a ‘double dose’ of instruction in their area of disability.
- This placement can be changed if the student’s IEP team feels changes need to be made.

MAKING EXCEPTIONS FOR STUDENTS......

- Some students may not be ready for mainstream language arts. These are our students who are very significantly below grade level in this area.
- This is a small number of our special education population! These are usually our students who take MTA3 instead of the MCAs.
- These students will receive their core language arts instruction in the special education resource room at the same time their peers are receiving their core language arts instruction in the mainstream.
SERVICE TIME

- Students in the mainstream for language arts will receive supplemental support in the special education room at an alternate time during the day.
- These students may receive anywhere from 20-60 minutes of supplemental special education support depending on their needs (20 minutes per area qualified in: reading comprehension, fluency, written language).

- Students who receive their core language arts instruction in the special education resource room will receive 40 minutes of service daily. This almost always includes written language instruction.

GRADING

- Students who remain in the mainstream for language arts will be given their language arts grade by their classroom teacher. It is exciting to be moving towards standards based report cards! Parents will know exactly which area(s) their child is struggling with as well as any areas that they are being successful in. Showing that these students are significantly behind grade level expectations justifies continuing special education services.
- For our students receiving their core language arts instruction in the special education research room, the special education teacher will be grading them.

**All students will also receive IEP progress reports four times per year reporting progress on their IEP goals.**
SUMMARY

- Special education is a service, not a placement.
- According to IDEA, all students with disabilities need to remain in the mainstream setting to the greatest extent possible. Supplementary aids and supports can and should be utilized to make this possible.
- Benefits to inclusion are many and include both social and academic benefits.
- There are barriers to inclusion as well, such as disruptive behavior, time involved in differentiating instruction, planning, staff development, and collaboration, and lack of training.
- Collaboration among general and special education staff is necessary for inclusion to be successful.
- The number of our students on IEPs receiving replacement instruction for language arts is small and reserved for our most severely disabled students.
- We (special education staff) are here to help! We are learning with you!

FOLLOW-UP

- Monthly handouts will be placed in your mailboxes focusing on one of the thirteen disability areas the state of MN recognizes. These handouts will include information on the causes of the disability, how it manifests itself in the school setting, as well as accommodations and modifications that may be helpful.
- Monthly check-ins through email will occur, seeing how our sped students are doing and addressing any concerns.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES CONTINUED....

REFERENCES CONTINUED...


Specific Learning Disability (SLD, LD)

**Definition:** A SLD is a neurological disorder that affects the brain and its ability to receive, process, analyze, or store information. Children with a SLD usually have an average or above average intelligence. Children with a SLD usually show a deficiency in one area and good skills in another. Fifteen percent of the US population have some type of learning disability according to the National Institute of Health (NIH).

**Causes:** Genetics play a major role in SLD; about half of all children with a diagnosed LD have family members who have the same disability. For the other half of children identified as having a LD, it is believed that interference with neuroendocrines, the brain’s chemical “messenger” system, might cause the miswiring. This may be caused by the mother’s use of over the counter and prescription drugs, alcohol, drug use and/or cigarettes use during pregnancy, Other factors which could cause the miswiring could be lack of prenatal care, premature birth weight, viral or bacterial infections, lead poisoning and/or poor nutrition.

**How it is Manifested:** Children with a SLD may have trouble with reading, comprehension, retention of information, writing, mechanics, legibility of writing, output of language, spelling, organization of thoughts, memorization of math facts, retrieving information in a timely manner, higher order thinking, organization, memory, as well as setting and carrying out a plan.

**Accommodations and Modifications for Students with a SLD:**
* extra set of books at home
* note taker in class (or copy of the teacher’s notes)
* use of a calculator
* books on tape
* extended testing time
* modified tests/quizzes (multiple choice vs open ended essay)
* preferential seating
* use of resource room for extra help/testing
* shortened homework assignments.

(Woliver 2009)
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Definition: Autism refers to a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term autism spectrum disorder applies to five subcategories: autism, Asperger syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS).

Causes: Theories regarding the cause of autism vary greatly and range from medical factors to environmental factors to genetics. Although some people believe there is a connection between vaccines and autism, many studies and experts in the field have ruled out this connection.

Common Traits: Characteristics fall into three major areas: social interaction, behavior and communication. Such characteristics might include the following: Unusual fixation (for instance, only playing with round toys), inability to focus without first completing a routine, disruptive behavior when ordinary schedule is interrupted, unusual communication habits (from not talking at all to repeating certain phrases), and/or difficulty understanding social interactions.

Accommodations/Modifications: Give directions one step at a time, use of assistive technology to assist with communication issues, use the student’s interests to encourage engagement, provide daily schedules, provide sensory tools, provide a quiet place to work or take a break, vary liked with disliked activities, reduced homework
**Other Health Disability (OHD)**

*focus on ADHD*

**Definition:** A child with OHD must demonstrate limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that (a) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and (b) adversely affects a child's educational performance. Because the majority of students serviced under OHD have ADHD, this remainder of this handout will focus on ADHD. (http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/autism/)

**Causes of ADHD:** There are a number of theories as to what causes ADHD, but they believe ADHD is caused by a miswiring of the brain. Studies show that in brains of a person with ADHD, specific areas exhibit diminished blood flow and less activity. These brains also showed less glucose usage, indicating that low brain activity might cause inattention. Environmental factors related to ADHD may include birth complications, lead poisoning, adverse living conditions and genetics. (Woliver 2009)

**Educational Challenges:** carelessness, meddlesome, daydreaming, hypoactivity (slow), disorganized, forgetful, hasty decision making, interrupting, inattention, memory issues, poor planning skills, poor planning skills, sloppy work, hyperactivity. (Woliver 2009).

**Accommodations/Modifications:** Eliminate distractions, teach "stop and think", alternate sitting activities with activities involving movement, provide schedules of activities, provide checklists for required work, provide fidgets, and/or break large assignments/tests into smaller sections. (https://www.brainbalancecenters.com/blog/2014/10/classroom-modifications-children-adhd-concentration-issues/)
Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD)

**Definition:** Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD) is defined as a condition that results in intellectual functioning significantly below average and is associated with concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior.

There are two key components within this definition: a student’s IQ and his or her capability to function independently, usually referred to as adaptive behavior.

(https://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/dcd/)

**Causes of DCD:** Most developmental disabilities are thought to be caused by a complex mix of factors. These factors include genetics; parental health and behaviors (such as smoking and drinking) during pregnancy; complications during birth; infections the mother might have during pregnancy or the baby might have very early in life; and exposure of the mother or child to high levels of environmental toxins, such as lead. For some developmental disabilities, such as fetal alcohol syndrome, which is caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy, we know the cause. But for most, we don’t.

(https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/facts.html)

**Educational Challenges:** NICHCY emphasizes, “They will learn, but it will take them longer.”

Obviously, an intellectual disability creates many educational challenges that must be overcome. These include: trouble understanding new concepts, inappropriate behavior, limited vocabulary, difficulty accomplishing complex tasks (http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/intellectual-disability/).

**Accommodations and Modifications We Can Make:** Choose activities and words wisely so the student is able to be successful, repetition of words and directions, use pictures to accompany words, provide consistent feedback, break larger projects/texts/tests into smaller sections, and remember to be patient.

(http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/intellectual-disability/)
Developmental Disability (DD)

Definition: A child up to age seven who is experiencing a measurable delay in development according to diagnostic instruments and procedures fits the Developmental Delay (DD) disability category. The developmental delays must be in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, adaptive development.

Causes: Most developmental disabilities are thought to be caused by a complex mix of factors. These factors include genetics; parental health and behaviors (such as smoking and drinking) during pregnancy; complications during birth; infections the mother might have during pregnancy or the baby might have very early in life; and exposure of the mother or child to high levels of environmental toxins, such as lead. For some developmental disabilities, such as fetal alcohol syndrome, which is caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy, we know the cause. But for most, we don’t.

Educational Challenges: NICHCY emphasizes, “They will learn, but it will take them longer.” Obviously, an intellectual disability creates many educational challenges that must be overcome. These include: trouble understanding new concepts, inappropriate behavior, limited vocabulary, difficulty accomplishing complex tasks.

Accommodations and Modifications We Can Make: Choose activities and words wisely so the student is able to be successful, repetition of words and directions, use pictures to accompany words, provide consistent feedback, break larger projects/texts/tests into smaller sections, and remember to be patient.
Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD)

**Definition:** A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.


**Causes:** No one knows the actual cause or causes of emotional disturbance, although several factors—heredity, brain disorder, diet, stress, and family functioning—have been suggested and vigorously researched. A great deal of research goes on every day, but to date, researchers have not found that any of these factors are the direct cause of behavioral or emotional problems.

([http://www.ccbd.net/about/ebddefintion](http://www.ccbd.net/about/ebddefintion))

**Characteristics:** Some of the characteristics and behaviors seen in children who have an emotional disturbance include: hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness), aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting), withdrawal (not interacting socially with others, excessive fear or anxiety, immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills), learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level). Children with the most serious emotional disturbances may exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts, and abnormal mood swings.

([http://www.ccbd.net/about/ebddefintion](http://www.ccbd.net/about/ebddefintion))

**Accommodations/Modifications We Can Make:** Provide positive reinforcement, incentives for good behavior, preferential seating, keep the environment structured, set clear rules and expectations and follow through with them, have a special cooling off area for the student, be aware of your words and non-verbals.

Physical Impairment (PI)

**Definition:** Students determined to be Physically Impaired (PI) have medically diagnosed, chronic, physical impairment, either congenital or acquired. Examples of diagnoses that may meet these criteria are cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, spinal cord injury, oteogenesis imperfecta and arthrogryposis. ([http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/phy/](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/phy/))

**Causes:** There are many different causes for physical disabilities. These include:

- inherited or genetic disorders, such as muscular dystrophy
- conditions present at birth (congenital), such as spina bifida
- serious illness affecting the brain, nerves or muscles, such as meningitis, spinal cord injury and brain injury. ([http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=30&tid=1874#2](http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=30&tid=1874#2))

**Educational Challenges:** Possible academic barriers include:

- Non-accessible transportation
- Trouble maneuvering around the classroom
- Difficulty navigating school hallways
- Earning mandated physical education credit

**Accommodations and Modifications:** Arrange the classroom so it is easily accessible for the student, assistive technology (iPads, use of computer for assignments), adapted equipment (seating, writing utensils), assign a peer to assist with buttoning/zipping/tying. Special education and support staff are here to help with this!
Deaf– Hard of Hearing (DHH)

**Definition:** The official definition of a hearing impairment by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is "an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but is not included under the definition of 'deafness.'" Thus, knowing the definition of deafness is necessary to understand what sort of disabilities are considered hearing impairments. A hearing loss above 90 decibels is generally considered deafness, which means that a hearing loss below 90 decibels is classified as a hearing impairment.

(https://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/hearing-impairments/)

**Causes:** Genes are responsible for hearing loss among 50% to 60% of children with hearing loss. About 20% of babies with genetic hearing loss have a "syndrome" (for example, Down syndrome or Usher syndrome). Infections during pregnancy in the mother, other environmental causes, and complications after birth are responsible for hearing loss among almost 30% of babies with hearing loss. Congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection during pregnancy is a preventable risk factor for hearing loss among children. About one in every four children with hearing loss also is born weighing less than about 5 1/2 pounds.

(https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/data.html)

**Educational Challenges:** Educational obstacles related to hearing impairments stem around communication. A student with a hearing impairment may experience difficulty in:
- the subjects of grammar, spelling and vocabulary
- taking notes while listening to lectures
- participating in classroom discussions
- watching educational videos
- Presenting oral reports

(https://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/hearing-impairments/)

**Accommodations and Modifications:** Designate a note talker so the student can focus on the speaker, preferential seating, turning in closed captions during videos, FM System.

(https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/treatment.html)
Speech Language Impairment (SLI)

**Definition:** A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a student’s educational performance. Fluency disorder means the intrusion or repetition of sounds, syllables, and words; prolongation of sounds; avoidance of words; silent blocks; or inappropriate inhalation, exhalation, or phonation patterns. These patterns may also be accompanied by facial and body movements associated with the effort to speak. Voice disorder means the absence of voice or presence of abnormal quality, pitch, resonance, loudness, or duration. Articulation disorder means the absence of or incorrect production of speech sounds or phonological processes that are developmentally appropriate (e.g. lisp, difficulty articulating certain sounds, such as l or r). Language disorder means a breakdown in communication as characterized by problems in expressing needs, ideas, or information that may be accompanied by problems in understanding.

([http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/lan/](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/lan/))

**Causes:** Some speech language disorders are caused by a brain injury, a traumatic physical event, or motor impairment. Other cases are neurologically based without a specific cause. Other suspected causes include genetics, environment, or anxiety disorders (Woliver 2009).

**Educational Challenges:** Some of these challenges might involve:
- Communicating effectively with classmates and teachers
- Understanding and/or giving oral presentations
- Participating in classroom discussions
- Attaining normalcy within a group
- Difficulty with reading comprehension and vocabulary


**Accommodations and Modifications:** create proper speech models, pause before key words, provide detailed step by step directions, provide positive reinforcement, provide visuals, reduce extraneous classroom noise, repeat instructions, frequently check for understanding, preferential seating, use computers with predictive text. (Woliver 2009).
**Blind–Visually Impaired**

**Definition:** According to Minnesota Administrative Rule 3525.1345, “Visually impaired” means a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by limitations in sight that interfere with acquiring information or interaction with the environment to the extent that special education instruction and related services may be needed.

(http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/bvi/)

**Causes:** There are many causes of blindness in children. Blindness may be due to genetic mutations, birth defects, premature birth, nutritional deficiencies, infections, injuries, and other causes. Severe retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), cataracts and refractive error are also causes.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood_blindness#Causes)

**Educational Challenges:** Intelligence does not require sight; therefore, overcoming educational challenges is vital to enabling a student with a visual impairment to reach his or her full academic potential. Such challenges may entail:

* Safely maneuvering around the classroom
* Conceptualizing objects
* Reading
* Operating standard educational tools such as calculators and word processing software

(http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/visual-impairment/)

**Accommodations and Modifications:** provide orientation and mobility training to the child, arrange classroom furniture so the child can move freely and safely, large print books, and braille books,

**Special education staff will assist with appropriate accommodations and modifications**

(http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/visual-impairment/)
APPENDIX E

Inclusion Evaluation Survey

1. Was the PowerPoint presentation on special education and inclusion helpful?
   Yes                                No

2. What new learning from the presentation will you take with you and use?

3. What changes could be made to this presentation to make it more helpful?

4. What other topics on special education and inclusion would you like to see covered?
APPENDIX F

Sample monthly e-mail check in

Date: __________

Student(s) name(s): _____________________________________________________________

Please take a minute to let me know how my student(s) is/are doing in your core language arts classroom.

What is going well? What are they being successful with?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What is not going well? What are they struggling with?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What can I help with to make this student more successful?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time!