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# Benefits and Limitations of Inclusion and Providing Practical Applications for Managing a Successful Inclusive Classroom/ Creating an Effective Teaching Environment for a Classroom with Diverse Needs

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**Benefits and Limitations of Inclusion and Providing Practical Applications for Managing  
a Successful Inclusive Classroom**

by

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Starred Paper

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## Dedication

These papers are dedicated to Nathan for always providing me with love, support, and patience throughout the process of finishing my master's project. I would also like to thank my children, Brevin and Callie, for being my best cheerleaders throughout this process. I would also like to thank my advisor, JoAnn, for providing the support and patience I needed to finish within my goal timeline

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1975, the U.S. Congress enacted a powerful change in education. They created the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, EHA, P.L. 94-142. This law was passed to guarantee a free and appropriate public education to each child with a disability in the United States. With the help of the amendments in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; P.L. 108-446), P.L. 94-142 now supports the individual states and local districts in improving the important needs in Special Education for the students it was intended to serve. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), the P.L. 94-142 had four purposes: to assure that all children with disabilities have available to them ... a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents ... are protected, to assist states and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education (2007) explained P.L. 94-142 not only supported more than 1 million children, each with a disability, who had been excluded entirely from the education system, it also supported individuals with disabilities who had only limited access to the education system and were therefore denied an appropriate education. The need for appropriate education for all led to the advancements in education regarding children with disabilities. Knowing P.L. 94-142 governed the programs and all services for children ages 3 through 21, in the 1980s the need for programming and services for young children with disabilities and their families became much more apparent and led to the change in EHA (P.L.

99-457) which required programs and services be provided to children with disabilities from birth.

Resulting from the passing of the P.L. 94-142 and the growing concern for the learning environments for children with disabilities, an open awareness of the strong need for an increase in opportunities for these children to be educated in the least restrictive environment became well known. In the early 1980s, more resources became available to train educators on the approaches for integrating children with disabilities in their home and school environments. Since this time, the opportunities for children to attend local schools have greatly increased, which also provides more opportunities to learn life skills needed to be successful and independent.

Inclusion of children with disabilities has become a commonality amongst schools, but another commonality amongst educators is the frustration of feeling overwhelmed in trying to teach a diverse group of students. Research by Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) found “Many teachers believe that teaching in an inclusion-model class is just “additional work” (p. 145). According to Berry (2006), there are two types of teachers. The first type is the pathognomonic teacher. This type of teacher believes the student may be defined by his or her disability. The disability, itself, limits the learning experience for the student. A pathognomonic teacher believes only teachers who are specially trained for this student’s disability are the teachers able to teach the student. The second type of teacher is the interventionist. This type of teacher believes that while the disability may be a barrier to learning, the student can still benefit from the instruction within the general education classroom. The interventionist teacher is able to provide the instruction needed to promote a positive learning experience for the student. The

beliefs of teachers can hinder or promote the success of a child in his or her classroom. General education teachers find it challenging to meet the needs of a child with a disability; however, there are several resources, trainings and additional supports that can help make inclusion successful.

In 2011, Tetler and Baltzer proposed that the climate in the classroom has a major impact on the success of a child with a disability. The classroom climate consists of the relationships, personal development, and the system maintenance. Relationships are defined as, “the extent to which people in the classroom support and help each other” (Tetler & Baltzer, 2011, p. 335). Personal development is “the extent to which personal growth and self-enhancement is facilitated” (Tetler & Baltzer, 2011, p. 335). System maintenance is “the extent to which the classroom is orderly, and educators are clear in their expectations, maintain control and are responsive to change” (Tetler & Baltzer, 2011, p. 335). Classroom climate is generalized by how teachers promote the growth and success of all students. According to their article, students’ perceptions about their learning environment has a direct effect on their learning (Tetler & Baltzer, 2011, p. 335). Tetler and Baltzer believe an observer can walk into a classroom and immediately begin their perception of the classroom climate. An observer can develop a sense of the climate, such as a sense of positivity in the environment. Students understand this positive climate to be a place where all have the right to learn and feel valued and respected. A strong component for a healthy, positive classroom climate is the general education teacher providing opportunities for every student to be actively engaged in the classroom.



## **Importance and Purpose of Study**

I am currently a first grade teacher and have been serving 25 students a year, with 8-10 of my students beginning the year on IEPs. Throughout the school year, I may be a part of the process in determining if one or more of my general education students qualify for special education services. The students have various disabilities, such as students who have autism, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, attention disorders, rare forms of other health disabilities, and speech and language difficulties. My class also contained students of a different culture than mine, with limited English language. I taught early childhood special education for 5 years and I know the importance of providing support and a positive learning environment for all students, but I found it difficult to manage a successful classroom, when my attention was being split amongst many diverse learners, and other typical students were not receiving my best efforts as a teacher.

There are educators who want to provide the best learning experience for every student, including being able to demonstrate growth and success in their classroom environment. The intent of inclusion is to provide all students with a disability their right to free and public education. Over the past 40 years since P.L. 94-142 passed, research has shown the benefits of inclusion in general education classrooms. Educators have been trained, acquired skills, obtained resources, and asked for help from colleagues and/or administrators about providing a successful learning environment for all students. There continues and may always be a struggle when implementing the objectives of inclusion. Thus, the purpose of my research project is to understand the purpose, the benefits and limitations of inclusion, and the strategies a general education teacher can apply in managing a successful classroom environment.

## **Research Questions**

In this paper, I explore past and current literature related to the benefits and limitations of inclusion in the general education classroom, and the recommendations of how to guide general education teachers who may have students with disabilities in their classroom to be prepared and successful. Through my review of research, I will be exploring the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of an inclusive classroom?
2. What are the limitations of an inclusive classroom?
3. What suggestions are available in which a general education teacher can be successful in managing an inclusive classroom?

## **Literature Search Description**

Throughout my process of collecting information for this study, I used the electronic library system of St. Cloud State University, searching articles in the following online journal sources: ERIC, EBSCO and Academic Search Premier. I used a combination of search terms in reference to “Special Education Inclusion,” “benefits of inclusion,” “consequences of inclusion,” “reactions to inclusion,” “inclusive classroom climate,” and “teaching practices for inclusive classrooms.”

## **Definition of Terms**

Adaptations: the process of changing to fit some purpose or situation. (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Classroom Climate: the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which students learn (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, & Lovett, 2010).

Disability: a physical or mental condition that significantly limits a person's motor, sensory, or cognitive abilities (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

Environment: the conditions and influences that affect the growth, health, progress, etc., of students (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

Inclusion: the act or practice of including students with disabilities in regular school classes (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

Intellectual disabilities (ID): a disorder with childhood onset that is characterized by limitations in intellectual functions, such as reasoning and learning, and difficulty carrying out the functions of daily life (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

General education: K-12 instruction that meets the commonwealth's Standards of Learning and prepares children for elementary, secondary and postsecondary success. (Virginia Department of Education, 2016).

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; P.L. 108-446)—supports states and localities in protecting the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving results for infants, toddlers, children, and youths with disabilities and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Least restrictive environment: To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature of severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Modifications: individualized changes made to the content and performance expectations for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

P.L. 94-142: guaranteed free appropriate public education to each child with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

### **Closing**

In the next chapter I discuss, in a literature review, the background knowledge of inclusion. I consider the different views of inclusion. While there are definitely benefits of inclusion, another focus of my discussion is explaining the limitations to inclusion that exist. The final topic of this literature review describes suggestions on how a general education classroom teacher can be prepared to manage an inclusive classroom.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature that examines the background and effects of inclusion within the general education classroom and how general education teachers can become prepared to manage an inclusive classroom. This literature review is provided in four sections. The first section provides the definition and includes the history of inclusion. The second section discusses the benefits of inclusion. The third section discusses the limitations of inclusion and the fourth section describes the suggestions and recommendations for managing an inclusive classroom. Inclusion is a major topic in education and if all students, parents, teachers, and administrators understood the development of the law and the affects it has on people, there will be an increased understanding of the process and the implementation of strategies to successfully manage the inclusive classroom.

### **The Plan for Inclusion**

P.L. 94-142 was developed to help all students with disabilities. In 1975, the U.S. developed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, EHA, P.L. 94-142 to guarantee a free and appropriate public education for each child with a disability. P.L. 94-142 expanded inclusion's exposure and implementation leading to the development of more opportunities for students. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) provided four purposes on the plan of inclusion. The first purpose is a free appropriate public education available for every student. During the year of 2007-2008, more than 6 million school-aged children 320,000 infants and toddlers were receiving educational services (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These programs and services are provided in all 50 states. The second purpose protects the rights of students with disabilities as well as their parents. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

protects the rights and develops plans for students with disabilities who did not qualify for an IEP and are attending a program or activity that receives federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Also, the parents receive progress reports from their child's education setting as required by IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The third purpose is to help the states and local schools in providing a free and appropriate education. For example, the federal government, state governments and communities are increasing the number early childhood programs available for families. Programs such as pre-kindergarten programs and Head Start education programs are expanding to include more students. The fourth purpose is to track the quality of the education and its effectiveness on all students with disabilities.

### **History of Inclusion**

Inclusion was not an immediate result for students with disabilities. Since the 1950s, laws have been legislated to cover the rights of individuals with disabilities. The Training of the Professional Personnel Act of 1959 (P.L. 86-158) was a program that was developed to provide appropriate training for educators, such as administrators and teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In 1965, programs such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA; P.L. 89-10, and the State Schools Act, P.L. 89-313, provided financial assistance to schools to support the education of students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These programs and the court decisions of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) expanded the opportunities for children with disabilities. These two court decisions

supported the rights of all students with disabilities access to education and they required the states and local schools to educate all children. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The need for appropriate education for all, led to the passing of P.L. 94-142 and this law had a positive impact on millions of children with disabilities, between the ages of 3 to 21, and their families. This law “supported more than 1 million children with disabilities who had been excluded entirely from the education system. The law also supported children with disabilities who had only limited access to the education system and were therefore denied an appropriate education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). During the 1980s, amendments to EHA, P.L. 99-457, required that states provide programs and services to children with disabilities from birth. The 1990 amendments to EHA, P.L. 101-476, allowed for the changing of names from the EHA to the IDEA.

With the amendments in 2004 to IDEA, accountability for schools was being met by the states. In assessments, the states require schools to establish goals for students with disabilities in the areas of participation rate and proficiency rate (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The 2004 amendments also allowed for the framework of response to intervention (RTI) to be used in the schools when identifying students with learning disabilities. “With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Inclusion was built by the commitment of providing an appropriate education for all. From the 1950s to present, understanding of the needs of students with disabilities were

acknowledged and public laws were amended to meet these needs. Inclusion can be seen in all education settings and an appropriate learning environment can exist for all students.

### **Benefits of Inclusion**

Various researchers have identified many positive outcomes, such as social and academic skills, as a result of inclusion for students. Hunt, Soto, Maier, and Doering (2003) believe people who receive positive results from an inclusive education are students with disabilities and their peers. Students with disabilities increased in social participation and access to the general curriculum and an improvement in individualized goals. Students without disabilities increased their social and communication skills when working with students with disabilities.

### **Increase in Access to General Education**

According to Purcell, Horn, and Palmer (2007), there are positive results from participating in an inclusion program. An increased access to the general education curriculum, with numerous role models, and frequent opportunities to practice and master new skills are a few of the benefits students with disabilities obtain. The physical placement of students with disabilities and the right to access the general education curriculum in a general education classroom is supported by P.L. 94-142. Enrolling a student with a disability in a general education classroom has the expectation that not only is the student included within the setting, but he or she is participating and making progress as well. The general education curriculum is introduced to provide the same access to learning for all students in the general education classroom. Purcell et al. (2007) focused beyond the placement and determined children need to belong, be valued and have choices within their general education classroom in order for inclusion to be successful.



Purcell et al. (2007) believed that being in the same classroom with the same or similar programming as children without disabilities is one meaningful way to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving the same instruction and are able to interact and participate with typical peers. Each classroom setting has its own adopted curriculum that all students are able to access, but all students may not have the same understanding of the content of the curriculum. With the correct training, educational resources, and supports from special education teachers, general education teachers can modify their curriculum to meet individual needs of their students.

A general education classroom setting can provide positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, and Born (2015) named three positive outcomes of a general education classroom: “(a) higher quality individualized education programs; (b) more time engaged in general curricular content; and (c) better academic, communication, and social outcomes.” (p. 193). Inclusionary settings are intended to supply students with disabilities a classroom climate that encourages them to progress and be successful. Purcell et al. (2007) and Morningstar et al. (2015) believed the access to general education curriculum can provide grade-level information for all students, whereas a student, in a specialized classroom, may likely be learning from a curriculum lower than his or her grade-level.

Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, and Bovaird (2007) reported a difference in access to curriculum amongst two different settings. They compared general education classrooms with self-contained classrooms and found in a whole-group general education classroom, students with special needs were more likely to be working on a grade-level standard and were more likely to be provided some sort of adaptation. Whereas in a self-contained classroom, students with special needs were more likely to be working on below-grade-level standards and tasks that

were supported by the individual's IEP (individualized education plan) goal. Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, and Algozzine (2012) stated “within an inclusive classroom, students with disabilities have access to meaningful, rigorous general education curricula; and special education is specifically designed instruction to assist them in maximizing their highest potential” (p. 478).

Students with disabilities can enhance their success in an inclusive classroom by developing their academic skills alongside their peers. Children have the ability to learn from other children. Krull, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2014) wrote: “children with SEN (special educational needs) achieve better academic success in inclusive settings compared to their peers in special schools” (p. 170). These authors believed inclusion helps a student become a progressing learner by participating in an engaging atmosphere. Students with disabilities in a general education classroom gain new models, new motivation, and new friends. The students' teachers and parents see their socializing skills growing and increasing self-esteem from being included and valued as an individual.

Students with disabilities are not the only students to benefit from inclusion; others in the class also receive positive effects. Students learn how to work more cooperatively with others, and are able to find the strengths in all of their peers. Peck, Staub, Gallucci, and Schwartz (2004) emphasized that students without special needs also benefit from an inclusion setting. Peck et al. (2004) noted parents agreed that having their child without a disability in an inclusive setting produces a positive outcome. The parents believed their child's social and emotional skills increased due to participating in an inclusive setting (Peck et al., 2004).

### **Increase in Social Skills and Communication**

A benefit of inclusion for students with disabilities and for students without disabilities is an enhancement in their social and communication skills. According to Siperstein, Parker, Norins Bardon, and Widaman (2007), the attitudes of students with disabilities and students without disabilities are positively impacted when they are in an inclusive classroom. Parents and educators in support of inclusion believe that with time and more exposure, students without disabilities develop a positive attitude toward students with disabilities.

Furthermore, teachers are the prominent figures in a classroom and their philosophy about teaching and inclusion determines the type of climate in a classroom. A type of general education teacher who promotes the progress of social and communication skills amongst all the students and provides adaptations and modifications needed for all to feel valued and appreciated, can be identified as an interventionist teacher. According to Berry (2006), an interventionist teacher helps promote an engaging classroom climate for all students. An interventionist teacher is an asset to inclusion. Inclusion cannot be prosperous if the teacher is hesitant in implementing new ideas and searching for strategies for each student to learn and be successful in an inclusionary setting.

An interventionist teacher is willing to modify whole-group settings to include small group lessons. Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird (2007) found when students with disabilities are placed in smaller group settings, with students without special needs, the students with disabilities were often more engaged. Both small group teaching and working one-on-one helps students with special needs learn more effectively. When a teacher is able to modify his or her designed setting to enhance students' needs, increased engagement and social interactions

will take place. The enhancement of their social interactions also improves their competence levels and acceptance by peers. A big impact resulting from inclusion is a student's improved social skills.

Siperstein et al. (2007), Berry (2006), Soukup et al. (2007), and Peck et al. (2004) believed a benefit of inclusion for students with disabilities and students without disabilities is an enhancement in their social and communication skills. With time and more exposure, students without disabilities develop or increase their positive attitude toward students with special needs. Students with disabilities will be more accepted amongst their peers which leads to more positive experiences in their least restrictive environment.

### **Limitations of Inclusion**

An increasing growth in social skills of students with disabilities is a beneficial point of inclusion; however, there are drawbacks of inclusion when it comes to a student's social needs. A large limitation to the plan of inclusion is the beliefs and attitudes amongst students, peers, parents, teachers, and administrators. In order for inclusion to be successful, the collaboration amongst students, peers, parents, teachers, and administrators involved in the process needs to be cohesive. Cohesiveness may not exist due to a negative outlook on inclusion. Tetler and Baltzer (2011) noted students, ages 6-10, had a positive experience in their educational environment due to their relationships with others. However, one study about first-graders and another study about fourth and fifth graders have shown students with disabilities are different in their social and emotional skills when compared to students without disabilities.

## **Students' Perceptions of Inclusion**

Krull et al.'s (2014) study on first-graders discovered that students with classroom learning difficulties (CLD) or classroom behavior problems (CBP) tend to have more social and emotional problems when compared to students without disabilities. They found students with disabilities have “lower sociometric integration status (children with CLD and/or CBP are more often socially rejected and less popular), a more negative academic self-concept, feelings of less acceptance from their teacher, and poorer perceptions of the classroom climate” (Krull et al., 2014, p. 185).

Kucuker and Tekinarsian's (2015) study on fourth and fifth graders compared students with and without disabilities on areas of loneliness, self-concept, social skills, and problem behaviors in an inclusive setting. They noted students with disabilities had higher levels of loneliness and problem behaviors than students without disabilities. Their self-concept and social skills were also lower compared to the students without disabilities. In inclusive classrooms, Kucuker and Tekinarsian believed students with disabilities may feel frustrated or overwhelmed when trying to meet the requirements of their lessons or assignments. The feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed then have a strong impact on a student's self-perception.

Siperstein et al.'s (2007) study on the attitudes of middle-schoolers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities claims the students showed more negative attitudes toward students with ID (intellectual disabilities). Knowing this negative attitude toward students with disabilities, may be one of the causes students with special needs feel socially rejected. Siperstein et al. (2007) believed perception of students with special needs, particularly ID, by youth is quite negative. Youth see students with ID as having lower ability than those with

physical disabilities and the youth rank themselves above students with ID or physical disabilities.

In addition, another limitation of inclusion is misunderstanding of the meaning of access to general education. Soukup et al. (2007) believed there are different meanings to the word access. For example, a school district could interpret the meaning as just the physical placement of a student in a general education classroom and the placement would satisfy the student's access to the curriculum. Whereas another district could interpret the meaning of access to mean that a student needs be actively engaged in the classroom curriculum to meet the requirements. "The primary focus of the IDEA mandates to ensure student involvement with and progress in the general education curriculum is...on what students are taught, how curriculum content is delivered, and what supports are provided to ensure student progress in the general education curriculum..." (Soukup et al., 2007, p. 102).

Along with a student's perception about inclusion and the misunderstanding of the term access, negative beliefs are also felt by teachers. Yildiz (2015) wrote that general education teachers' views toward students with special needs are generally negative. When compared to students without disabilities, teachers believed students with disabilities had more behavior problems and they should not be allowed in the general education classroom (Yildiz, 2015). Yildiz explained if teachers do not have an efficient classroom management system, a student's engagement behavior can decrease, while off-task and problem behaviors increase..

### **Educators' Perceptions of Inclusion**

Teachers who display negative attitudes can be labeled as a pathognomonic teacher. According to Berry (2006), the second type of a general education teacher is a pathognomonic

teacher. If students with disabilities are in a classroom with a teacher, who is defined as a pathognomonic teacher, they may find themselves in a classroom climate that is focused on the disability first and the student second. A pathognomonic teacher believes only a teacher who is specifically trained on the student's disability should be the teacher for the student. This type of teacher may feel inadequate or believe it is too difficult to teach students with disabilities. If this is the belief of the teacher, then it will be more difficult for a student's experience to be positive. A general education teacher's commitment to providing a successful environment for each child can be very effective on a student's learning and engaging behavior. General education teachers are not the only educators who can affect a student's inclusion experience, administrators can also have a strong effect on the student's experience.

Praisner's (2003) study on elementary school principals identified attitudes of principals toward inclusion. Praisner discovered only approximately one out of five principals had a positive attitude towards inclusion. Principals' positive attitudes can help make inclusion successful. Praisner found there are three components that determine a principal's attitude and these include: "(a) factors related to placement perceptions, (b) role of experience with students with disabilities, and (c) types of training in inclusive practices" (p. 141). If a principal is uncertain in any of these three components it effects his or her attitude toward inclusion.

In the component of placement, a large number of principals believed "that certain disability categories, such as those without emotional or social needs and who tend to 'fit in' academically, are more appropriate for inclusive settings" (Praisner, 2003, p. 141). This belief goes completely against the true understanding of inclusion where all students have the right to be educated in a general education setting. In the component of a principal's role of experience

with students with disabilities, Praisner's study has shown the more positive experience a principal has with students with disabilities the more positive attitude he or she has toward inclusion. A principal's positive experience with students with disabilities, no matter the category, can alter a principal's view about the least restrictive environments (Praisner, 2003).

Furthermore, in the component of types of training, Praisner (2003) claimed principals are involved in a limited amount of specified trainings pertaining to special education, but they receive higher amounts of training toward general education. "Principals who are prepared well to administer general education programs are made responsible for a broad range of special education programs in an area in which they have had minimal training and/or experience" (Praisner, 2003, p. 143). More specific training about students with disabilities, whether in-service or college courses in preparation for being an administrator, can lead to a more positive attitude toward inclusion.

### **Parents' Perceptions of Inclusion**

Students, peers, teachers, and administrators have a strong impact on the positive attitudes toward inclusion, as well as the parents of students with disabilities. Parents have a strong impact of their own outside the educational setting. Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001) believed parents may be more hesitant about including their child in an inclusive setting. A few parents believe their child would not be welcomed or their child would place a burden on the teacher and the class. The parents were also worried the teacher may not be accommodating toward their child. Palmer et al. (2001) stated, "It may be true that views regarding inclusion are often related to perceptions of the general education system itself" (p. 480). If a classroom is lacking control, or a teacher is untrained or unwilling to adapt the curriculum or seems



overwhelmed, parents are less likely to favor inclusion. In order for students to associate with children like themselves, some parents believe their child should be placed in a classroom with children with similar disabilities. Palmer et al. (2001) emphasizes inclusion should not be based solely on a child's placement in a general education classroom, but should also be open to a child's individual needs and wants as well as the family's.

The purpose of inclusion is to provide fair and equal education to every student, including those with and those without disabilities. Students, peers, teachers, and administrators have developed their own positive and negative feelings about inclusion. The groups having negative feelings toward inclusion may not have seen an education environment that provided a positive effect on those included in the inclusive setting. It is the job of administrators, general education teachers and special education teachers to develop an environment that will help all students show progression in their classroom.

### **Suggestions for General Education Teachers for Managing an Inclusive Classroom**

There are several suggestions and recommendations developed to successfully maintain inclusion. The suggestions and recommendations range from trainings prior to becoming an educator, trainings that occur during an educator's profession, and ideas that can be incorporated inside a classroom.

Curricula have been developed to guide educators in delivering information that corresponds with state's standards. A teacher's ability to cross-check lessons with the state's standards can determine if his or her lesson meets the requirements. If the lesson does not meet the requirements, educators are then able to bring in supplemental resources to meet the

standards. However, using a district's adopted curriculum is not the problem educators are facing, it is the delivery of desired curriculum to all students.

Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, and Palmer (2010) noted the 1997 and 2004 amendments to IDEA "required schools to institute policies and practices to promote involvement with and progress in the general education curriculum, including providing supplementary aids and services and special education services to students with disabilities to promote such outcome" (p. 213). Meeting every student's needs seems like a daunting task to some, if not all educators. However, Lee et al. stated it is important for modifications and adaptations to occur in order for students to make progress and be successful.

Lee et al. (2010) researched two types of modifications that can be used for students to be successful. The first type of modification is curriculum adaptations. Curriculum adaptations would not make any modifications to the present curriculum; instead, an educator would provide different ways for the students to access the information (Lee et al., 2010). There are many ways an educator can provide access and various accesses can be explained by understanding the meaning behind Universal Design for Learning, UDL. Lee et al. defined UDL as the "design of instructional materials and activities to make the content information accessible to all children" (p. 214).

UDL promotes educators to be flexible in their presenting. A teacher should not rely on one or two ways of teaching. There are various ways to present a piece of information, such as using a variety of teaching materials, providing different methods to delivery of the content, and letting the students show their understanding in multiple ways. Lee et al. (2010) suggested using different formats, such as texts, pictures, media devices (audio or visual) and skits. The variety

of ways an educator can deliver content can be by giving whole-group lectures, instruction through media, and role playing (Lee et al., 2010). Each student should be given a variety of ways for him or her to demonstrate his or her understanding of the material, including: ‘reports, exams, portfolios, drawings, performances, oral reports, videotaped reports and other alternative means’ (Lee et al., 2010, p. 214).

The second type of curriculum modification is curriculum augmentations. To augment a curriculum is to extend the curriculum in a way for a student to practice extra learning skills. The examples of such learning skills may be strategies to set goals and increase problem-solving skills; and how to monitor him or herself during the lesson or assignment. Lee et al. (2010) claimed the skills that correlate to curriculum augmentation show a connection to the speediness of progression and access to the general curriculum. For example, if a student has a higher level of self-determination then this student will also have an increase of active engagement and a decrease in negative behaviors (Lee et al., 2010). Curriculum augmentation is important to help guide any student by increasing his or her engagement in each lesson.

In pre-service trainings, educators can learn an assortment of methods to deliver content. Teacher Education and Collaboration is one method for a curriculum modification (Lee et al., 2010). In this form of curriculum modification, teachers need to have access to appropriate trainings to provide additional support to their instruction, while learning how to collaborate best with other teachers and staff to benefit the success of all students. Lee et al. mentioned most curriculum modifications are brought on by the special education teachers in a classroom led by a general education teacher. In a classroom, with only a general education teacher, a lack of curriculum modifications were being provided. Kucuker and Tekinarslan (2015) believed

problems such as “inappropriate educational environments, insufficient support services for SEN students, and teachers’ lack of knowledge and skills regarding the implementation of effective inclusion practices” (p. 1568) can affect a student’s experience in an inclusion setting. General education teachers need to be provided with curriculum modifications training during pre-service and during their teaching profession in order to provide a successful learning environment for students with disabilities.

Lee et al. (2010) also discussed the importance of the involvement of paraprofessionals as a modification example. They believed paraprofessionals can and should be trained to implement curriculum and modifications (Lee et al., 2010). Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, and Doyle (2001) reviewed past research on paraprofessional supports for students with special needs, and reported most paraprofessionals have not been trained and appropriately supervised. This lack of training and supervision can greatly impact the support they provide to teachers and students.

Giangreco et al. (2001) provided examples of how educators can promote the benefit of the support from paraprofessionals. Not only are paraprofessionals a valued asset to a student with special needs, they need to be treated as a valued asset. A paraprofessional needs to be respected and supported by the educators. They need to be provided with detailed trainings that will help them be successful in their position. The trainings need to support the paraprofessionals getting acquainted with their student, teacher, administrators, as well as the other staff in school. The trainings need to provide understanding of their student’s disability and how to provide the correct amount of support for their student. Along with the trainings, in order to make it a better success, paraprofessionals should be part of ongoing instruction,

feedback, and mentoring from the qualified professionals with whom paraprofessionals works. Paraprofessionals are important support for students with special needs as well as other adults and a positive collaboration can add to the support each student needs.

A collaboration approach amongst general education and special education teachers was developed in inclusive classrooms, to support students with disabilities, and this collaboration is labeled as co-teaching. Co-teaching is a modification to the traditional-style classroom of one general education teacher. The idea of co-teaching may be defined as one general education teacher who is paired with one special education teacher in a classroom. Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) provided a list of variations of co-teaching and these include: One teach-one assist, Station teaching, Parallel teaching, Alternative teaching, and Team teaching. One teach-one assist is defined as the general education teacher takes the lead, while the other, usually the special education teacher, provides the modifications when needed. Station teaching is the creation of a variety of centers in order for the co-teachers to roam and support when needed. Parallel teaching is a split in the class and each teacher takes one group and teaches the same lesson. Alternative teaching is one of the teachers taking a group of students and providing specialized instruction. Team teaching is lesson responsibilities equally split between the teachers.

Scruggs et al. (2007) found benefits to the idea of co-teaching. Educators described how they benefited from various experiences with co-teaching, such as an increase in content knowledge for the special education teachers. General education teachers reported they found benefits in their classroom management skills and their knowledge of applying different

adaptations to their curriculum. In addition, students without disabilities found benefits from the co-teaching style.

Participating using a co-teaching model, students without disabilities were found to have an increase in cooperation and empathy for the other students in the classroom. For students with disabilities the benefits included increasing confidence level, which in turn supported these students to work harder in the inclusion classroom. Students with disabilities were also reported as being exposed to appropriate behavior by peer role models. While co-teaching has benefits, the cohesiveness of the approach does not just occur on its own. Appropriate training must occur for those involved in co-teaching in order to provide a successful learning atmosphere.

Co-teaching refers to the idea of sharing the classroom between a general education teacher and a special education teacher. To expand adults working together to support students is the design of Unified Plan of Support (UPS). Hunt et al. (2003) studied the impact of UPS. The UPS provides opportunity for various professionals to meet and share their ideas and this in turn helps the development of a collaborative relationship. UPS helps several professionals maintain their focus on the student being supported with the plan of support. The collaboration brings the general education teachers and the special education teachers, including the speech and language, physical, and occupational therapists together to provide support and help when needed.

A curriculum modification known as Response to Intervention (RTI) is a program in which multiple educators are involved in monitoring a student's response to interventions. RTI can exist in a co-teaching style classroom or a classroom with one teacher. Vanderheyden (2011) defined RTI as "a framework that uses student performance data to determine if

instruction is effective for most students and to identify, and repair early learning problems, yoking intensity of instruction to a child's need" (p. 335). RTI relies on data analysis to provide the information needed to determine if a student is not meeting their current level of instruction.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010) described RTI as a three-tiered approach. Each of the three-tiers has criteria for determining if a student fits its' tier. Each student is placed in a tier based on his or data from a given category or subject. A few of these categories or subjects are reading, math, and behavior. The first tier is the initial screening of all students "at the start of the school year to identify a subset potentially at risk for school failure" (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 302). The students placed in the subset are progress monitored and the students who are not responding to the small group instruction are moved to the second tier. The second tier offers a student to be served an intervention by an adult using a standard treatment protocol. A student's progress is also monitored during this time and if she is unresponsive to the intervention, or showing too little progress, the student may be considered for the third tier. In the third tier, a student receives an individualized intervention focused on the student's skill deficits. If a student receiving targeted interventions is not meeting the goal of progress, then the student may be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team to see if the student is eligible for special education services. According to RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, "It should be noted that at any point in an RTI process, IDEA 2004 allows parents to request a formal evaluation to determine eligibility for special education. An RTI process cannot be used to deny or delay a formal evaluation for special education" (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2016).

The last approach to implement in a classroom is the positive attitudes amongst all educators involved. Yildiz (2015) found negative views towards students with disabilities from general education teachers. Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) found general education teachers viewed teaching to an inclusive classroom setting as additional work. An idea for general educators to not have an overwhelming feeling or to be proactive in lessening their work load, Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) recommended creating a portfolio for each student with special needs. The portfolio will contain any information an educator receives prior to the student beginning school. Information can include the curriculum standards and the student's IEP goals. An ongoing collection of progress notes or what the student is working on can be kept inside this portfolio.

The progress notes are then easy to show to students, staff, and family about what the student has been working on, the success, and the areas of concerns. "Portfolios also serve as a constant reminder for classroom teachers of what needs to be accomplished by each student" (Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000, p. 149). The authors encourage a short-term goal, which is easier to reach. This in turn provides motivation to reach it and as soon as the goal is met, the next benchmark can be provided.



### **Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions**

The introduction of inclusion has prompted many discussions in the field of education. Inclusion is a popular concept in most classrooms and with the support of the states, local school districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and students inclusion can be successful. In this paper, I reviewed the literature that examines inclusion, including the benefits and limitations. I have also reviewed suggestions and recommendations for general education teachers to create and manage a successful learning environment for their students.

#### **Benefits of Inclusion**

After reviewing several articles written about inclusion, I have gained a better understanding of the push for inclusion. There are several benefits that result from providing access to a general education classroom for students of all abilities. Hunt et al. (2003), Morningstar et al. (2015), and Obiakor et al. (2012) saw an improvement in the individualized goals of students with disabilities when gaining access to the general education curriculum. The authors' articles noted students with disabilities have more opportunities to learn from grade-level, standard based learning when in a general education classroom compared to learning from a curriculum that is below their grade-level when being placed in a pull-out setting.

While Hunt et al. (2003), Morningstar et al. (2015), and Obiakor et al. (2012) have shown students with disabilities value from the inclusion process, Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) and Peck et al. (2004) agreed that students without disabilities are also positively influenced by inclusion. Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) saw an increase in new models and new friends for students with disabilities by students without disabilities. Peck et al. (2004) noted students without disabilities, being a part of an inclusion classroom, had an increase in academic skills as

well as the students' parents believed they also had an improvement in their social and emotional growth.

An interventionist teacher increases the positive opportunities for all students in an educational setting. Berry (2006) defined an interventionist teacher as a teacher who willingly adapts and modifies any curriculum or the classroom environment to meet the needs of his or her students. This type of teacher focuses on how a child learns, rather than just thinking each student will learn the same way as his or her peers. Interventionist teachers can have a large impact on all students by teaching to their grade-level standards and modifying where needed. They also are incorporating a variety of opportunities for students to thrive and succeed along with their classmates. Whether in a whole-group or small group activity, students with disabilities can learn from their general education peers. Students have the ability to engage and communicate with each other in an inclusive setting and this builds each student's academic and social and emotional skills.

### **Limitations of Inclusion**

I reviewed several articles that investigated the limitations of inclusion. A few authors mentioned the decreased development of a student's social and emotional needs as a limitation of inclusion. Students, peers, parents, teachers, and administrators were listed as components of hindering the growth of students' social and emotional skills. Students ranging from first-graders to middle-schoolers were represented in the reviewed articles and each age group showed at least one limitation from the inclusion process.

Krull et al.'s (2014) study on first-graders and Kucuker and Tekinarslan (2015) study on fourth- and fifth-graders discovered that students with classroom learning difficulties or behavior

problems had a higher negative social and emotional drawback when compared to students without disabilities. First-graders with classroom difficulties had more negative views of themselves such as a feeling of more rejection, less acceptance, and a low-perception of the classroom atmosphere. Fourth and fifth grade students with disabilities had a higher level of negative social skills, such as higher level of loneliness and problem behaviors and lower levels of self-concept and social skills when compared to their peers.

Siperstein et al. (2007) studied the attitudes of middle-schoolers toward the inclusion of students with special needs and they also discovered negative attitudes; however, the attitudes were being displayed by the general education peers. The study found the middle-schoolers' without disabilities perceptions of students with an intellectual disability (ID) are of lower ability than themselves. Along with the studies of the primary school-aged and middle-schoolers, adults within and outside of the educational setting are also found to cause drawbacks to inclusion. School district administrators and teaching staff can inhibit a student's success in an educational setting by misunderstanding all students' rights to free and public education.

The term of access can be misunderstood to mean by just physically placing a student in a classroom, then the school is meeting the law requirements. Soukup et al. (2007) understood the word access to mean students are given the opportunity to be actively engaged in the instruction of a general education classroom. A school district's responsibility is to define a clear definition of the term access so their students and staff can fully understand it and begin building a strong foundation for a positive learning environment for all students.

Within a school district, there are teachers and principals who provide limitation for an inclusionary setting by not providing a positive learning environment for all students. To

paraphrase Yildiz's (2015) research, Yildiz found teachers view students with disabilities as having higher behavior problems and causing difficulty for teachers to manage their classroom. Berry (2006) described a pathogonomic teacher as a teacher who only believes those who are specially trained on a student's disability can effectively teach that student. Pathogonomic teachers may feel like it is quite difficult to teach an inclusion classroom and pass on their negative attitudes toward the students.

Furthermore, a study on elementary school principals by Praisner (2003) showed a higher number of principals were unsure about the inclusion process and if it had beneficial results. These principals were uncertain because due to lack of experience with a disability, lack of proper training, or believing only certain types of disabilities will fit properly within an inclusive setting. These educators as well as students' parents can affect a student's learning experience.

Palmer et al. (2001) conducted a study on parents of children with severe disabilities and their views of inclusion. The parents were found to be more hesitant about including their child in an inclusive setting. They did not want their child to feel unwelcomed by other peers and teacher or be a burden to the teacher and the class. Some parents also wanted their child to be placed in a classroom with similar disabilities so the student would be more comfortable and not have the feeling of being different.

Every person in any educational setting, needs to understand the process of inclusion. By understanding the background and being able to define the different components of inclusion, educators can inspire others to promote the process. However, knowing not all people will agree in the promoting of inclusion, having a positive attitude and thinking more of how to adapt and

modify a setting, like an interventionist teacher, can increase the exposure of the inclusion process and in turn increase their social and emotional and academic goals of all students.

### **Suggestions for General Education Teachers for Managing a Successful Inclusive Classroom**

Several articles pertaining to the suggestions for general education teachers regarding the need for managing a successful inclusive classroom have been reviewed. Several suggestions were described to support a well-managed inclusive classroom. The suggestions can be easily incorporated into a classroom with appropriate training. Appropriate training of adding modifications and adaptations is needed to support teachers in enhancing their current teaching methods for students with disabilities.

Lee et al. (2010) researched two types of modifications for classroom use. The first type of modification is curriculum adaptations, in which an educator is able to provide different approaches for students with special needs to access the information. UDL is provided as an example to incorporate modifications in a classroom. UDL is the “design of instructional materials and activities to make the content information accessible to all children” (p. 214). The second type of modification, according to Lee et al., is curriculum augmentations. Lee et al. defined curriculum augmentations as a way of providing extra skills to help students become more engaged in their own learning. Students learn how to set goals, increase problem-solving skills, and monitor themselves during a lesson.

Lee et al. (2010) promoted the use of the Teacher Education and Collaboration. Teachers need to be provided with training to learn how to modify their curriculum and how to be successful in the collaboration. Collaboration with paraprofessionals, who are also adequately

trained, can increase the developmental skills of students. Paraprofessionals are a valued asset to any school program, especially when they receive training, and are supported and respected.

Co-teaching, between a general education teacher and a special education teacher within the same classroom is another way of collaborating with other educational professionals. Benefits from co-teaching are an increase in content knowledge for the special education teachers, an increase in classroom management skills for the general education teachers, and adaptations used in their curriculum. Students also benefited from co-teaching. Students without disabilities increase their cooperation and empathy for others in the classroom and students with disabilities increase in confidence. Co-teaching also had a limitation of the co-teachers not being cohesive with each other and this can affect the success of the classroom.

In addition to the co-teaching strategy, multiple professionals can work together to provide a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach in determining a student's level of understanding. RTI can involve multiple educators to monitor a student's response to interventions. The data collected by the educators is used to create subsets that meet the needs of the students. General education teachers can help with data collection and this information can be recorded in a portfolio. Portfolios are a way to collect information about each child, keep identified goals for the child, and a place to record progress notes (Vaidya & Zaslavsky 2000).

Inclusion is a common practice in education; however, there are limitations that can gain more focus from general education teachers. There are several benefits from inclusion, but if a classroom contains a diverse group of learners, a teacher can easily feel overwhelmed and unprepared to deliver instruction. I believe all administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals need to be provided with proper training on understanding inclusion and how to promote its success.

Reviewing the articles about the benefits and limitations and history of inclusion, I have gained a more structured understanding of how I, as well as others, can change our frame of minds to develop and encourage a positive learning environment for all learners.

## Chapter 4: Position Statement

My review of research has practical applications for myself and other general education teachers in an inclusive classroom. As an educator, I wanted to understand the process of inclusion, its history, and I also want to be able to adjust my teaching to become a stronger supporter for all my students. Throughout my research, I developed a clearer understanding of inclusion. I was able to understand the benefits as well as the limitations of inclusion. With my better understanding of inclusion, I am able to see how others, not just myself are impacted by the process and what I can do to support myself and the others.

I believe inclusion is a benefit for any classroom. I feel that students are always learning from each other, whether it may seem beneficial or a limitation. Students with disabilities can enhance their social and academic skills, as well as students without disabilities. Increasing social skills was a major component when researching for both students. Students without disabilities are believed to increase their empathy and compassion, while students with disabilities were observed as increasing their confidence and participation skills. In the past, I felt I communicated great with my students' parents, other staff, and my administrators, but from my research results, I know I need to be clearer with the progress of students and ask for support when it is needed.

I understand the applications I have researched about and included in my literary review may not be available for all school districts; however, I included the applications such as co-teaching and RTI for a better understanding of what is being used in the education setting to better serve students with disabilities. In order to successfully use the recommended applications and to strongly support all students, educators need to be properly trained. With the evidence



from research claiming both administrators and educators may not be completely comfortable teaching in an inclusive classroom, shows that trainings need to be provided. The results of several articles pointed out the importance of training prior to teaching and continual training throughout an educator's career. Administrators need to provide these trainings as well as attend them with their educators in order to provide extra support for their staff.

In summary, I believe that educators need to take part in their own education about areas not clear to them. With the education field constantly changing, educators need to be proactive and look for ways to adapt their way of thinking and teaching to strongly support all students. Administrators, I believe, need to help support their teachers and staff and promote the trainings that will help develop each other as professionals. Inclusion is well-known in the education setting, but it may be misunderstood by several. I feel this paper will help define inclusion and help guide educators in providing a successful inclusive classroom.

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### Appendix: Literature Review Grid

Authors and Year of Publication	Research Questions	Research Questions	Findings
Anderson & Spaulding (2007)	Will universal strategies being used in a classroom be effective in reducing a range of behavior problems, while strengthening student academic success?		With the stress on the importance of assessment, for identifying a teacher's goals as well as for identifying persistent problems. The results of an assessment may be used to develop a successful classroom system.
Berry (2006)	What was the nature of writing instruction in the two classroom, particularly process writing instruction? What did the teachers say they believed about teaching, learning, and inclusion, especially with regard to writing instruction? Can similarities or differences regarding writing instruction in the two classrooms be linked to teachers' beliefs.	Qualitative data  Two inclusion classrooms in a midsize urban district.  Primary-level classrooms. 5 teachers, 44 general education and 23 special education students, first through fourth grade.	Even though the teachers had similar views on inclusion and were committed to their own instructional approaches, the teachers would variate their instruction to agree with their theories about teaching, learning and disability.
Johnson-Harris & Muchsenk (2014)	How does UDL benefit students with BD, when it is adopted as the foundational approach in a classroom?		Universal design for learning provides a way for teachers to design instruction that engages all learners and create behavioral supports that are accessible by those who need them. A benefit of UDL is that students with Behavioral Disorders are able to engage with the material in a way that interests them, challenges them, and allows them to build on their strengths, while supports are made available to help them monitor and improve behavior.

Authors and Year of Publication	Research Questions	Research Questions	Findings
Kucuker & Tekinarsian (2015)	<p>Are the self-concepts, social skills, problem behavior, and loneliness levels of students with special education needs (SEN) in inclusive elementary classrooms differ from those of students without SEN?</p> <p>What are the roles of self-concept, social skills, and problem behaviors in predicting the loneliness levels of SEN students?</p>	<p>272 students (4th and 5th graders) attending inclusive elementary classrooms.</p> <p>A total of 140 were SEN and 132 were non-SEN students.</p> <p>2 data collection tools were used.</p>	<p>Self-concepts, social skills, problem behaviors, and loneliness levels of the SEN students were significantly different than those of the non-SEN students. It was also found that self-concept and social skills were significant predictors of the loneliness levels of SEN students.</p>
Krull, Wilber, & Hennemann (2014)	<p>Does co-education of students with and without classroom problems and/or disabilities have negative consequences with respect to social and emotional situation within the classroom community?</p>	<p>An exploratory analysis</p> <p>2839 First Graders were surveyed to determine if children with classroom behavior problems (CBP) and classroom learning difficulties (CLD) are more likely to be socially rejected than their peers.</p> <p>Sociometric interviews and a questionnaire were used.</p>	<p>Results reveal that first grade students with CBP and CLD experienced significantly higher levels of social rejection.</p>
Morningstar, Shogren, & Born (2015)	<p>How highly inclusive classrooms support participation and learning of all students, including those with significant support needs; and to document practices occurring within those classrooms that support participation and learning?</p>	<p>Descriptive Analysis</p> <p>65 classroom observations in inclusive classrooms across six knowledge development sites.</p> <p>Semi-structured protocol (Inclusive Classroom Observation Tool, Morningstar &amp; Shogren, 2013)</p>	<p>Classroom supports are a necessary and critical dimension of systems-level approaches resulting in educational reform.</p> <p>Inclusive classrooms that can and do engage students with diverse learning needs if educators carefully and collaboratively differentiate instruction and establish a universal approach to learning.</p>

Authors and Year of Publication	Research Questions	Research Questions	Findings
Tetler & Balzer (2011)	What outcomes do children with disabilities experience being in inclusive settings, and how do they characterize their learning environments?	Interviewed 14 students with disabilities who are included in mainstream classrooms.	Students with disabilities (early in schooling) evaluate their learning environment positively. However they lack positive experiences of influence and appreciation.
Vaidya & Zaslavsky (2000)	<p>Universities are invited to a partnership with Pennsylvania teachers to engage teacher educators and public school staff in the collaborative preparation of pre-service teachers, so that all new teachers will be able to effectively support children with disabilities in the general curriculum.</p> <p>How the curriculum and instruction will support professional development school partnership?</p> <p>Program/course features: Theory integrated with best practice Developing intrapersonal competencies Continuous inquiry and reflection Integration of technology Exemplary clinical/field experiences for future teachers.</p> <p>How to teach to an inclusion-model classroom: Implementation</p>	<p>This article was a guidance and preparation for pre-service and current service teachers.</p> <p>A classroom teacher's point of view is also given.</p>	It is not the job of a teacher to instruct some and not others. It is the job of a professional educator to teach all children-all individuals.
Yildiz (2015)	<p>1. What are the general education teachers' classroom behaviors in an inclusive classroom?</p> <p>2. What is the academic engagement, off-task and problem behaviors of students with special needs in an inclusive classroom?</p>	The sample group: 54 general education teachers working at local primary schools Eskisehir, Turkey and their 54 students with mild intellectual disabilities.	The behaviors of students with mild intellectual disabilities and the academic communication of teachers with them significantly changed according to the placement of these students in the classroom and the teachers' adjustments in the instructional program toward them.



**Creating an Effective Teaching Environment for a Classroom with Diverse Needs**

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

There are many reasons an elementary student may or may not be a successful learner in an educational setting. Some students easily absorb the information, but for other students, such as students with special needs, there may need to be a different approach used to help them learn. Each child learns in his or her own way and it is the job of an educator to try to meet every student's preference for learning, whether it is visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Ford (2005) stated, "When instructing students, we are likely to think about their learning styles. Who is an auditory, visual, and/or spatial learner? Who likes working independently or with others? Who prefers and/or needs concrete examples and who gets annoyed by them? Who needs reinforcements?" (p. 28). One major factor in a child's learning preference is the effectiveness of his or her classroom environment as well as the teacher's instructional skills.

In an education setting, various characteristics can describe a classroom environment. Positive characteristics such as well-organized, active learning, respectful, welcoming, adaptive learning, expectations are set, and collaborative learning can be found in classrooms. A teacher's approach to creating a nurturing and successful learning environment for her students can have a profound effect on her students. However, if a classroom setting is lacking in positive and encouraging characteristics, it can have undesirable effects.

Educators have their own philosophies about delivering instruction and these may affect their approaches used in educating students (Ford, 2005). Within each classroom, there is a diverse group of students. This diverse group may include students with special needs, defined as students who have been diagnosed with a disability from a medical or educational setting, and may also contain students who have different cultural backgrounds. According to Montgomery

(2001), many teachers may not entirely understand other cultures besides their own, and this lack of understanding can cause limitations to a student's educational success.

A teacher's job is to know her students to the best of her ability. Every student has the right to feel valued and respected in a classroom. A teacher's understanding of a student's preference of learning leads to providing an enriching and engaging classroom atmosphere. Teachers can provide a variety of enhancements in their classroom settings which will be beneficial to their class of diverse learners. A teacher can provide a responsive classroom through appropriate training, understanding of students' learning preference and the desire to promote a positive environment relationships. Not only can a teacher develop an environment enriched with positive social and emotional aspects, they can also alter the aspects of the environment, such as seating, lighting, and sounds.

### **Importance and Purpose of Study**

The social, emotional and physical aspects of a classroom can shape the processes and activities of a classroom. To assist in the transformation to a responsive classroom, the teacher's mindset may have to be altered. According to Sobel and Taylor (2006), "It is not at all uncommon for general and special education teachers to face the challenge of teaching in ways they were not taught, to learners who are oftentimes unfamiliar to them, and in classroom contexts that are outside their experiential realm" (p. 28). Sobel and Taylor continued explaining not all educators are ready to teach all the diverse learners. Many teachers are being challenged in their own classroom.

A strong, engaging environment is needed for diverse learners. I am currently a general education teacher to 25 first-grade students. My classroom contains students from various

backgrounds. I have students with disabilities, students without disabilities, and students from different cultures. My diverse classroom creates a challenge for me in developing a positive learning environment. Thus, the purpose of my research project is to understand how general education teachers can build a classroom environment that will provide an engaging environment whereby increasing social and emotional skills and academic learning, while reducing negative behaviors that decrease student attention and diminish available instructional time. Teachers need to be provided with appropriate training that will support their planning for and development of positive learning environments.

### **Research Question**

In this paper I explore the general education approaches and designs in creating an effective teaching environment for a classroom with diverse needs. The main question of this literature review is: “What education practices and designs within a classroom can promote an effective teaching environment for a diverse classroom?”

### **Literature Search Descriptions**

In collecting information for this study, I used the electronic library system of St. Cloud State University, searching articles in the following online journal sources: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO and Eric. I used search terms either individually or in combination in reference to “classroom management,” “classroom environment,” “teaching,” “responsive learning classroom,” “classroom design,” “classroom effect,” and “school environment.”

### **Definition of Terms**

Active learning classroom: student-centered, technology-rich learning environments (Center for Educational Innovation, 2015).



Classroom environment: educational concepts, including the physical setting, the psychological environment created through social contexts and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviors (Miller & Cunningham, 2011).

Traditional classroom: learning space in which the teacher provides face-to-face instruction to students and communication between and among teacher and students is face to face (IGI Global, 2016).

Physical: existing in a form that you can touch or see (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2016).

Social: interaction of an individual with another individual or a group (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

Emotional: relating to emotions and the expression of emotions (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

Disruptive Behavior: to interrupt the normal progress or activity. Behaviors that impact others (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

Decibel: a unit for measuring how loud a sound is (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

Modifications: individualized changes made to the content and performance expectations for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Differentiated instruction: a method of designing and delivering instruction to best reach each student (Weselby, 2014).

Curriculum: established courses that are taught by an educational institution (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

IEP: Individualized Education Plan creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, and students to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Graphemes: a letter of the alphabet. All the letters and letter combinations that represent a phoneme, *f=ph* (American Heritage Dictionary, 2015).

### **Closing**

In the next chapter I discuss, in a literature review, how general education teachers can provide a positive learning environment for a diverse group of students. I briefly consider the different variables affecting an educator's design of a classroom. When a classroom of diverse learners is being considered, significant planning needs to be done. This research was planned to help provide a variety of examples that can be applied to any classroom.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the literature related to classroom design. The physical, social, and emotional aspects of design are all considered. The aspects of design are considered in order to answer the research question of “What education practices and designs within a classroom can promote an effective teaching environment for a classroom with diverse needs?”

### **Addressing Physical Needs in a Classroom**

Every student has the right to learn and there are a variety of ways in which an educational setting becomes an effective learning environment. Downing and Eichinger (2003) stated, “Physical placement of students with moderate or severe disabilities in a general education class is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful inclusion” (p. 26). This is also true for students who have other needs in addition to their disabilities. There are other physical aspects that can enhance a student's learning preference.

Each student has a preference of learning. A student's preference of learning may include learning by watching, listening, feeling, or movement. Visual learners must be able to look at some type of visual display such as pictures, a whiteboard, a bulletin board, projector screens, and/or flip charts to acquire information. They also may use more colors and diagrams in their own notebooks to help organize the information being taught. Auditory learners are students who prefer to receive information by listening. They may not take a lot of notes, but find it more beneficial to record the lesson to play back at a later time. Kinesthetic learners prefer to be actively involved, may have difficulty sitting for a long time, and prefer to work with manipulatives. Students can identify with different preferences and a teacher's ability to identify

a student's learning preference or preferences will help him or her design a positive learning environment to engage all students.

The first thing teachers usually do, prior to starting the school year, consists of planning and physically setting up their classroom. Taking into account, the variety of students' learning preferences, teachers can make the classroom convey a positive and safe environment that encourages engaged students. "Disruptive behavior (e.g., speaking without permission, getting out of seat) often interferes with students' engagement in the learning process" (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010, p. 8). Disruptive behavior may be one challenge for teachers, but another challenge is the creation of a positive learning environment that invites student engagement. Guardion and Fullerton noted a classroom should be well-organized to build a positive learning environment which promotes nourishing relationship between teachers and students. In addition, a positive relationship can decrease the amount of challenging behaviors that exist in classrooms (Guardion & Fullerton, 2010).

Auditory challenges are an area to focus on when planning an engaging environment. Students who are auditory learners find it difficult to engage themselves in lessons if the sound in the classroom is distracting to them. DiSarno, Schowalter, and Grassa (2002) identified many contributors to a noisy classroom; these include "hall traffic, street noise through open windows, fans blowing, lights humming, overhead projectors in use, and general noise caused by a group of children" (p. 21).

The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) "recommends that the average unoccupied classroom should not exceed a 30-dB noise level. Average unoccupied classroom noise levels, however, range from 45 to 60 dB" (Disarno et al., 2002, p. 21). ASHA

compares sound levels of 30-db (decibel) to a whisper and a quiet library and a decibel level ranging from 45 to 60 dB is compared to noises of a moderate rainfall and a typical voice level in conversation. When the classroom is occupied, the noise level obviously increases. DiSarno et al. (2002) gave examples of how to be proactive when planning for the engagement of auditory learners. Disarno et al. suggested that a teacher's voice should be heard over the background noises in order for students to listen and learn more. A teacher may wear an amplification system to help his or her voice be heard, but if this idea is not available, there are more suggestions for providing better acoustics able to absorb sound.

Disarno et al.'s (2002) suggestions include:

Physical modifications can be made to the walls, windows, floors, and ceilings. Carpeting floors and installing acoustical ceiling tile helps to absorb middle- and high-frequency sounds, reducing the reverberation present in the classroom...Functional classroom furniture, such as cork bulletin boards and bookshelves placed at strategic positions will reduce reverberation within a classroom. Mobile bulletin boards and chalkboards placed at nonparallel angles to the walls will aid in the reduction of reflected sound. (p. 22)

In addition to noise-level, other physical aspects may be altered to support learning for all preferences. Physical aspects such as adapting the seating options, lighting, and temperature can help produce an engaging classroom environment. Various seating options are available for students who need a modification in their current seating arrangement. Informal seating such as standing desks, bean bag chairs, sitting or lying on the floor are examples of modifications to a student's seat. A student's comfort when working or listening to instruction can increase his or her attention span and attitude (Burke & Burke-Samide, 2004). Classroom spacing can also be modified to encourage attentiveness. Guardino and Fullerton (2010) provided examples such as

“arranging classroom furniture to define learning areas, improving accessibility and availability of materials, delineating traffic patterns, and improving organization of materials” (p. 10).

Students’ ability to learn can be affected by the lighting in a classroom (Burke & Burke-Samide, 2004). Lighting can vary from the use of natural to fluorescent light. Students may prefer brightly lit areas or areas that are dimmer. To provide a softer lit area, placing a light covering over the ceiling lights or turning on a limited amount of lights, if there are multiple light switches in the classroom, can easily dim the lights in a classroom. Also, selecting a few light switches to turn on will soften the brightness in the classroom, while having a brighter area remaining for students who prefer this type of lighting.

Room temperature is another physical element that can be modified to increase engagement in the classroom. “Most students prefer a warm yet comfortable instructional climate” (Burke & Burke-Samide, 2004, p. 237). It may not be possible to modify the temperature in a classroom, but a teacher can allow the children to have sweatshirts or blankets nearby if they would like to feel warmer. Students can increase active learning when their environment is physically modified to meet their learning preferences. In addition, students may also increase learning from developing healthy and strong relationships with their peers and teachers.

### **Addressing Social and Emotional Needs in a Classroom**

Downing and Eichinger (2003) wrote:

If we merely place a student in a general education class with no thought about how we will actively involve the student, we may have minimal or no expectations of the student or may influence the student’s peers to have a negative impression of the student. There is the emotional side, which is building relationships with each student as well as the physical side, which is how a classroom is designed. (p. 26)

Students need to feel safe and valued in a classroom while being provided with numerous opportunities to be actively engaged. A teacher can provide for these needs with appropriate training, experience, and knowledge of the personal and cultural background of each child. With the growing numbers of students requiring more social, emotional, and physical needs, teachers are acquiring additional strategies to help support each student. Prater (2003) provided a system that will help teachers reflect on what is needed for their students to make progress and succeed. Prater's system is the process, "SHE WILL SUCCEED" (p. 58). Table 1 shows what each letter in the acronym "SHE WILL SUCCEED" is defined as:

**Table 1****The SHE WILL SUCCEED Process**

<b>1. S</b>	Show concern for the targeted student.
<b>2. H</b>	Have faith in yourself and your targeted student.
<b>3. E</b>	Examine your classroom.
<b>4. W</b>	Write down the targeted student's strengths and limitations.
<b>5. I</b>	Include skills, learning preferences, and behaviors specific to your classroom.
<b>6. L</b>	Line up student and classroom characteristics as those that facilitate, provide barriers, or are neutral for the individual student's learning success.
<b>7. L</b>	List 1-3 classroom characteristics you could modify and skills you could teach.
<b>8. S</b>	Select and implement adaptation(s) and goal(s).
<b>9. U</b>	Use effective teaching principles to teach goals.
<b>10. C</b>	Collaborate with others as needed.
<b>11. C</b>	Change adaptations and instruction as necessary.
<b>12. E</b>	Evaluate results.
<b>13. E</b>	Exit here OR
<b>14. D</b>	Do again.

(Prater, 2003, p. 58)

The first step in Prater's (2003) table is: "Showing concern for the targeted student" (p. 58). Showing concern for all students is sometimes difficult for teachers to provide. Teachers can feel frustrated by the increasing amount of the diverse needs of their students, the amount of planning necessary to support the needs of all these students, and by the lack of



discipline among our students. Establishing a positive tone can show the students they are cared for, while increasing the inactive engagement.

Promoting a safe and positive classroom environment can be supported by educators obtaining appropriate training for the PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) intervention program. According to the PBIS website (2016) “PBIS is based on principles of applied behavior analysis and the prevention approach and values of positive behavior.” PBIS encourages desired positive behaviors, and an educator supports these behaviors by teaching, modeling, and reinforcing them. Students participating in PBIS programs are able to gain a full understanding of the desired positive behaviors and are able to independently demonstrate these behaviors, which in turn impacts the classroom environment. PBIS is part of the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach. RTI is defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche et al., 2005, p. 3).

PBIS requires each school to develop a positive behavior matrix. This matrix specifies the desired behaviors that are to occur in each setting within a school. These settings may include the classroom, hallway, lunchroom, gymnasium, locker bay, and other areas inside and outside of the school. By displaying the expected behaviors, students become part of some type of reward system. The reward system is anything the educator puts in place, whether verbal praise or stickers or a reward slip or other prize. The goal of PBIS is diminishing the negative behaviors while increasing positive behaviors. Sinnott (2009) believed there is an increase in the time available for learning when teachers are spending less time on negative behaviors.

A teacher who is focusing on promoting a positive learning environment when giving positive feedback should “strive to be specific, immediate, consistent, frequent, and preventative” (Perle, 2016, p. 251). Also, the teacher should avoid giving negative feedback that may reverse the effect of the positive learning environment. Positive behaviors enhance the emotional and social skills of students with diverse needs. PBIS and RTI both lay the foundation for differentiated instruction. Each intervention program has the capability to demonstrate the three-tiered approach by having components in each tier. Tier 1 is aimed at the entire classroom, Tier 2 is aimed at a group of students targeted to need more direct interventions, and Tier 3 includes the interventions aimed at specific individuals.

Tier 1 includes the designated general curriculum used to plan the desired social skills expected from all students. Sandomierski, Kincaid, and Algozzine (2007) stated: “For proponents of PBIS, the universal curriculum consists of the school-wide expectations, rules, and procedures, as well as the lesson plans used to teach them” (PBIS, 2016, p. 2). When a teacher delivers the intervention and it is done successfully with fidelity, students needing more help with behavioral support can be identified. To monitor the success of all the students in a classroom, a screening measure needs to be in place to be able to identify students who are at-risk of not being successful. Educators continuously look at results from the universal data and analyze them to help make decisions of who needs to be provided a Tier 2 intervention.

In Tier 2, a student “has been identified as needing additional support, both RTI and PBIS advocate for using evidence-based interventions that require resources appropriate to the student’s level of need, and then monitoring the progress of students receiving those interventions” (Sandomierski et al., 2007, pp. 3-4). Small groups, such as “social skills groups,

group counseling, or mentoring programs” (Sandomierski et al., 2007, p. 4) are developed to provide support for students in Tier 2. This tier does not require a large amount of time or staff and some of the collection of data can be done in class by the teacher.

A check-in/check-out program can be used to monitor a student’s progress. The student’s goals and objectives are typed onto a sheet and the student will be assessed on the behaviors that are shown. “As the teacher fills out the rating scale brief, specific, verbal feedback is provided to the student about why they earned that rating. The most obvious drawback to this method of progress monitoring is that the teacher’s reported opinion is being measured, not the actual instances of academic or social behavior” (Sandomierski et al., 2007, p. 4). With every Tier 2 intervention program, it is important for any educator to make sure he or she is following the intervention with fidelity. Since, the Tier 2 uses evidence-based interventions, fidelity is important because it is followed by the state and national agencies. Evidence-based interventions are not only used in Tier 2, but also in Tier 3.

Tier 3 follows the Tier 2 interventions, however, it focuses on individuals needing extra support in a given area rather than a small group of students. A school team meets to go over the student’s collected data, and while analyzing the student’s information from the Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions the team will develop a specific plan that is geared for the individual student. A behavioral or mental health rating scale will be completed by a member of the team. Throughout the Tier 3 approach, the team will create a Behavior Improvement Plan (BIP) which will include evidence-based interventions and they will analyze and monitor the intervention/s and determine if the intervention/s are working for the student (Sandomierski et al., 2007, p. 5). Sandomierski et al. explained during Tier 3’s intervention, the student’s response to it should be closely

monitored. If the intervention is not causing a positive result, the team will involve more school professionals to conduct informal and formal observations. The data from the observations will be used to determine the need for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

According to PBIS (2016), PBIS has been effective in all types of settings, such as urban, rural and suburban areas. PBIS has four major components:

1. Identify the expected behaviors;
2. Teach, model and practice what those behaviors look like, sound like, and feel like;
3. Specifically praise appropriate behavior with private or public acknowledgement; and
4. Measure outcome data to determine successes and barriers to reaching the desired goals. (PBIS, 2016)

Not only does the PBIS (2016) program support all students, it helps with the creation of a culturally responsive classroom. PBIS and a culturally responsive classroom often require educators to evaluate themselves because oftentimes the educators find themselves not understanding different cultures and/or the different personal backgrounds of students. Montgomery (2001) said: “Many teachers are faced with limited understanding of cultures other than their own and the possibility that this limitation will negatively affect their students’ ability to become successful learners” (p. 4). In the same way as understanding the social needs of students with different cultural backgrounds, students with special needs may also show an educator the limitations of his or her teaching abilities.

Montgomery (2001) encouraged educators to reflect on their attitudes and current ways of teaching to determine if a change is needed in their current practices. Building a positive relationship with any student is an important factor for an educator trying to create a safe environment for learning. Also, it helps a student to feel valued and respected. Table 2 is a Diversity Self-Assessment to help educators evaluate themselves and reflect on their findings.

**Table 2****Diversity Self-Assessment**

- What is my definition of diversity?
- Do the children in my classroom and school come from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- What are my perceptions of students from different racial or ethnic groups? With language or dialects from mine? With special needs?
- What are the sources of these perceptions (e.g., friends, relatives, television, movies)?
- How do I respond to my students, based on these perceptions?
- Have I experienced others' making assumptions about me based on my membership in a specific group? How did I feel?
- What steps do I need to take to learn about the students from diverse backgrounds in my school and classroom?
- How often do social relationships develop among students from different racial or ethnic backgrounds in my classroom and in the school? What is the nature of these relationships?
- In what ways do I make my instructional program responsive to the needs of the diverse groups in my classroom?
- What kinds of information, skills, and resources do I need to acquire to effectively teach from a multicultural perspective?
- In what ways do I collaborate with other educators, family members, and community groups to address the needs of all my students?

Montgomery, 2001, p. 4

The self-assessment in Table 2, with minor adjustments, can also be used to evaluate an educator's understanding of students with special needs. After the self-assessment is taken, an educator can "reflect on their responses and make some critical decisions regarding ways to constructively embrace diversity and, thus, create learning environments that respond to the needs of their students" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 5). Prater's (2003) second number in Table 1 is "Have faith in yourself and your targeted student" (p. 58). If a positive learning environment is provided for each student to feel safe and valued, a strong relationship between a teacher and student can be built and supported. This positive relationship can help students trust their teacher when the teacher is showing his or her faith in them. Students can easily become passive or

inactive learners, but if they feel determination from their teacher who believes in them, students can gain more confidence and will want to increase their own learning power.

A classroom of diverse learners can be a struggle for a teacher planning to meet the specific needs of all students. A teacher will need to plan for modifying and adapting lessons and the classroom environment. Before figuring out what needs to be adapted or modified, a teacher needs to follow the third step in Prater's (2003) process, "Examine your classroom" (p. 59). Teachers can examine the classroom with the use of the acronym CRIME. CRIME describes the five elements necessary in a classroom. The five elements are "Curriculum, Rules, Instruction, Materials, and Environment" (Prater, 2003, p. 59).

**Table 3**

**Examine Your Classroom with the Use of CRIME**

<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What determines the curriculum in my classroom?</li> <li>• What are the state and/or district standards?</li> <li>• How difficult, comprehensive, and important is the material?</li> </ul>
<b>Rules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are my posted rules?</li> <li>• How well do I make students accountable for keeping the rules?</li> <li>• What behaviors are important to me that are not posted?</li> </ul>
<b>Instruction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do I usually present new information?</li> <li>• What kind of assignments and tests do I require?</li> <li>• Do I expect individual or group work or both?</li> <li>• How important is homework?</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What supplementary teaching materials are available to me?</li> <li>• Do students have access to support materials such as computers, calculators, and cassette players?</li> <li>• Are students expected to supply their own basic materials?</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the furniture in my classroom arranged?</li> <li>• What are the visual and auditory distracters in my classroom?</li> <li>• What time of day am I teaching this content?</li> </ul>

Source: Prater (2003), p. 59

A general education teacher, as well as a special education teacher, can modify their current practices to enhance the learning environment. After using Prater's (2003) CRIME acronym, teachers are able to reflect on their classroom and alter it to support the diverse needs

of students. The fourth, fifth, and sixth steps of Prater's process are focused on identifying a student's strengths and limitations, learning preferences, skills, and behaviors. To help a student succeed in an educational setting, a teacher needs to understand the student's strengths and limitations. Using the PBIS (2016) program and a responsive classroom, a teacher can determine a student's skills, learning preferences, and behaviors and she can also analyze what classroom characteristics, whether social and emotional and/or physical, can facilitate or limit the success of the student. After listing the student's and classroom's characteristics, a teacher can choose 1-3 of them to modify and choose 1-3 skills to teach and reinforce. Downsizing the list of characteristics is the seventh step in Prater's system.

By identifying a student's characteristics, a teacher can begin the eighth step of Prater's (2003) process by planning and producing an environment that will help each child succeed. Teachers may realize they need to incorporate more adaptations and modifications to their curriculum. Montgomery (2001) noted a few methods, such as using explicit, strategic instruction, instructional scaffolding, and establishing a classroom atmosphere that respects individuals and their cultures.

Explicit, strategic instruction promotes the think-aloud method and reciprocal questioning. The think-aloud method is a procedure where a teacher "reads a passage and talks through the thought processes for students" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 5). The reciprocal questioning method is "where teachers and students engage in shared reading, discussion, and questioning" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 5). Both of these methods encourage students to ask themselves questions, while reading, to understand the material.

Using instructional scaffolding, teachers can “determine the difference between what students can accomplish independently and what they can accomplish with instructional support” (Montgomery, 2001, p. 5). The teachers then produce teaching instructions that are supportive of what the student needs to be successful with his or her learning. Instructional scaffolding and explicit, strategic instruction are both used to encourage the students to learn independently, but if they are needing help, a teacher is able to decide what and how much help is needed for the students to succeed while promoting more difficult tasks.

The strategy of establishing a classroom atmosphere that respects students and their cultures is adaptable to meet the needs of all students. A respectful atmosphere provides students with the feeling of being safe and valued. “Teachers must attend to all students and try to involve them equally in all class activities. This recognition provides students with a positive feeling about their worth as individuals and productive members in their classroom” (Montgomery, 2001, p. 6). Montgomery suggested providing relevant bulletin boards and a resourceful book area to promote a positive classroom environment. The bulletin boards could display current events that depict diverse people promoting accomplishments, pictures of community leaders from various backgrounds, and original pieces of work by the students in the classroom. A book corner could be an interchanging area for reading material focusing on different interests, historical events, student-written material, and anything that promotes the learning of various cultures and backgrounds.

Sobel and Taylor (2006) wrote “teachers must affirm students for the dynamic abilities, cultures, languages, and backgrounds they bring to the classroom” (p. 28). Positive and healthy relationships are the strongest anchor a teacher can have with his or her students. A positive



relationship builds the foundation of a successful learning environment where students are engaged because of the dedication they feel from their teacher. Regardless of the learning environment, teachers often find themselves using “lecturing, reading, giving directions, and whole-group discussion” (Downing & Eichinger, 2003, p. 26). These four teaching methods are well-known and are not uncommon, but realizing these methods may not always promote desired learning for students with special needs, can help modify a teacher’s teaching strategy.

### **The Need for Responsive Teaching**

“We must plan instructional activities that promote skill acquisition and create a classroom climate that promotes a sense of belonging for all students” (Downing & Eichinger, 2003, p. 27). Instructional activities must be purposeful, while tending to the needs of all students and promoting numerous skills. Inclusion is not just physically placing a student in a classroom, it is the promise that this student is being provided the academic, motor, behavioral, communication, and social skills needed. Downing and Eichinger encouraged teachers to look for “learning opportunities that could become part of an activity” (p. 28). Students can strengthen other skills by being provided with opportunities to practice during lessons or activities.

Small opportunities occurring in daily activities, provide great practice for students with moderate or severe disabilities as well as other students in the classroom. For example, a teacher may have a student distribute materials for a lesson, providing practice in developing various skills, such as following directions, participating in social interactions, and practicing handling of classroom materials (Downing & Eichinger, 2003). Downing and Eichinger provided an example of an opportunity for a student who has a low skill level in following directions. A

teacher asks this specific student to model the directions for the rest of the class. The teacher is guiding the student through the directions, while the student is learning the process by doing the activity first.

Providing opportunities to support various skills is a characteristic of an effective and efficient teacher. The students benefit from the opportunities, because they are being actively engaged. Determining what students need is a challenging task to most educators, but can more easily be identified if an educator is reflective about her own teaching. A reflective teacher can “examine and respond to practices that effectively reach students with a range of backgrounds and diverse abilities” (Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 29). A reflective teacher can develop her teaching techniques to include using responsive teaching.

According to Sobel and Taylor (2006), “Responsive teaching practices encompass all aspects of classroom life, including the classroom environment designed by the teacher” (p. 29). They provide a table of components of responsive teaching and the application of the strategies into a classroom of diverse learners. The classroom examples are from observations, completed by Sobel and Taylor, from a highly diverse class, Ms. Hillerman’s. Ms. Hillerman’s class contained students from various cultures and included students identified with a disability. A discussion about the components follows Table 4.

Table 4

## Classroom Applications of Responsive Teaching Components

COMPONENT AND DEFINITION	CLASSROOM EXAMPLES	RATIONALE
<p>The classroom <b>environmental print</b> visually demonstrates that the teacher values diversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class quilt</li> <li>• Book covers in multicultural topics Corresponding to units of study</li> <li>• “Friends” poster in different languages</li> </ul>	<p>Ms. Hillerman recognizes the impact of stimulating and colorful displays that support the learning styles of visual learners. Having students create individual squares to the quilt helped to build a sense of community in the classroom. Visual and verbal sharing allowed students and the teacher to learn about the student and family as well as students’ cultural backgrounds. Multicultural children literature and biographies of women history were leveled to match students’ reading abilities and used stimulate sharing. By sharing their lives and feelings, the class begins to understand and respect the pluralism of their school society. Peer-acquaintance activities (friends’ poster) help students feel more comfortable to engage in learning activities.</p>
<p><b>Grouping strategies</b> enhance student achievement and promote non-like-group interaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative groups</li> <li>• Color-coded spinners</li> <li>• Primary spokesperson, yet every student gets an opportunity</li> </ul>	<p>Students are encouraged to talk and confer with each other. Heterogeneous groupings provide supplemental strategies to meet the needs of individual learners. Students have multiple opportunities to support and encourage each other. Simultaneously hearing the discussion and seeing the work can benefit students who have difficulty focusing on reading or writing. Listening is a strong link to language development and provides models for language use for second language acquisition.</p>

Table 4 (continued)

COMPONENT AND DEFINITION	CLASSROOM EXAMPLES	RATIONALE
<b>Instructional materials</b> illustrate valuing and promoting understanding of diversity factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actual cookies and pictures of cookies representing different cultures</li> <li>• Transparency sheets and markers</li> <li>• Writing prompts poster</li> </ul>	Engaging multisensory materials supports students' kinesthetic learning styles. Visual supports such as sentence starters enhance student opportunity by providing assistance to process, organize, and initiate the writing assignment.
<b>Lesson adaptations</b> articulate the process of accommodating individual strengths and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple and varied examples of modeling</li> <li>• Responses can contain words, pictures, numbers, or symbols</li> <li>• Team support</li> </ul>	Modeling the steps to a math problem, for example, is crucial before students are able to independently practice it. The teacher ensures multiple differentiated opportunities for students to practice new skills, and allows for additional oral language for those students with learning and language differences. Providing choice in student-generated work allows multiple modes of expression and contributes to increased student ownership.
<b>Distribution of attention</b> demonstrates respect for students' diverse abilities and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative learning groups</li> <li>• Clear roles for group participants</li> <li>• Individual student conferences</li> </ul>	The teacher emphasizes the importance of community building and social decision-making. Cooperative learning helps students to be more accepting of diversity, including greater sensitivity to students with special needs. These structured arrangements also help students understand the reasons behind their decisions to implement a strategy to solve a problem. Meeting individually with students to discuss their work, behavior, or interests has powerful and positive impact.
<b>Evidence of student understanding</b> ensures all students understand and can carry out procedures for instructional activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework</li> <li>• Group presentations</li> <li>• Response in math journal</li> <li>• Feedback via self-assessment</li> </ul>	Students demonstrate understanding of a concept through verbal expression, drawing, and/or writing. The teacher is able to emphasize the value of different means of expression. Student self-assessments support students in monitoring their won progress.

Table 4 (continued)

COMPONENT AND DEFINITION	CLASSROOM EXAMPLES	RATIONALE
<p><b>Positive standards</b> for classroom behavior are consistent and equitable for all students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher moves about the room</li> <li>• Students held responsible for each other</li> <li>• Self-assessment</li> <li>• High expectations</li> </ul>	<p>The teacher displays high expectations by referring to her students as “mathematicians.” Her classroom management approach emphasizes the importance of self-regulation, community building, and social decision-making. She appreciates the work products need to be personalized by students to ensure their ownership. She provides students with scaffolded supports and tools to ensure that they meet her high expectations.</p>

Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 31

The seven components: environmental print, grouping strategies, instructional materials, lesson adaptations, distribution of attention, evidence of student understanding, and positive standards for classroom behavior are provided in the first column with a brief description labeling each component. The second column provides examples of each component found in Ms. Hillerman’s classroom. The third column provides the rationale for Ms. Hillerman’s classroom design to be responsive. These components are provided as a guide for educators to help design a responsive classroom environment that engages opportunities for students by being “more meaningful, more inclusive, and more sensitive to the needs of all students” (Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 31).

The ninth step in Prater’s (2003) process is to “Use effective teaching principles to teach goals” (p. 62). Educators are an advocate for their students’ learning environment and “responsive teaching calls for teachers to create respectful, inclusive, supportive environments that foster authentic learning communities” (Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 34). This type of environment also demonstrates social understanding, tolerance and respect by both the teachers

and students (Sobel & Taylor, 2006). Sobel and Taylor mentioned a strong force that influences the building of a responsive classroom is the teacher's own teaching philosophy. The authors encourage teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices to determine what they need to alter in order to create a responsive learning environment. Sobel and Taylor provide a reflective practices worksheet in Table 5.

**Table 5**

**Reflective Practices Worksheet**

<b>Components of Responsive Classroom Design</b>	<b>How Do Teachers Demonstrate Their Responsiveness in the Classroom?</b>  <b>Respond to the following prompts to assess your practice</b>
Environmental print	<input type="checkbox"/> List three examples of environmental print that reflect the different learning styles of your students. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify two examples of environmental supports for the daily schedules, procedures, and routines.
Grouping strategies	<input type="checkbox"/> Identify three proactive strategies you use to foster student belonging, acceptance, and encouragement of each other.
Instructional materials	<input type="checkbox"/> From the last unit of study, identify the materials that were the most stimulating and thought provoking for your students.
Lesson adaptations	<input type="checkbox"/> Write three to five questions you have regarding appropriate adaptations for specific students in an upcoming math unit. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify two students who are "at risk for making adequate yearly progress." List the ways you are currently adapting their instruction.
Distribution of attention	<input type="checkbox"/> Identify two ways that every student in your class has daily opportunities to be successful.
Gain evidence of student understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Name three alternatives that your students can use to demonstrate they have learned the major concepts in a lesson. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify the strategies you use to ensure that each student is given ample opportunity to experience success.
Positive standards for classroom behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Identify a classroom rule or procedure that truly benefits students as opposed to one that is primarily there for convenience. <input type="checkbox"/> Name two ways you encourage classroom freedom without infringing on the rights of the other students. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify a specific intervention that has helped a student learn better, as opposed to just eliminating disruptive behavior.

Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 34

Sobel and Taylor (2006) stated: “Teachers today must demonstrate a real commitment to an honest personal appraisal of their teaching styles and classroom practices if they are to meet the scope and intensity of the academic, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional needs of their students” (p. 34).

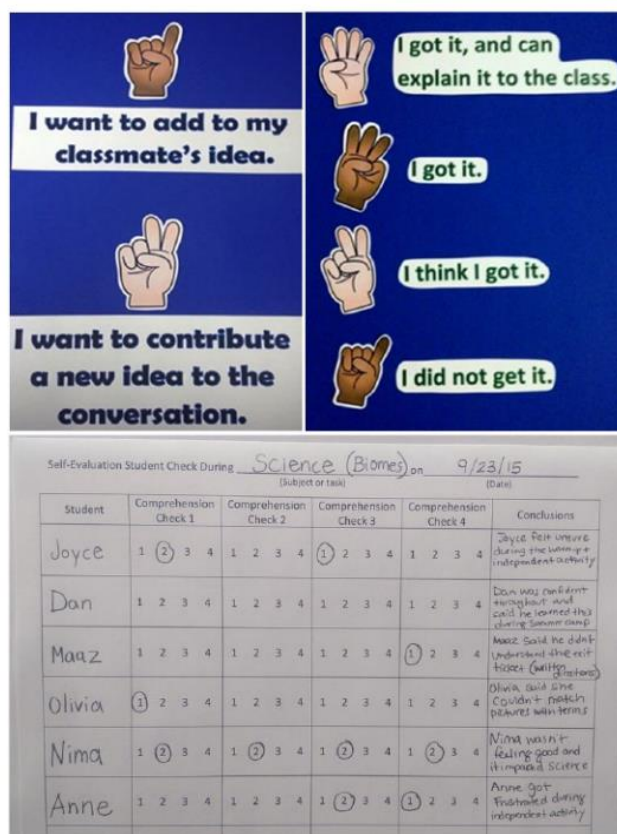
The social and emotional side of learning is important when building the foundation of a positive learning environment. Once a relationship has been established, a teacher may wonder how to keep his or her students engaged in this type of environment. There are several strategies teachers can incorporate into their teaching practices and one of the most common is whole-group instruction. Whole-group instruction can be difficult to actively engage all students in the classroom when there is a diverse group of students. Nagro, Hooks, Fraser, and Cornelius (2016) wrote “teachers should strive to incorporate strategies that increase opportunities for student participation, engagement, and self-evaluation” (p. 243). Nagro et al. supported their desire for educators to increase participation, engagement and self-evaluation by using strategies that encourage engagement, while gathering informal observations of students' progress. Nagro et al. provided strategies to promote engagement of students, who have a difficult time focusing on the instruction.

Examples of proactive strategies to promote engagement include: “proximity, high rates of opportunities to respond, high-probability requests, and choice making” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). Whole-group responsive instruction encourages students to respond in a variety of manners, such as “through verbal, gestural, written, or digital modes of responding” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). It is common for students that are high-achieving, respond at a better percentage than those that may need more amount of time, not comfortable with speaking in

front of peers, or those that are disengaged. A teacher needs to find a proactive method that will encourage all students to respond.

Exploring and establishing methods of activating prior knowledge, increasing levels of comprehension and maintaining active participation is a challenging task for educators when teaching a class of diverse learners. Whole-group response techniques can help students enhance their sense of belonging in the classroom and promote social skills. With a formative assessment, these proactive techniques can help track participation and performance. Nagro et al. (2016) provided examples of how to effectively engage students with special needs during whole-group instruction. The first example is the use of hand signals. “Hand signals can be used to promote student engagement and check for comprehension” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). Figure 1 shows a variety of hand signals that may be used for tracking comprehension.





**Figure 1: Hand Signals with Example Tracking Chart**

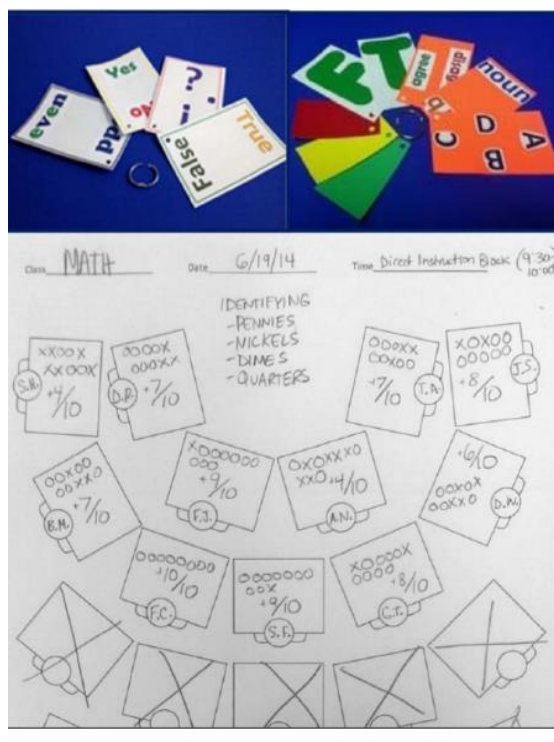
“Hand signals can be used to promote student engagement and check for comprehension” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). During a classroom discussion, a teacher can guide the discussion by hand signals. Students holding up one finger show they want to add to a classmate’s idea. Students holding up two fingers show they want to contribute a new idea to the conversation. Hand signals can also demonstrate a student’s comprehension skills.

Another hand signal tracking method is a meaning for the use of one through four fingers to show a student's level of comprehension. A student showing one finger does not understand the information. A student showing two fingers thinks he or she understands the information. A student displaying three fingers are showing he or she understands the information and a student

displaying four fingers has a full understanding and he or she would like to explain his or her information to the class. This model encourages the students to be accountable by reflecting on their own comprehension level. These hand signals also provide an excellent way for students to pair up with someone else to discuss their understanding. For example, a student who understood the information can find a partner who did not and the partners learn from each other in this peer learning opportunity.

Through the use of formative assessment charts, teachers can make decisions about future lessons. During a lesson, a teacher is able to assess students' hand signals to determine their comprehension levels. This detailed information can determine if a student is doing well or if more support is needed from a peer, a teacher, or another educator. Another whole-group response strategy is the use of response cards.

The use of response cards is an alternative to choral responding in a classroom. Choral responding is described as being a whole-group response when a teacher asks for an answer and the class answers in unison. Choral responding is often difficult in encouraging students who may have special needs, are passive, or lack the confidence needed to verbally answer. Nagro et al. (2016) described response cards as involving “students holding up cards with predetermined answers to respond to a teacher-initiated prompt, eliminating the need for verbal or written responding” (p. 245). Figure 2 shows what response cards can look like.



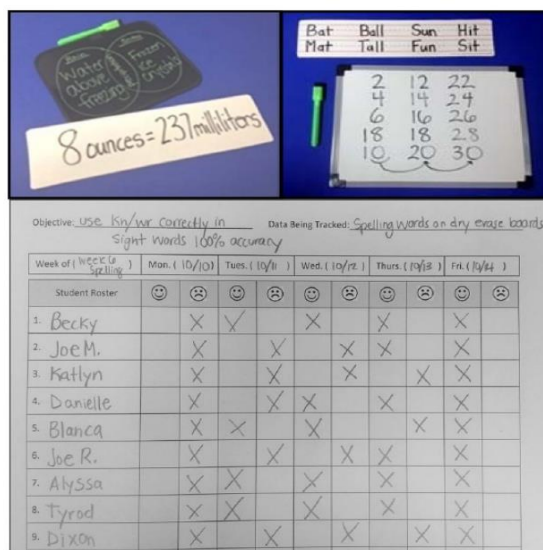
**Figure 2: Response Cards with Student Tracking Chart Example**

“Response cards can be true-false, multiple choice or more content-specific, such as a set of graphemes, vocabulary words, parts of speech, or story elements” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 246). The purpose of response cards is to support a positive learning environment for all students. This response technique can provide a method of participation for students who would otherwise not participate (Heward, Gardner, Cavanaugh, Courson, Grossi, & Barbetta, 1996).

For students who have special needs, lack confidence or be passive, response cards provide extra-wait time. Wait time can be demonstrated in the use of “think-pair-share—where students think through their response, express their reasoning to a peer and obtain immediate feedback on their understanding, and then share their response card out in the whole group” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 246). Figure 2 also provides an example of a formative assessment, a tracking system a teacher may use during the use of response cards. This formative assessment

allows the teacher to monitor the progress of students in a specific area of content. This form of data makes it easier to help track IEP goals and learning objectives teachers may have for their students. One more whole-group response strategy is the use of written responses.

Written responses can be used on “exit tickets, open-ended poll questions, surveys, and dry-erase boards” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 246). Nagro et al. explained written responses usage may be more appropriate when teachers need to make accurate observations about how students are understanding their instructional objectives. Written responses can prevent students from working ahead of the others and is a great way for student to show their work, especially on the work of a math problem. Figure 3 shows the use of dry-erase boards.



**Figure 3: Dry-Erase Written Responses with a Student Tracking Example**

“Students can write a vocabulary term, rewrite a sentence using correct punctuation, or construct an extended response to a probe. Students also can create pictorial or representational written responses when the teacher probes allow for it” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 247). Also, in Figure 4 there is a tracking system. Using this system data are collected in spelling during a

5-day week. A chart like this can be used several different ways to track participation and the progress of their content knowledge.

Three strategies for whole-group response have been described and are examples of how to promote a positive learning environment for a diverse group of learners. “Increasing students’ opportunities to respond and providing student comprehension self-checks as well as capturing this information using formative assessments are very important topics for all teachers” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 247). Whole-group response strategies provide a teacher with an increase amount of data that can be used for planning future lessons, planning small groups for students who may need more support, and for keeping track of the students’ progress in certain areas of content. Furthermore, these whole-group response techniques also encourage active participation from all students.

The tenth through fourteenth steps in Prater’s (2003) process are to “Collaborate with others as needed, change adaptations and instruction as necessary, evaluate results, exit here or do again” (p. 58). These five steps are all about evaluating the process. Did the adaptations or modifications help the student? Did the teacher reflect on his or her teaching style to determine if she needs to change current teaching methods to incorporate beneficial teaching practices? If a teacher is able to answer yes, then she can continue on with her teaching practices, if not, she is able to go back and try different practices to provide an effective learning environment.

### **Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusion**

Fulfilling the variety of needs of students in a classroom is a complicated task and can be stressful for educators. Creating an environment that is engaging and encouraging is a goal for many teachers; however, at times, seems unreachable. Several resources are available with guides and suggestions about creating a positive learning environment in an inclusive setting. In this paper, I reviewed the literature that examined various ways general education teachers can meet some of the physical, social and emotional needs of students.

#### **Addressing Physical Needs in a Classroom**

I reviewed several articles pertaining to the physical environment in the classroom and how it can affect a student's learning. Physical aspects can enhance the learning preference of the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Educators can design a classroom to help support the various learning preferences, while decreasing disruptive behaviors. A physical modification, such as reducing the noise level, by making changes to the floors, walls, windows and ceilings can lower the decibel level of sound. Moving classroom furniture or boards on walls can also reduce the noise level to the recommended decibel level. Disarno, Scholwalter, and Grassa (2002) suggested that a teacher's voice should be heard over the background noises in order for students to listen and learn more. With decreased noise level, students have the increased opportunity to focus on the instruction, rather than being distracted by surrounding noises.

In addition, altering seating options, lighting, and temperature can enhance the learning opportunities for several students. Providing different seating options and open areas for students to move around in a classroom can help their engagement and participation in a lesson.

Acknowledging a student's visual preference of lighting can strengthen the student's attentiveness to instruction. The possibilities of bright, dim or natural lighting can be offered to students and they can choose where to sit to increase their learning. Room temperature can also be altered to increase a student's learning. "Most students prefer a warm yet comfortable instructional climate" (Burke & Burke-Samide, 2004, p. 237). These methods of modifying the physical environment are not expensive, but are great strategies in giving students a positive learning environment catering to their learning preferences.

Educators look for inexpensive ways to provide a warm, welcoming environment for their students. Altering a classroom's physical environment can be an easy fix, but not every classroom has the ability to be changed. A limitation of providing a physical environment to support students' learning styles is the difficulty for some educators to change their physical layout of the classroom. Each classroom can have design flaws that create difficulty in changing the room layout. Most educators need permission from administrators before changing the environment and there are schools designed in a specific way that not allowing for changes. A few examples of cost effective and non-permanent changes have been provided, such as using less lights, moving movable furniture and providing more options for seating.

### **Addressing Social and Emotional Needs in a Classroom**

Each student needs to feel safe and valued in her classroom. The growing rate of students with special needs in a classroom is increasing and more support is needed from the teachers. There are multiple guides to help produce a learning environment that will develop a student's confidence. Prater (2003) provided a system to encourage teachers to reflect on their delivery of instruction. The Table 1. The "SHE WILL SUCCEED" (p. 58) process is an order of

steps a teacher can go through to determine if everything they are doing for each student is enhancing his or her learning. The process begins by showing concern for any specific student follows with determining the student's needs and wants, implementing adaptations or modifications, and then finally evaluating if such adaptations and modifications are working for the specific student.

A program that is valuable in providing a positive tone in a classroom as well as an entire school is the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program. This program offers guidelines for any teacher on how to make each child feel valued for her efforts. PBIS (2016) reinforces positive behaviors, while decreasing undesirable behaviors. One of PBIS' main focus is to model the desired behaviors. Teachers must teach and model the desired behaviors in order for students to understand expectations in the classroom and entire school setting. PBIS has a correlation with the process Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is defined as "the practice providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions" (Batsche et al., 2005. p. 3).

PBIS (2016) can be differentiated in its intervention methods. If students are not responding to the universal curriculum, Tier 1, they may need a more small-group approach to learning expectations for behaviors, Tier 2. If students are still not responding to the extension of the interventions, they can be moved to Tier 3. Tier 3 is provides a detailed plan to help individuals who need extra support in responding to positive behavior. PBIS supports a positive environment for student success in learning.



Providing a safe and valued environment is a necessity for building positive relationships between students and teachers. A Diversity Self-Assessment in Table 2 helps educators evaluate their own teaching styles, reflect on their strategies, and then determine what, if anything, needs to be changed to encourage positive relationships. The Diversity Self-Assessment can be slightly altered to not only meet the needs of students with various cultural backgrounds, but also to include students with other disabilities. When a teacher is reflecting on his or her classroom, another suggestion for reflection is the acronym CRIME. Prater's (2003) acronym CRIME stands for curriculum, rules, instruction, materials, and environment. A teacher's reflection on his or her own classroom, leads to identifying the adaptations or modifications needed to support learning.

Montgomery's (2001) methods of adaptations or modifications are using "explicit, strategic instruction, instructional scaffolding, and establishing a classroom atmosphere that respects individuals and their cultures (pp. 5-6). Prater's (2003) "SHE WILL SUCCEED" and "CRIME" acronyms, PBIS (2016) interventions and methods of alterations to a classroom environment and instruction can increase positive learning environments.

PBIS (2016) is a wonderful teaching tool that is strongly supported by research. I have used PBIS strategies for the past 9 years and the program produces positive and encouraging results. At the beginning of each school year, I work hard on creating a positive relationship with each students and his or her parents. I strongly believe negative behaviors can be problem solved and resolved with the help of parents being involved in all processes. Negative behaviors occur, but they decrease or diminish when a teacher is committed to promoting a safe and healthy learning environment for all students.

It is important for educators to be reflective of their teaching methods and able to receive constructive feedback from colleagues or administrators. Each student deserves to a teacher who models growth and success in his or her teaching styles. Teachers are not perfect, and I allow my students to know this. I show them I make mistakes, but I also show how to acknowledge the mistakes and learn from the mistakes. This allows students to observe a productive way of growing from a mistake, promoting self-help and building responsibility.

### **The Need for Responsive Teaching**

A responsive teacher is one who understands the needs and wants of students and provides a learning environment that responds appropriately. “Responsive teaching practices encompass all aspects of classroom life, including the classroom environment designed by the teacher” (Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 29). Sobel and Taylor developed a table of components, Table 4, of responsive teaching techniques and ways to apply the strategies into a classroom of diverse learners. The components consist of the classroom environmental print, grouping strategies, instructional materials, lesson adaptations, distribution of attention, evidence of student understanding, and positive standards for classroom behavior (Sobel & Taylor, 2006). Each educator should be an advocate for his or her students’ learning and “responsive teaching calls for teachers to create respectful, inclusive, supportive environments that foster authentic learning communities” (Sobel & Taylor, 2006, p. 34). A reflective practices worksheet is also provided by Sobel and Taylor (2006) to allow teachers to reflect and understand their current practices and what they may need to change in order to create a responsive learning environment.

Being responsive is also being proactive. Teachers plan their daily lessons and they may plan ways to engage their students. Nagro et al. (2016) provided strategies for teachers to

incorporate into their classroom and these include: “proximity, high rates of opportunities to responds, high-probability requests, and choice making” (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). These strategies help in maintaining student engagement and monitoring progress with informal observations in a whole-group setting. Nagro et al. also provide a few examples of whole-group response techniques to support students who struggle with active participation and engagement. These techniques include: hand signals, response cards, think-pair-share, and written responses.

The process reflecting on current teacher practices, and determining modifications needed to occur within the classroom environment or curriculum is an example of a teacher being responsive. All teachers need to reflect on their current teaching methods, because this helps in determining she is on the right track and is doing all that possible for each student. If a teacher is on the right track, she has the resources and data to continue her current methods. If a teacher notices a student/students are not responding to a method, she can use the data and resources to implement other effective interventions.

## Chapter 4: Position Statement

It is my philosophy that every child has the right to be in a classroom that is safe, engaging, and where each child is valued as an individual. Prior to the beginning of any school year, I receive standard information about most of my first grade students, such as how successful they were during their kindergarten year, who their family is, and if they are receiving any services. I believe it is extremely important to have the child and his or her parents complete questionnaires that can provide me with additional information about the child, such as likes or dislikes of school, favorite activities, or anything else they would like to share with me. With the standard and additional amount of information, I determine the basic necessities to build a foundation for the beginning of their first grade year.

It is my job as an educator to provide a positive classroom environment. Students feel safe and valued when a positive relationship is being established between myself and them. Research has shown a strong need for a positive learning environment for students to be valued. When feeling valued and respected a student can build their social and emotional skills, which causes their confidence to increase and in turn becomes more engaged in his learning process.

Teachers also need to provide a classroom environment that is conducive to a child's learning preference. A teacher's observation of a student, or information from prior teachers and/or parents, can help determine a student's learning preference. Acknowledging the learning preference, a teacher can adapt or modify the physical aspects of a classroom. Designing a positive learning environment, in regards to complimenting students' social, emotional, and physical needs is a possibility.

I believe providing educators appropriate training and workshops on how to create and support a positive classroom environment should be a priority for administrators. Education is an ongoing process with constant changes, and classrooms are filled with an increasing amount of diverse needs. Educators need to be proactive in their teaching methods. Administrators need to acknowledge the need for positive and proactive teaching to support their staff in providing this type of environment.

My review of research has practical suggestions or guides for general education staff to implement into their teaching methods as well as the physical classroom environment.

Throughout the research, I discovered teachers need to be reflective of their teaching methods and learning environment in order to be willing to alter what is not working for a student or students. A positive approach in education, PBIS (2016) was explained in detail and can work for the whole-school setting while supporting the classroom setting as well. PBIS is a program for the entire school; it encourages a positive learning environment from the moment a student walks into school until the he leaves for the day. I have been a part of PBIS in two different districts and I have seen the success of this process for the school and individual classrooms.

In summary, I believe that supporting students' social, emotional, and physical needs are crucial in providing a positive learning environment for all. Teachers can provide this environment by taking the appropriate training and workshops, collaborating with other professionals and seeking out other resources. Every student needs to feel safe and valued and be actively engaged in his or her educational environment. Educators being proactive in their teaching methods can be successful in managing a classroom filled with diverse learners.

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### Appendix: Literature Review Grid

<b>Author(s), Year</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
DiSarno, Scholwalter, & Grassa (2002)	What are the auditory challenges of inclusive Classroom? What do teachers observe about amplification?	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities, two teachers	Amplification caused an increase in the teachers' ability to get and maintain students' attention.
Downing & Eichinger (2003)	What alternative strategies would be useful in too abstract of content from a lecture?		Adaptations and accommodations suggested can be used in a variety of classes and situations and can benefit the entire class.
Guardino & Fullerton (2010)	What impact does the classroom environment have on overall class behavior and learning?	1 teacher, 17 fourth grade students	Academic engagement was extremely low before intervention. After a modified classroom, academic engagement increase immediately.
Montgomery (2001)	How can an educator create a culturally, responsive, inclusive classroom?		Instructional strategies and specific teaching behaviors can encourage all students to engage in learning activities that will lead to improved academic achievement.
Nagro, Hooks, Fraser, & Cornelius (2016)	What whole-group strategies can promote student engagement in inclusive classrooms?		Proactive whole-group response systems paired with formative assessment charts have the potential to result in more effective instruction that actively engages students in the learning process.
Prater (2003)	What strategies can be used for success in inclusive classrooms?		14-step process teachers can use to examine their classroom and make it successful for students.