

**The Missing Links:  
What Students and Teachers Say about Inclusion and  
Achievement**

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## **Research Question**

In what ways does the inclusion program affect student achievement? How can inclusion programs be installed in schools in order to ensure student success?

## **Rationale**

I am an English teacher of an eighth grade inclusion program at a large heterogeneous middle school in the southeastern section of Brooklyn that is predominately African American and West Indian. I have worked with 20 of these students from the inclusion program, during the 2000-2001 school year when they were in the seventh grade. During this time, I taught these students English and Social Studies.

At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, I was asked by my principal to work in a new program at my school that would soon be widespread throughout the district and city schools. I was asked to spearhead the first inclusion class in my school. As a second year teacher, I was vaguely aware of what inclusion program was and what my roles as the general education teacher entailed. I had very little experience with special education students and the idea of working with them in the classroom made me uneasy due to my lack of experience working with students with special needs. However, I was convinced by my principal, whom I believed in and I felt believed in me, that this was the direction that many of the schools in my district was going and I would have the benefit of starting the program with my own vision upon working with the two groups. I ended the school year with the bright hopes of working with another inspired teacher and beginning a program that would be an invaluable experience for me. So it was a great shock to me to find out on my first day back to school in September 2000 that the principal who installed the program left the NYC board of education for a position on Long Island without any

notice to our staff. A new principal and administration would now lead the school and our new pilot program.

During its first year, the inclusion program was rvy with problems as a result of inexperience, poor decision-making, and interpersonal conflicts. The students came from various academic backgrounds and both special education and general education students lacked the basic skills that we were informed each group would have. The other teacher who was selected to work with me just completed her first year of teaching, like me. Tricia\* taught across the hall from me during our first year. We were very cordial towards each other, went to lunch together occasionally, and although never really witnessing her teaching styles and method, I felt that she was a strong teacher. The training that my teacher and I were promised never materialized. Tricia and I rarely planned with each other due to conflicting schedules and our personal lives. Our priorities were different, as well as our vision of what our class should be. As a result, I believe that our students suffered. As I began my second year with the inclusion program working with most of the same students from the 2001-2002 school year, it made me ask myself the following questions: 1) what can I do to make my class a better one? 2) What decisions were made by administrators and how did it affect my ability to create the type of classroom that would most beneficial to my children, 3) Finally, how has the inclusion program affected my student's ability to achieve both academically and socially?

My research stems from the questions that perplexed me during my second year of teaching. I believe inclusion classes are an effective way to teach students the true meaning of diversity in NYC schools. Students feel more assured of their strengths in a safe environment, thus resulting in positive social and academic achievement. Also,

students enjoy the benefit of helping each other with skills that he/ she may be deficient in, including social skills. Moreover, the students have the support of two teachers in the classroom, in addition to school aides. Inclusion classes can benefit both general education and special needs students, but only if these programs foster a nurturing environment for both groups of students. Unfortunately, I believe my school has failed at properly planning the inclusion program despite its good intentions to have an inclusive setting. What has resulted is a mismatch of expectations, policies and procedures among teachers, staff and administration. As an inclusion teacher, I was left to fill in the missing links in terms of what was needed to adequately support the needs of all my students. During my first year, these "missing links" led to confusion on my part, other teachers and the students.

The inclusion program should be fully supported by administration, parents, and teachers both fiscally and professionally. Finally, I believe that inclusion programs positively affect student achievement when it is collaboratively planned by both teachers and administration, so that the programs caters to the individual needs of each of its participants.

### **Review of the Literature:**

Moore, in his research on equity in the classroom defines inclusion as “providing specifically defined instruction and support for students with special needs in the context of regular education settings.”<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of my research, this is the definition that applies when the term inclusion is used. The Wisconsin Education Association Council has developed several studies based on inclusion programs from across the country.<sup>2</sup>

Their research defines inclusion programs and the variations of it such as mainstreaming, inclusion and full inclusion that are present in school districts across the country. The study also provides an examination of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the federal court cases that have been fought in cities such as Sacramento, Rome City, Clementon and Tucson, Arizona.<sup>3</sup> These federal court decisions provide guidelines to school districts and what it is expected to provide to students with disabilities, as well as their appropriate placement in the school district.<sup>4</sup>

There have been several studies done recently that contend that inclusion programs are more effective than both integrating and mainstreaming. One such study completed by Ferguson found that for general education students to achieve both learning and social outcomes that integration doesn't work, but inclusion does.<sup>5</sup>

Moore discussed the current research on achievement and success in terms of inclusion practices in relation to educating students with disabilities in inclusive general education classrooms. Moore argues that general education classrooms need to be an environment that helps to facilitate the wide range of student abilities so that it is supported and accepted.<sup>6</sup>

Evidence from research studies reveal that students with disabilities can be integrated into the classroom, but not become a member of the class, when membership is defined as involvement both socially and academically. Hilton & Liberty found in their study of 16 secondary students placed in nine Oregon high schools that placing students with severe disabilities in mixed settings "do not ensure that either integration or inclusion will take place."<sup>7</sup>

Several studies refute the belief that inclusion programs may result in “dumbing down” the curriculum for the benefit of students with disabilities over general education students. Sharpe, York, & Knight used standardized examinations and reports cards to measure achievement of general education students and found no significant negative effect on the behavioral or academic achievement of classmates who were educated in classes with students with disabilities.<sup>8</sup>

Numerous studies have measured the attitudes and relationships that have resulted from inclusion programs. In most of these studies, positive experiences and improved attitudes have been the result of including both general education students and students with disabilities. Helmstetter’s study showed that student friendships and relationships improved by inclusion, with greater understanding and empathy displayed throughout the study.<sup>9</sup>

Rashke and Bronson discuss the needs of both general education students and children with special needs seek in order to achieve both academically and socially. Their study notes that teachers should recognize the strengths of working with a diversity of students for their own professional development and the betterment of their classroom for all of their students.<sup>10</sup> Rashke and Bronson researched the importance of imparting students with special needs a sense of belonging in a diverse stimulating environment in which they can grow and learn. The authors agree by that having general education students in the classroom with students with special needs, they will develop an appreciation that everyone has unique characteristics and abilities and that the students will develop a respect for others with diverse background and characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

There have been several studies that focus on the relationships between general and special education teachers working together in one classroom. Traditionally, most teachers work in isolation – in a classroom by themselves. Sharing the responsibilities of educating both general and special education students involves a large commitment from both teachers to directly collaborate with each other. Dieker & Bauwens (1996) assert that by creating a meaningful inclusion paradigm, each teacher brings their various skills, training and perspectives to the classroom.<sup>12</sup> By doing this, the teachers pool their experience, skills and resources in order to improve their teaching, learning opportunities for their students, and effectiveness within the classroom. In this type of learning environment, the student's individual needs take precedence over the curriculum.

The research on planning and inclusion programs most often notes that teachers need time to plan for the best interests of their students. In his research, Crutchfield (In Press) asserts that adequate planning ensures that both general and special education teachers become masters of their subject areas, and by doing so can effectively teach their students.<sup>13</sup> In her research, Ripley argues that teachers are most effective when they plan together and point out that time is the biggest obstacle to effective planning between teachers—the time for development and evaluation. Moreover, she suggests that planning not only take place among co-teachers, but on a school-wide level, and district level to ensure the successful achievement of both general and special education students.<sup>14</sup> Also, Ripley contends that both school-wide and district planning should provide teachers with the opportunities to become better team teachers through professional development opportunities such as workshops, classes, and professional conferences on inclusion.<sup>15</sup>



Ripley's work also shows that planning also means selecting students who will be a part of the inclusion program by keeping a balance of at risk students, typical students, and those identified as having some type of disability.<sup>16</sup>

Walter-Thomas' study on effective team teaching points out that planning sessions should be the utmost important priority for both teachers and that "competing responsibilities" that interfere with planning may negatively effect the classroom and student achievement.<sup>17</sup>

There are several factors that may become barriers to both special and general education students, as well as teachers in their search for an inclusive environment. Richard Nowell points out that for students with special needs obstacles that may arise are: 1) the chance of isolation from teachers and 2) classmates, limited chances to interact with peers and professional support staff. These students may also face the possibility of inferior quality of staff members in handling the special needs of these students.<sup>18</sup> For general education students, being stigmatized as "slow", "dumb" or "retarded" may hamper student's achievement. According to Ripley, teachers may face a lack of adequate resources to provide for the needs of all their students. Also, lack of support from administration, general education parents, and staff members are all potential barriers to the student.<sup>19</sup>

Several studies have shown that administration plays a large role in the creation of an inclusive setting, thereby having a direct effect on student's achievement. For example, Cook contends that the school must have an atmosphere that is inclusive and willing to meet the individual needs of both general and special education students.<sup>20</sup> This means that the principal understands the needs of students with disabilities. There is

an adequate amount of school aids, personnel and support staff available. Administration should participate in collaboration with teachers in the selection of students who will be a part of the program and establish their individual needs. The administration of the school should also set adequate time in teacher's schedule for planning on a teacher and school-wide level. Also, the appropriate resources should be provided, including technological tools that will help both special needs and general education students achieve. The school administration should also provide the appropriate policies and procedures that will help teachers better evaluate their students, both general and special education on a fair and consistent basis, modifying policies when necessary for the benefit of the individual student's needs.

**Tools:**

I conducted 20 audio taped conversations with students who have been a part of the inclusion program since 2001-2002. 12 of these students were in the original inclusion program that began during the 2000-2001 school year. These students have had more exposure to the program, the teachers, policies and procedures. Therefore, they were able to fill in many of the links in terms of what is missing in the inclusion program at this school. I interviewed eight teachers and two paraprofessionals. These teachers and paraprofessionals were able to speak on the ways the inclusion program has affected their ability to teach and their student's ability to achieve. I interviewed two paraprofessionals who worked with the students during the first and second year of the Inclusion program. Not only did both of these people offer insight about the inclusion program and how it affects the student, but they were able to shed light on some of the "missing links" that

may affect the students the most, since they often worked on a one-on-one basis with many of the students.

**Data:**

My research is a qualitative study. According to Hubbard and Power, “qualitative research entails immersing oneself in to the daily lives and routines of setting chosen for the study”.<sup>21</sup> This method of research emphasizes the importance of the participant’s voice and perspective. In the case of my research, in order to fully understand what students and teachers say about inclusion programs, it was important to infuse my research with the “voices” of my students and co-workers (teachers & aides). It was only in this manner would the true “missing links” be revealed. My data collection was based on several categories: interviews with the student’s on their perception of their achievement through audio taped conversations, anecdotal records and journal entries that I made periodically from October 2001- May 2002, and sociograms that I created based on the students comments.

I asked teachers and students open-ended questions with the intentions of having the most honest, thought provoking expressive responses possible. The questions were asked in this manner in order to get the most candid responses from the respondents without fear of reproach for their comments and ideas. For example, some of the questions I asked the respondents were:

Teachers:

How has the inclusion program affected your class? Tell me about the inclusion program?

How do you think the inclusion programs affect students academically and socially?

Are there any negative affects of the inclusion Program on special education students, on general education students?

Would you like to see more inclusion programs? Why or why not?

What could make the inclusion program better for you? For your students?

Students:

Tell me about the inclusion program.

How has the program changed from the first year to the second?

What do you need in order to succeed in this program?

How has the inclusion program affected your learning? How has it affected you socially?

Should the program be installed in more classes? Why or why not?

What would you change about the program?

Do you think that others would benefit from being in the program?

**Analysis:**

General Education Students' Responses:

Of the general education students that I interviewed, all of them understand the benefits of have inclusion programs. All of the respondents agreed that all students should have equal access to classrooms, whether they are disabled or not. There are several key themes that the general education students I interviewed claimed would help them to achieve. Some students mentioned that helping one another was one of the key factors of

being a part of the inclusion program. Acting as a role model for the special education students was expressed by several of the students that interviewed as important. Also, many of the students felt that each group can benefit from helping the others develop social and academic skills. Moreover, each respondent emphasized the importance of recognizing their peers' differences as a benefit in the classroom.

However, there were some barriers to achievement according to the respondents. One of the biggest issues for general education students in the inclusion program was being stigmatized as “dumb”, stupid, etc. from peers. Behavioral problems in the classroom appear to be a source of frustration for some of the general education students (although the source of the problem seems unclear). Finally, the belief that the class was working at a “different pace” than their peers In general education or having to “work slower” for the benefit of the special education students was a problem mentioned by eight out of the 12 general education students I talked to during interviews. Although in the face of the very real cases of stigma and discrimination that special education students feel, this may sound irrelevant; we cannot so easily dismiss the feelings of being stigmatized and alienation that is expressed by the general education students.

All of the students that I interviewed claimed that smaller classes made the inclusive program worthwhile. These students credited smaller class size as helping them to work harder, focus and work with classmates. Here are some comments from Jenna\*, an eighth grade student who says the program helped her during his seventh and eighth grade year:

It's not bad. It's better for me, because it's not a big class and if it was a bigger class I wouldn't think more, because if it was a bigger class, there would be a whole bunch of kids fooling' around. With the inclusion class, it's a smaller class, so you can think better.

Four of the general education students that I interviewed agreed that the inclusion program allowed them to sharpen their basic math and reading skills by going over concepts. Ethan, an eighth grader who has been a part of the inclusion class for two years talks about how the program has helped him as a general education student:

Ethan: The kids like Will and Alex help me understand things like math. There are more teachers checking the work. More programs because kids can help out each other.

Another student, Ken also a second year student in the inclusion program, said he enjoys it because he gets the help he needs. He explains it because sometimes he doesn't understand some of the ideas.

“Sometimes it was good, because things were explained in ways that I could understand, because sometimes things would get confused in my head”

Sam, eighth grader in the inclusion program for his second year describes his experiences:

Sam: It was always a good experience because we came up with ideas together to get answers for our work.

Paul, an eighth grader and first year inclusion student, credits the inclusion program for his improvement in school:

Paul: My reading got better. My math got better. My grades got better. Last year my grades were bad!

For some of the students, like Jenna, a general education student, class size was relevant and vital for them to succeed. Jenna feels that a smaller class setting was better for learning. She believes that a smaller class setting equates to academic success.

Teacher: Tell me about the inclusion program and its effect on you and your classmates. Tell me what you see.

Jenna: What I see is a regular education and special ed class getting together to see how we act with each other and how we respond to it down the line, so that we can help them

Teacher: Is that how you feel about it all of the time.

Jenna: Not all the time. Not in certain subjects.

Teacher: Tell me about any subject that you want to talk about and what it is like in the class.

Jenna: Well, in Social Studies every time the teachers say something, the kids are always talking and I say shut up, but the kids always have something to say and how you going to learn if you can't even listen to the teacher. English is ok, because they know you already and they all listen to you.

Teacher: How do you act with each other, not just in class but on a social level?

Anasisa: We act the same. We talk and play.

Teachers: Tell me about the negative consequences of this class.

Jenna: We don't listen. Both classes, some of the m just don't want to listen. Some of the kids were here last year and they thought there would be new teachers and new kids, but it's all the same, the teachers, the kids. To be truthful, I don't like it. I don't want to be here anymore. It's like they act the same they don't change.

Throughout the interviews, several general education students considered themselves role models. These students believed that they were able to influence their special education peers by helping students having difficulties with schoolwork. Tasha, a general education student who has been in the inclusion program for two years, shares her experience with the inclusion, seeing the program as an opportunity to become role models for the special education students.

Tasha: Last year it was different from this year because last year we felt more like an inclusion class. We had to do hard work and sometimes we had to slow down so that the other kids could catch up. Sometimes we had to help the special ed. Kids. That was kind of fun, a little bit, sometimes. But we had to put a lot of effort in our work so that we could be role models for the special education class.

The general education students that I interviewed were empathetic to the needs of the special education classmates. The respondents felt that all students should be recognized for their differences and how it helps them to be more accepting of others.

Farah, an eighth grader and first year inclusion student, discusses judging others because their differences:



Teacher: Should others take part in the inclusion class?

Farah: Yes, so they can stop always jumpin' to conclusions, telling people "oh, you dumb because you hang out with these people" but you shouldn't jump to conclusions if you don't know somebody.

Adelle, an eighth grade student in her second year, discusses her opinion on accepting others:

Adelle: Some kids might learn from other kids that everybody is not the same. Everyone is different, but smart at what they do. Kids shouldn't make fun of other kids because they're the same as them.

Although the students believe that the inclusion class is worthwhile for both the groups of students, the general education students believe that behavior has played a major role in their ability to achieve in inclusion.

Jenna believes that students should make changes in order for the class to do better:

Teacher: What would make the program better?

Tasha: If the ones who don't understand get more attitude. Like if they don't know what's going on to stop giving an attitude and

Sam shares his thoughts about the class' behavior.

Sam: It was good because we helped the other kids and they helped us.

Teacher: What would you change about the inclusion program?

Seam: To take the kids out who have the bad behavior so that we could get more work done.

Teacher: Who would you say behave poorly?

Sam: Both.

Tasha shares her thoughts about the class.

Teacher: What do you think is the biggest factor affecting this class?

Tasha: It used to be the learning in the seventh grade, but now it's the behavior.

Four students: Jenna, Sam, Darrell and Tasha believed that behavior was a major issue in the inclusion class, but no one could pinpoint where the problems came from. We then discussed the frustrations of being a part of the inclusion class.

Teacher: What frustrates you about the inclusion program?

Tasha: That we had to learn slower things. In the sixth grade we was all at the same pace because they put kids in the class you know with kids that have the same reading and math scores. But it don't seem that way in eighth grade and the seventh grade it didn't feel that way, because you learn things that you learned already. You are like why are we learning this and why is the work so easy? After a while everybody starts talking about you That's why you stupid that's why you in this class. You know its peer

pressure because other kids they react to it. That's why it feels different. You know people are talking about you.

Teasing, taunting and the stigma of being labeled special education are especially troubling for some of the general education students, like Tasha.

Some of the general education students asserted that the inclusion class worked at a slower pace than the rest of their peers. Although the students had no way of knowing this for sure, the perception was that by working with special education students, the class learned at a slower pace.

Jenna explains her perception of the class' work pace:

This year it doesn't really feel like that, but sometimes it does. It feels different from the other class. We're not on the same pace. We don't really catch up with our work sometimes in Social Studies, because some kids don't want to participate or do their work or raise their hands. It's alright. Sometimes it feels like a regular class and sometimes it don't. Because you learn things that you've already learned and some kids aren't good and you feel like you are ahead of them and you should be doing other things but you have to be on the same pace at the same time, so sometimes you try to help them when you can.

Like Jenna, Tasha believes that being a part of the inclusion class has affected her ability to complete assignments and keep in pace with the other classes. In the next part of the interview, Tasha describes the how the class makes her feel different:

Teacher: What does it feel like a normal class and when doesn't it.

Tasha: When we are all getting along and not arguing and screaming, participating.

Sometimes you realize it because you look at the work and the students and see how they act and you say daag, it's not same as the other classes because the other classes don't have this. So, maybe if was like this in a few other classes, maybe you wouldn't feel the same. Because people judge you by the class what you are in. It makes you feel different and that's the only time you feel different.

Teacher: What makes you think the classes move at different pace?

It seems like we're on a different pace, because if someone doesn't understand something. We keep going over it again and again.

Tasha: Really, if the ones that don't understand the work if they would get more better work and the ones who don't understand adjust their attitude, their actions. Instead of sittin up her not listening to what the teacher is saying they could just try to ask the teachers for their help. Instead of sitting in class acting like they don't know what's going on. Cause that's what they do! Some of them just be sitting in class action like they don't know what to do. Repeating yourself like five times to them. To the other kids, maybe you have to repeat yourself like two times and they get the point. After awhile, they don't get the points they keep asking over and over, so maybe if they get a little more help.

Maybe helping them out with what they don't understand would be better

Some of the major themes that resonate during my discussion with the general education students are: smaller classes with more attention, but more social problems, such as behavior. Many of the general education students understand the importance of an inclusive environment, whether they benefited from it all the time or not. Also, because the class has worked together in the past, there is a tendency for issues to arise. Several students mentioned behavior as having a major effect on their class and its ability to complete work and stay out of trouble with their teachers. One thing that was unclear was where the behavior problems were coming from: general, special education or a combination of both?

Special Education Students' Responses:

The concerns of the Special Education students from my inclusion class vary from their general education classmates. These students discussed the things that general education students take for granted: the opportunity to work in large classrooms, more attention from their teachers and learning basic skills beyond what they've learned in the classroom.

Another major theme that has been discussed throughout the interviews with these students is the need to feel "regular". Matt, an eighth grader in his first year in the inclusion program explains:

It's fun because I get to be with regular people, like Regular Ed people. Because when I'm with regular ed students I try to prove myself.

Several of the students felt that by working with general education students, they strived to succeed, to be considered “regular.” Another student, Jacob, a second year inclusion class participant, explains why inclusion works for him:

It’s a lot of people and I can’t work with a little group. It’s stupid.

They teach you harder stuff than in special ed. They teach you the basics. In here they teach you regular stuff like regular ed.

Not only does Jacob see the inclusion setting as an opportunity to be “regular”, he feels being regular has a larger effect on his ability to learn.

Teacher: What do you see regular ed as being?

Jacob: Smarter. Sometimes kids can’t read and they put them in special ed. Kids in here can read, not that good, but they can read.

For some special education students like Jacob, having the chance to be in an inclusion setting actually means being smarter and learning more. Will, who was in the inclusion class as a special ed in the seventh grade and decertified into regular ed chose to return to the inclusion program after one month. He explains why:

In 813, I wasn’t learning like I was learning over here. They were like acting too stupid and stuff. The teacher used to tell me that I didn’t belong in that class because I was faster than them. In this class, it was like harder work. I got homework in every class. In 813 didn’t do, almost nothing.

For some students being in the inclusion class was dealing with a difficult adjustment. James, Candice, and Alice talk about how the program affected them.

Teacher: How has being in the inclusion program affected you?

John: Stress. Cause I have a lot of work to do, mad homework. They help us because they give us work like the other regular ed classes.

Candice: we get more work. It's different because you get more attention with more teachers. It's ok. Plus you get to work with more teachers.

If there is only one teacher in a class with more students, it gets confusing.

Alice: Yes, it would be good because kids would have a lot of opportunities. Plus, you get more attention.

Like many of the Special Education students I interviewed, Alex, Lance and Spelman were most concerned about becoming better students. Like Jacob, becoming a better student meant learning basic skills that they felt other regular education students had learned already.

Alex: It helped me because my reading and math skills weren't that strong. So, this year it helped me a lot. I didn't know that I was that good in math, but now I am. It opened my eyes to the skills I had in math.

Lance: It helped me to achieve the things that I set out to do. When I first came to this school, I was in Special Ed. So it helped me in the seventh grade for what I set out to do.

Because of the two different teachers. Some of the regular ed teachers and some of the special ed teachers. I set out to not be in special ed by the time I left this school.

Teacher: How do you think it affected your school work?

I got more schoolwork done and my grades improved. The work. It's got a touch of easiness to it and a touch of hardness. Let's say we're looking up words in the dictionary. Words that we didn't know we had to look up in the dictionary and we got to read a lot of different stories.

How does it affect general ed students. It let them (special education) get a feel of what other kids are learning.

Personalities will blend and they will come out. Like if they're not learning the same things or if the general ed. Students didn't learn it they can learn it from them and it goes both ways. Let's say the general education kids learn something in math, those special ed kids can learn it from them and then they can go back and extend on it. For Spelman, an eighth grader and first year inclusion class member, being a part of the class meant achieving his own personal goals.

Spelman: Since I got in the inclusion program I've been more dedicated to my work because my math got better. My math wasn't that good because the teachers that I had last year would give me stuff that I already knew and now when I come in the inclusion class I'm learning more things like algebraic expressions and things like that I didn't learn.

Teacher: Would it be difficult being in this program coming from special ed?



Spelman: It would for the first few months because when you're in Special Ed you only learn so much and when you come in this class, you learn even more.

Spelman: Being that there are more teachers in the classroom, you have more one on one.

Several issues were revealed during my interviews with the special education students in my inclusion class. What these students mentioned most as affecting them as members of our class were: learning the same things as their regular ed. Peers in other classes, being accepted and “blending” with their peers, learning basic math and reading skills, having teachers who are concerned and the difficult adjustment to the rigors of regular education curriculum. Several of the students mentioned being ridiculed for being in special education. For two students, their own personal goals helped them to succeed in the inclusion program. What many of the kids in the program sought were being “regular” or identified in the same manner as their peers. What is interesting about these issues is that these should be rights that all students should have access to in the classroom.

Teachers & Administrator Responses:

I interviewed six teachers, two paraprofessionals and one administrator / special education teacher for my research. All of the respondents felt the inclusion program was somewhat successful, but still had some ways to go before achieving the goals of true inclusion. Some of the various topics that were discussed during the interviews were: adequate resources, students chosen for the program, evaluating students, input, teacher's role in the program, working with another teacher, the administration's role in the

program, the ability to teach more with a smaller class. However, the subjects that echoed throughout the interviews were: lack of input regarding the program i.e. failure to inform teachers that they were working with special education students, time constraints, evaluation standards for special and general education students, curriculum guidelines and procedures for the inclusion program, interpersonal issues between team teachers, failure to collaborate among co-teachers and lack of support from administration.

One of the many issues that teachers and administrators felt the inclusion program needed in order to improve was specific guidelines and procedures outlined by their administrators. However, the administrators depended on the teachers they selected to make sound decisions based on their knowledge of their students.

Ms. Soto, a former paraprofessional and first year teacher, teaches a sixth grade inclusion class. She briefly discusses the need for guidelines and procedures and the lack of guidelines from her supervisors.

Interviewer: What about guidelines and collaboration?

Ms. Soto: Yeah, a lot more of that and a lot more between departments because I'm getting one thing from my supervisor, what to do with grades and what not to do, while the teacher that I work with is a completely different set from his supervisor. So, he's got the idea that we should do all grades in one grade book while coming from my supervisor is you each do your own grades. You each do your own thing. So, we had differences in what we did. There was a big conflict between individuals about what was being marked and what was not being marked. We had differences in what he would collect and what I

would collect. So, that all has to be worked out. A lot of it I think as you go along, but even though you are going along, you are addressing some of it, but we weren't addressing it. A lot of it could have been addressed. I think that I let a lot of things slide and I shouldn't have. That's what caused all of the problems. Most of the problems are coming down to the supervisors. I was told to teach both, Social Studies and Language Arts, but I wasn't being allowed to teach. If he wanted to teach a lesson and it ran into to my time, he just kept going. Even though we agreed, ok you're taking this period...you're taking this piece, you're teaching that...nobody followed the game plan. So, if you make a plan, but no one bothers to follow it, then why make a plan? The planning and sticking with it, you both got to do it. has got be done by both

For Ms. Soto, the lack of guidelines and procedures led to a very difficult time during her first year that may have been prevented if guidelines about grading, time allocated for co-teachers to teach and planning might have been addressed.

Ms. Stohl, the special education supervisor, is the person who oversees the special education section of the inclusion program. One of the biggest issues Stohl dealt with during the initial phase of creating the program is establishing guidelines for the selection of students. She explains:

Well I think at the beginning when we started to think about an inclusionary program the ideals behind it I think are great. I think that they are really great ideas. One of the problems that the school faced was that last year when we started the program, I sent out a memo to the teachers to decide who those students should be, but I think where we lacked was that I didn't give a criteria that the students needed to meet in order to be a

part of the inclusionary program. So, teachers used their own personal decisions on which kids should go in. I think if you sat in a class, you were quiet, you didn't getting on a teacher's nerves and you were doing ok, they let you go into the inclusion program. Because you weren't a behavior problem and I think it should be looked at more than that. I think that there should be a specific rubric that the teachers go by and the students should be aware of that rubric prior to that decision being made.

The lack of criteria may have lead to confusion and mismanagement on the inclusion teacher's part. Ms. Stohl then discusses how she believes teachers made their selections for inclusion students.

I think that if the child is mainstreamed that it should be based on a list of things: does that child complete all of their homework, does that child show up on time, while they're there do they participate, do they want to learn, are they eager to learn, do they pass their tests and if not why don't they pass their test, is it lack of study or lack of ability and I don't think those things weren't looked at. I think we looked at some test scores. We looked at some citywide math and reading scores, which I don't think tell us anything. So, I think the setup if it was looked at more carefully, if we had more time to plan that would've caused the program to be more successful.

She then gives details that possibly explain why the program doesn't fulfill the ideal inclusion model:

First of all, it's supposed to be a 40-60 split. It's not. It's supposed to be sixty percent general ed. We're not. It's almost 50/50. You need to have more general ed. in the room

than special ed. I think that, the concept is that special ed is going to try to live up to the potential based on the general ed. abilities but we are selecting kids in the general ed that are on the same level as kids in special ed., so what ability are they living up to? They are living up to an illusion that they want to be a general ed. student. They don't know why they want be one, because those students are functioning at the same place that they are. So it's like we're tricking them and it's meeting needs of the school, because it's reducing general ed. size, because they give you money in order to make this inclusionary class with less kids. But it's supposed to be the better kids. It's not supposed to be the lower level kids.

Finally, she talks about the problems the school faced when selecting students for the inclusion program:

The sixth grade came in with suggestions from supervisors from other schools. I didn't know these kids, and I couldn't make determinations, so they're there. But they're all behavior problems. I mean one of the biggest problems with the sixth grade inclusion program is that they're not manageable. The general education part we picked haphazardly based on reading and math scores. So, we had no knowledge of those kids. The seventh grade kids that we do have knowledge of; it's the same thing. I mean, we selected them with no real criteria, you know just based on whimsical teacher input, not that it's whimsical. I'm sure the teachers thought about it, but they thought about it in their bubble. You know, not in a broader kind of picture and they never went into a general ed. sixth grade class to even see what a general ed sixth grade student is supposed to know and so how can you base a decision on... you know that never happened.

The lack of specific guidelines created by both teachers and administrators may have led to the confusion and miscommunication that both groups have outlined during their interviews. Confusion about policies regarding grading, student and teacher selection and their responsibilities may have lead to the program's ineffectiveness. As a result of this, students may not be achieving if guidelines are not specific.

Several of the teachers I interviewed expressed their lack of input regarding the inclusion program. The type of input the teachers said they wanted to be included in varied from the scheduling of classes to the ability to meet with other teachers. The teachers argued that their input was vital in order to help the students achieve. Three of the teachers I interviewed initially weren't aware that they working with an inclusion class. Not knowing that you are working with students with special needs affects a teacher's ability to properly instruct their students. Ms. Michaels, an eighth grade math teacher working with an inclusion class for the first time. She expressed her delight in working in a smaller classroom setting, but talked about how being uninformed affected her class:

I didn't know who was in class 808 or 815. They can let the teachers know from the beginning so that I can be aware of what I can do to better the results. At first, I assumed they were on the same levels. I looked at 808 and wasn't even aware of 815.

Mr. Linden, an eighth grade science teacher shares his experiences with the same issues as Ms. Michaels:

I wasn't even told what type of class it was. Until the middle of the second semester what type of class this was. My whole method of teaching them was the way I would teach the other classes, so I had to diversify the way I teach them. They're bright kids. I'm starting to see that now.

Ms. Coles, the special education teacher that I have worked with for the past two years in the inclusion program, expressed the frustration of not being advised about how the program should be run:

No one came to observe us. Nobody sat down and said this is what works and this is what doesn't work! We've just had the blessings to carry it on another year. If you would've had another teacher...what does that teacher have to go on? Only your experiences. We don't have an overall model for us inclusion teachers. We don't have an overall goal.

Mr. Evans believes that the teacher's inability to make decisions reflects the administration's myopic view of decision-making:

Their agenda comes first no matter how it impedes ours. Students are sitting right along teachers when it comes to administration because we're unable to be flexible if they're [administration] not. Rules have to be established in the beginning and backed up.

Ms. Stohl summarizes her beliefs on why there is limited input from teachers:

I think that there's minimal input. Wait, that's not true. I think that teachers have come to me and wanted to give input, but their input can't be addressed because I don't have time to address it. There has been one teacher who has had conflict with teachers and is not very sure of his role. He needs to sit with a staff developer, as well as, not just the one teacher but all of the teachers that are in inclusionary program that he works with and they need to outline what he supposed to do and what they're supposed to do and what the paraprofessionals are supposed to do. I think the teachers want somebody to show them how to do it and I don't have somebody who can show them how to do it. I know how to do it but I don't have time to sit with them. I mean, I do on an individual basis for the people who hound me. I mean, I know that that sounds horrible, but it's true.

Collaboration between teachers was the issue that the teachers that I interviewed mentioned most. All of the teachers felt that in order to have a model inclusion setting, teachers must be provided with the opportunity to work together in order to make the best decisions for their students.

Mr. Evans comments:

We need as inclusion teachers prep time with our co-teachers. We need at least three prep periods that coincide a week. I have one prep in science with the core teacher, of which I've seen her, I mean, schools been in session for four months and I've met with her a total of six times, because of either coverages or we're just too busy mopping up from last period and trying to plan for the next. We also need time to plan. Time to re-



plan. I don't get a chance to revamp my lesson plans. It's a one shot deal every time and we need that to grow.

Mr. Evans acknowledges that teachers must use their time wisely in order to collaborate:

There's got to be more teacher sessions to talk and time. But one thing we can do is to manage it [time] better. Instead of dealing with four core classes, I should be dealing with just two.

Ms. Michaels, talks about the importance of collaborating with other teachers in an inclusion setting.

You need to have those forms of communication open. If you could have meetings to have teachers put lesson plans together, it would be great.

Although most of the teachers I talked to were somewhat satisfied with the inclusion program because of the advantages it gives to their students, most of the teachers were disappointed in the administrations role in the inclusion setting. Some of the issues that the teachers believe the administration could systemically effect are: scheduling, flexible scheduling for teachers to meet with other teachers, creating specific guidelines and procedures regarding such things as the selection process and evaluation of students, and providing teachers with sufficient professional development regarding inclusion. Several teachers felt that the administration could do more to make the program better for the students and the school:

Mr. Evans discusses the programming and its effect on the program:

There is no program. As far as I can see, number one the schedule for the school is itself is chaotic...there's no pattern, there's no rhyme there's no reason for it. It's just poor management and that's paramount when you are talking about an inclusion setting. Because if the schedule is chaotic then that means that time is not being managed properly. We can see that because there is an assembly one period a week and that can be used for a study period in which the kids can work on the skills that they are most deficient in.

Ms. Coles believes the administration could have taken a more proactive position with the program:

I don't think the school environment or the administration really did anything to make it beneficial. It was more "us" than anybody else. They kind of just threw you into this and whatever you think it should be, you do it. I've never seen anybody come in and observe our classes. I've never seen Ms. Crane come in and commend the class. I think that it really would've made a big difference if she came in and told the class how proud she was that they were making the inclusion program work. I don't think the kids are recognized for their effort and their part! I think everything is more for show.

Interviewer: Who should change it? Supervisors. Whoever came up with this program, whoever made the selections of putting two teachers together. We never even had guidelines They [the administration] are not participating. They are not involved!

Ms. Stohl comments about the administration's position regarding inclusion:

I think that it's working for the expectations of the school but not of the program. I don't know if we can make it work here without changing the mindset of the people who are making the decisions. Even though I am one of the people. My mindset is there. But I can't make those decisions without the rest of the cabinet and they don't want the same things from special education that I want. She then begins to give an example of a severely disabled student who is working with a student who is higher functioning in general education.

Like the teachers, Stohl contends that inclusion the model inclusion program will only be changed once she receives the full support from her co-administrators. Stohl then comments about the administrations' future plans for the inclusion program:

It won't change this year. I hope that it will change for next year. It's one of the things that I've been thinking about with my personal goals for things that I want to work on. I want to work on having a program that people want to come and see. I want to be the model school. They should be coming and observing us. It's funny because the district will say, "Oh go to [School #]. They have three inclusionary programs that work", and

they do because they don't know what it's supposed to be. They think it works. Do you know what I'm saying? If you test out kids when they go in and test them when they come out, there are no leaps there. Yeah, they make progress because you're working hard with them, but the light bulb isn't that much brighter.

Finally Ms. Stohl points out that the decisions made regarding inclusion may not be beneficial to the program, but logistical for the school.

I think that inclusion is not for everyone. If we have 18 classes, fourteen self-contained classes including the four inclusion classes. We're allowed to have X number of kids, so we fill our seats. So if they say we have twelve seats in an inclusion class, but only 10 kids should be in there, we put 12 anyway because we need the seats. It's just another point. Those kids got put in there because they're the best of the worse and we need to have seats in the worse of the worse classes. So, we move somebody up. That technically doesn't make them inclusionary material. It just makes them a better kid in the class that they're in.

Teachers and administrators emphasized the importance of working with someone who displayed expertise in their discipline, the curriculum and able to demonstrate their expertise in the inclusion setting. According to those I interviewed, this expertise is developed through training relating to inclusion and dealing with students with special needs.

Ms. Coles talks about the need for an informed choice to work in an inclusion setting based on experience:

I felt that some type of workshop should have been given beforehand to inform those people of the pros and cons and give them a choice on whether or not that's something they can handle. I think that when the teachers are told they're going to have an inclusion class, that something that's glorified. It's like, "wow, that sounds like a good idea!" You know what I mean? But I don't think that they [teachers] know everything that goes into it to make it successful. All teachers go into it with good intentions, but down the line they weren't really sure what they were up against and then it hits them.

Mr. Ethan, a new teacher, believes that being paired with a new teacher is symptomatic of the growing teacher shortage and reflects poor decision-making.

Being a new teacher, I was paired with a new teacher. Understandably, I know that the whole system is influx, because of a shortage of teachers but there's no supervision. When the core teacher is coming to me and asking for advice and I'm a new teacher...

Ms. Coles questions the choices that were made for inclusion teachers and whether the individuals are equipped to teach students with special needs.

I think the selection process for teachers should be that someone who has some prior experience with special education or has some type of understanding of that whole environment because there is a difference, as far as dealing with both groups.

Ms. Stohl understands the lack of training that has taken place in regard to the selection of inclusion teachers, but believes the causes are largely time related. She comments:

The other thing is that we tried to pick teachers that we thought were structured and motivated to learn more about the program. People who are really motivated on their own because even though the city provides four million dollars in training for inclusionary classes, I'm the one that goes to the training and I can't give you the stuff that I learned. There are fifty manuals here on inclusion. You don't have time to read them. I don't have time to read them. I mean, I know what it is based on going to see it at some other schools and reading part of it, but I can't give you that information. It's just not enough hours. I think that you, personally, as well as the other teachers who are doing it now were never properly trained. Some of them had no training.

The teachers and paraprofessionals that I interviewed believe that in order to have a truly successful inclusion setting that is truly beneficial to the students; team teachers must have a good rapport. Teachers are better to make equitable decisions that affect their students when all voices are heard in the classroom, including the paraprofessionals that work with the students according to the teacher's responses. It is essential that

students are able to see teachers cooperating and sharing ideas, space, goals and a vision of what each wants teacher their students to achieve.

Ms. Coles discusses the value of good team building in the inclusion setting:

I think I had to develop what that model was with my partner. I think they [administrators] leave you to do that. I think that if you're not passionate or dedicated, it [inclusion] won't work know Ms. Soto downstairs is having a hard time with Mr. Ball, because the two of them never really meshed, personalities don't have to match, but you have to have the same goals and I think some kind of compassion has to be there where you want to see these kids achieve.

As mentioned above a poor rapport between teachers may affect the students learning environment and adversely affect the student's ability to achieve in an inclusive setting. Ms. Galloway, a paraprofessional with my inclusion class for two years, discusses the importance of being valued as a member of the team and how the students react to the rapport between teachers and paraprofessionals:

Before this year, I wasn't the classroom paraprofessional, but I feel that I am. Seeing that you needed help, and they need it. They'll [students] say, "Will you help me?" They're not afraid to come to me. Where I felt that last year they didn't want to come over to me because they felt that maybe I didn't want to help them. But now they know that I'm there for them because I feel that I am more appreciated. But I feel that it's a one-to-one relationship. I have a good rapport with you and Ms. Coles. You always defer to me

and I appreciate that so much and the kids see that and they feel that they can come to me too.

**Policy Implications :**

My research entailed the inclusion class I work with in a large, heterogeneous middle school in the southeastern part of Brooklyn. The program was initiated at my school in September 2000. My study examines how inclusion affects student achievement by examining responses from my students, co-workers and administrators.

My study suggests that inclusion programs are highly effective towards increasing student's achievement socially and academically according to students, teachers and administrators. However, the inclusion program has many problems systematically in its first two years, thereby adversely affecting the student's ability to achieve. Thus, there is a need for policy changes on several levels:

On a school wide level, administrators, teachers, school aides should encourage an inclusive community, where students are accepted for the strengths, differences and the gifts that each member can contribute to the community as a whole. All students should feel like they are a part of an environment that accepts them for their uniqueness and that fosters achievement for all.

Administrators should collaborate with both teachers, school aides and staff developers to establish guidelines and procedures for the inclusion program. These guidelines should include both evaluation procedures for both general education and special education students, as well as guidelines for teacher selections based on teacher choice and experience with subject and dealing with students with special needs.



Procedures for selecting students for the inclusion program should involve giving students a choice to work with special education students and teaming special education students with higher functioning students that the students can model from. Also, classes should have a blend of at risk, regular, and those identified as having some type of disability. This could possibly address some of the students' concerns that they might be working at a slower pace. If students are paired with higher functioning, students the class may move at a steady pace.

Teachers should be given the time in their schedule by administrators to prepare and collaborate with teachers, staff developers, paraprofessionals and other inclusion teachers to plan lessons and evaluate student's work. By giving other students with special needs these opportunities, students benefit from learning basic skills, working and socializing with kids

Special education classes should be given more opportunities to be included in the general education shared settings. These settings should be free of taunting, teasing and stigmatizing for both general education and special education. These students should be given adequate time to complete assignments and work with others.

- 5) The Inclusion program should be fully supported by the principal, teachers, staff and parents supporting the inclusion program and its students over administrative demands such as filling class seats.
- 6) Both teachers and students should be given the opportunity to give input regarding the inclusion program. Teachers and administrators should work together with to provide the model inclusion setting. On a district level, training should be provided for

both new teachers involved in the inclusion program and experienced teachers. Also resources should be provided in order to ensure success for both general education and special education groups.

**New Questions for Research:**

The inclusion program has been somewhat successful. The students have achieved many of their goals largely due to their efforts, and those of their teachers. The inclusion program will improve if these suggestions are considered.

Finally, there are some questions that my research did not address but should be further developed:

How do the administrative demands of the school affect the inclusion program?

Do financial restraints result in the misplacement of general education students in inclusion settings?

Do special education students receive the required funding mandated by the Federal and State government? Are these funds being misappropriated for the general education under the guise of inclusion?

4) What was the source of the behavior problems that manifested? Was it learning frustration or something else?

5) What was the source of the behavior problems that the students I interviewed based on: learning frustration or something else?

6) How is time used by teachers and administration and how can it be used more beneficially for the inclusion students?

These questions suggest that more research on inclusion is needed. It is vital to the growth of the inclusion program that the school must take the time to plan effectively. This planning should involve all of those who are most affected by the program: the students, administration and teachers. True inclusion involves restructuring the school's program and an ongoing evaluation process of both its practices and results.

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Notes:

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