Successful Integration:

How Special Education Students Can Be Successfully Integrated into General Education Classrooms

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Abstract

The integration of Special Education (SE) students into General Education (GE) classrooms is becoming increasingly more prevalent in school systems attempting to accommodate policies such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act in the least-restrictive environments. However, with this new movement and requirements, there have not been many adaptations in the areas affected by this new program. The research has revealed that there are many attributes contributing to integration’s success or lack thereof. Elements that directly affect the success includes: GE teacher’s view of the program, GE teachers lack of SE knowledge and education, lack of communication amongst SE and GE teachers, as well as administration, not having responsibilities identified per role, and the lack of preparation of GE students. Having programs developed and set in place to fulfill these areas would lead to a more successful integration of SE students into GE classrooms.

Keywords: special education, integration, general education, teachers, inclusion, successful integration, disabilities, collaboration, support, parents, training, adaptations, accommodations, programs, education, school, elementary school, middle school, high school, classroom
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When reflecting on the treatment and education of those with disabilities in our history, we can find great injustices in their treatment, human rights, and education. People with disabilities at one point in our history were forced to undergo the process of sterilization and in some cases, they were incarcerated, simply due to their disability (Wang, 2008). During the Civil Rights movement, those with disabilities were alongside others in their fight for equal rights. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ([Americans with disabilities act of 1990, as amended, n.d.]) was created in order to protect these rights and make sure people had equal access to society. You can visually see some of the results of this act, including wheelchair ramps and access to all buildings, or the yellow bumps at intersections for the blind.

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) to protect the rights and needs of children with disabilities ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.]). Before this was enacted, “U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws excluding certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or had an intellectual disability” ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d, para. ]). However, in the 2018-2019 school year, there were more than seven and a half million children receiving special education and other services, compared to the over a million that were excluded before EHA ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d]). During the 2018-19 school year, sixty-four percent of disabled students were integrated into GE classrooms for eighty percent or more of their day ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d]).
Statement of Problem

Although the movement of integration is going in the right direction in regards to time in a GE classroom, there is another element; the success of the program. Percentages can show us the time students are spending in the classroom and can look great on paper, but if the students are not interacting with peers or having accommodations and modifications made for learning by the GE teacher, the program is not going to be successful. The problem lies in required implementation of integration in spite of the gap in the preparedness and support of peers, teachers, and administration.

Integration was not always a topic of discussion. It is important to learn about the history of the movement for inclusive classrooms to help everyone involved understand the journey to get to where we are today, and why it is important we find a successful way to integrate. In the beginning of Wang’s (2009) analysis paper, a historic account of SE integration, and lack thereof, is recounted. The paper discusses how people with disabilities in the past have been segregated from mainstream schooling as well as economic and social activities. There was a history of extreme social practices including sterilization and incarceration. These practices were in place due to misconceptions of people with disabilities, abilities and characteristics. “The practice of separating the disabled from the rest had originated from the mistaken notion that human bodies must conform to a certain standard or norm” (Wang, 2008, p.154). The article continues, explaining how educators find segregation of SE students into classrooms designed to cater to the students' certain incapacities as beneficial. However, the paper references Dunn (1968) who explored the issues of SE segregation including the students academic achievement, labeling of obvious disclusion from mainstreaming, racial imbalances in SE, and the new development of accommodation techniques that would allow for students to be integrated.
Justification of Study

The purpose of this research is to express and explore the elements attributing to unsuccessful integration programs in order to make adaptations throughout the process to better support and educate those involved. The research can help us guide our adaptations to the most pivotal points on the road to successful integration, and really hone in on the major aspects creating the more issues.

A main concept of integration is the ability to interact, work, and learn alongside peers their own age successfully, but there are many issues that can prevent that from happening. Most SE students are not prepared or do not know how to be accepting of the SE students. This causes a greater feeling of exclusion and uncomfortability on both sides, which negatively affects both the emotional and physical learning environment. GE teachers are not well-trained in working with students with special needs, how to collaboratively work with SE teachers, how to manage an integrated classroom, and how to create accommodations and modifications. It is found that some teachers do not understand the importance of accommodation and modification in their classrooms, and do not support the program which in turn will affect its ability to reach success. Lastly, some administrations are disconnected from the programs, and believe they are providing the needed support. However, there is miscommunication between teachers and administration and these needs for success are not being met.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review I will discuss the findings of relevant research studies as they relate to my problem of practice which asks how integration of SE students into GE classrooms can be successful. During my review of the literature it led me to take note of the following themes: GE students and teachers not prepared for integration, lack of communication, and not
clear guidelines or education on the roles each party takes in the program. These themes support my understanding of what it will take to reach successful integration because it reveals the areas in which negative connotations of the program are coming from, and allows us to pinpoint what areas to work on and improve upon to reach success.

**Lack of Collaboration**

Within the concept of integration, students must rotate between Special Education classrooms (SEC) and General Education classrooms (GEC), as well as have interactions with both classrooms' respective teachers. The commonality between the teachers is the student, and if we are implementing integration for the benefit of the student, it is important both environments are consistent and on the same page. This in turn requires collaboration and interactions between the Special Education (SE) teacher and the General Education (GE) teacher in order to best provide the student with the education and interaction they need. A study from Al-Natour et al. (2015), however, revealed that at a school in Jordan, the collaboration between SE teachers and GE teachers was extremely limited and even those who believed there was collaboration, had a definition that still indicated individual work and minimal communication. To come to this conclusion, this study used surveys and semi-structured interview systems completed by both GE and SE teachers (250 of each). The results showed that both groups of teachers collaborated in a limited scope and a low frequency. When teachers thought there was a “collaboration” it was commonly presented as “I” statements, and in the form of passing information or simply due to the fact they shared a student.

Now, although teachers have fallen short in the call for collaboration for the benefit of the student, this study revealed other impacting factors affecting the drive or want for collaboration. Teachers expressed the highest constraints as their concerns with their already heavy workloads
which are not compatible with meetings to communicate and work together on specific students. Over seventy percent of both GE and SE thought this applied to them. In other cases, schools have classrooms with student numbers between forty and fifty per class. It would be nearly impossible for those teachers to keep up actively with the one student when there are forty-nine others who need assistance. Brought up in the research was that some GE teachers’ personalities and attitudes towards collaboration were perceived as negative by SE teachers. GE teachers can feel discouraged with the slow progress of SE students when they can be helping other students or other requirements that come with the teaching profession.

Another factor preventing collaboration is simply the lack of awareness of the importance of collaboration among GE teachers. They are not knowledgeable of the benefit collaboration would have for the students and for the GE teachers. Briefly mentioned in the research is that about half of both GE and SE teachers thought a constraint was not knowing the roles and responsibilities of their jobs and how they interact. This also is among administration, not knowing the job roles of their teachers and allowing for teachers to bring forth concerns or issues in their school operations. There is not specifically allocated time for collaboration at schools as well as training in how to adequately collaborate. Al-Natour et al.’s (2015) research revealed interesting dichotomies on how important collaboration is for the success of integration, yet the rate of actual collaboration is very low despite the many adjustable and flexible constraints teachers feel inhibits them from successful collaboration.

Support from GE and SE Students’ Parents

Support is an essential component needed for the success of integration. If people are not willing to support and actively work towards finding a successful system, integration will fail to reach its purpose of aiding the student. Sharma & Trory (2019)’s research focused on the
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attitudes of fifty typically developing students’ parents and twenty-one parents with children with special needs in Thailand regarding inclusion. The research used anonymous surveys to gather their data in the case that some parents of students with Special Educational Needs can feel embarrassed. Six sample schools were used to determine the purposeful sampling approach to data collection. The surveys were in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”.

Results from eighty percent of typically-developing students’ parents agreed that inclusion would help their children be more sensitive to others different from themselves and those with disabilities. Fifty percent of the parents agreed that it helped their kids become more helpful and supportive of children with special needs. Ninety percent of the parents acknowledged that inclusion would benefit the SE students. From their perspective, Sharma & Trory’s (2019) research showed that ninety percent of these parents expressed they believed, in order for the program to be successful, GE teachers would need specialized training. GE parents also shared their concerns about the program. Some worried about SE students being a distraction in the classroom, slowing the pace of academic education and taking most of the teacher’s time they could be spending with GE students. Close to ninety percent also believed their children could be scared by the behavior of SE students. In the end however, sixty percent of parents thought the benefits outweighed the concerns and seventy percent of parents said they would re-enroll their GE students in an inclusive school environment.

The parents of students with special needs were incredibly supportive of inclusion, with one-hundred percent of them either recording “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the survey for the topics of preparing their children for the world beyond school, developing self-help skills, and that inclusion was socially important for their children. Ninety percent agreed that their children
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had increased self-esteem and had good role models to follow and seventy percent agreed their children’s academic skills rapidly increased. The majority of SE parents believed the benefits were improving academics and social acceptance rates. SE parents in the study however also had their concerns. Echoing the GE parents, more than ninety percent of SE parents believed that GE mainstream teachers needed to be trained in order for successful integration. Other concerns were the potential lack of presence of a SE teacher, lack of IEP implementation, and social exclusion. In the end however, seventy-five percent of SE parents believed that the benefits outweighed the concerns with ninety-five percent saying they would re-enroll in an inclusive programmed school. So in conclusion, the majority of both SE and GE parents agreed inclusion positives outweigh the concerns and they both believed in order to be successful, there must be specialized education for the mainstreamed teachers.

**New Training for GE Teachers**

As a GE teacher in training with a minor in SE, I see how little GE students are prepared in handling SE cases and students. There is limited education on how to balance SE students and GE students, as well as how to successfully integrate and collaborate with SE teachers. In Kisbu-Sakarya & Doenyas’s (2021) research, they investigated what effect SE training could have with GE teachers in regards to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students. The research was sampled from over seven hundred mainstream school teachers in Turkey. The teachers went through a four and a half day training involving special education strategies, evidence-based applications, and inclusive education practices.

Several articles show that mainstream (integrated) teachers lack knowledge on ASD and therefore had negative attitudes with the idea of inclusion. “For example, results of a survey conducted with early childhood preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate educational
psychology course revealed the possession of more misconceptions than correct knowledge about ASD and these misconceptions were accompanied by negative views towards inclusive classrooms (Barned et al., 2011)” (Kisbu-Sakarya & Doenyas’s, 2021, p.3). What was found in this research was that for GE teachers who are open or have positive ideas about integration, they were significantly more willing and likely to introduce what they learned into the classroom. The training however did not change the opinions of those previously against integration, or those who had negative connotations with the idea. This shows the importance of school districts and credential programs teaching about inclusion as a necessary passion and positive experience and not settling for less.

GE Teacher’s Thoughts on Adaptations

There are varying opinions from GE teachers regarding adaptations for SE students in their classrooms. It is important however to understand these thoughts so we can help support them to have a more positive connotation with integration. Kargin et al. (2010) gave a hundred twenty-six GE teachers in the province of Ankara The Scale of Instructional Adaptations for Inclusions (SIMI) to collect data regarding their thoughts on the instructional adaptations that need to be made for an inclusive environment. The results show the majority of teachers see the majority of items significant and understand them to be necessary. They showed they were more likely to accept physical adaptations over educational adaptations most likely due to the fact that physical adaptations are easier to adapt and require less field knowledge. However, select teachers find adaptations to be unnecessary and unimportant. “This can be explained with the limited knowledge of the teachers with regard to the instructional adaptations that need to be made within the scope of the special education support services that need to be provided to the
students with special needs in inclusive settings” (Kargin et al., 2010, p. 2461). Without this knowledge and education, teachers can continue to view adaptations as unnecessary.

**Preparing GE Students**

In order for inclusion to be successful, GE students must be knowledgeable and prepared to work alongside, interact, and understand their SE peers. Kids, especially at that age, are wary of the unknown and different. Without lessons on disabilities, compassion, and inclusion, GE students will be confused and uncomfortable when interacting with SE students which will not foster a positive integrated learning environment. Blândul’s (2010) study interviewed eight-hundred students across Romania, Spain, Poland, and Italy. They used a sociometric test to explore GE students' preferences about their classmates. The results showed that in order to have a successful integration, it was not just necessary to have a personalized curriculum, but also the emotional support and acceptance by the other classmates. Some barriers found were communication, and behavior disorders. It showed however that most students were willing to help in the case the SE needed help. “The results showed us that a great number of non-disabled children were inadequately prepared to accept their disabled classmates and this can be a major obstacle for the latter ones’ effective inclusion in mainstream education” (Blândul, 2010, p.1). If GE students are ill-prepared to accept SE students into their classrooms, it will create a negative environment for all involved and could have a reverse effect on lessons of compassion.

The approach to inclusive integration is different from simply the perspective of a GE teacher and classroom. Different techniques and approaches would be taught and developed in order to set the students up for the highest success possible. At-Turki et al. 's (2012) research studied 140 male and female resource classroom teachers in both public and private schools in the Directorate of Amman to determine what the requirements of success of integration were.
“The policy of integration is the educational practice of the general principle that guides special education services, and it is the normalization toward the ordinary in the environments with the least restrictions” (At-Turki et al., 2012, p. 109). There might be a lot of different ideas or perceptions of what integration means, so by having its policy defined, hopefully everyone can be unified on its purpose.

**Important Aspects/Programs for Success**

This research acknowledges that prior to implementing an integration program, the teachers must be educated. They must be prepared with the importance of creating an educational curriculum and appropriate program for SE students as well as their skills (personal, social, educational, daily living). They also must be taught how to make the necessary accommodations and adjustments to their own teaching methods for the SE students in their GE class as well as having the preparation to educate GE students on how to compassionately accept their peers with disabilities. It is a big task, but necessary before the implementation of integration. In line with other articles, this article expresses the importance of the attitude of the GE teacher on SE students and integration.

The results indicated that, for the success of implementation, (in order of importance) the school program needs: “[...] awareness, support services, integration programs, the domain of the school environment, teachers of students with disabilities” (At-Turki et al., 2012, p. 108). With these suggestions implemented into aspects of the school, it will better prepare teachers, administration, and classrooms to successfully integrate SE students.

**Strategies to Integrate Students with Severe/Multiple Disabilities**

There is available literature that describes techniques to include students with mild learning disabilities, however it is becoming more common for moderate to severe SE students to
be integrated into GE classrooms. Rogers & Johnson (2018) completed a review of literature to determine effective ways to implement students with moderate/severe disabilities or multiple disabilities into the GE classroom successfully. They found it was beneficial to use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices in communication improvement benefitting inclusionary activities amongst students. Micro-Switches is also a beneficial program to help SE students make decisions and communicate with their peers allowing them to be an active participant in the classroom. Embedded Instruction is used to teach skills within the routines of the classroom that are not disruptive to the traditional class. Teachers can implement Wait Time to help students not feel rushed and to allow time to process. Wait time is the time between something the teacher says and the time it takes for the student to respond. Wait Time implemented with response cards was found to be an effective pairing. Lastly, Specialized Design Instruction helps students have the needed accommodations and modifications to set them up for the best possible success. “The most effective adaptations in the general classroom are using prior knowledge to develop new skills, adjusting content to make instruction concrete and relevant to the student’s life (Jenkinson, 2000), and identifying the students preferred learning style (Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1997)” (Rogers & Johnson, 2018, p. 7). These are methods I personally was never introduced to as a GE teacher-in-training. Teaching GE teachers how to use these programs and devices would help with the successful learning environment for students with disabilities.

**Administration Needs to Show Support**

Although teachers' attitudes are a very important aspect in the successful implementation of integration, without administrative support, it can be hard for motivated teachers to reach their full vision. Valeo (2008) published findings through interviewing six teachers on the problems
they have experienced with integration as well as their definitions of successful integration. Through the interviews, it was a commonality that GE teachers found it hard to explain their roles when it came to SE. They fell back on explaining things about their students instead of indicating their roles. Two of the teachers saw herself as a curriculum coordinator who worked in collaboration with the SE teacher. With the last two teachers, they did not see their role within integration and seemed pretty distant from the program. Later in one of their interviews the research found the teacher had a role in curriculum, but the collaboration with the SE teacher had dwindled. All of the teachers brought up the concern and struggle of time; that it is hard to balance a full classroom with the individual curriculum or programs of a few SE students. A difficulty also brought forth was of the behavioral distractions of some of the SE students to the GE classroom. The teachers described successful integration in immediate concern views; whatever they were struggling with was the definition of successful integration. This attitude could lead to discouragement and we already have discussed the importance of the view of the teacher. The teachers also questioned the value of SE students in regular settings, thinking they could not provide the student with what they needed.

When asked about support from their principals, most answers were short, negative, and denied the support from administration. The interviews suggested the teachers want the principals to have an active role in leading the integration program and helping them understand the expectations. They also want the principals to understand their challenges (including time), and help them develop and maintain positive relationships with SE teachers. When interviewed, principals believed their role fell more under administrative (paperwork) and not day-to-day running and implementation. It gave the perspective that they kept their distance, yet they were involved, attending meetings, and knowledgeable of the program. Most principals viewed their
contributions as acceptable, due to their overseer position, understanding of the program, and availability to their teachers for encouragement. The teachers however, acknowledged “[...] that principals were blind to the fact that assuming everything was well was not the same as ensuring that everything was well” (Valeo, 2008, p. 14). In total, there was disparity amongst teachers and administrators on the support the GE teachers received. Teachers felt they were not being supported whereas the principals thought they were doing their duty and offering their support, mostly through completing administrative requirements.

**What Affects Teachers Attitudes Towards Integration?**

Throughout the articles we have heard about the importance of teachers' attitudes towards integration, but what actually affects the teachers attitude and are they things that can be adjusted or solved? The Vaz et al. (2015) study had seventy four Western Australia primary school teachers participate in a cross-sectional survey to understand their attitudes and efficacy regarding integration. GE teacher’s attitudes are often based on real-world concerns about how their inclusive classroom would successfully operate rather than the basis of particular ideology. They have understandable hesitations such as balancing SE students with the needs of GE students and making sure neither students are disadvantaged, the absence of a lack of supporting systems, and the little training they have in inclusive practices. The research is showing that teacher education is necessary for a positive outlook on integration. “Similar findings have been found with trainee teachers, where the inclusion of a compulsory module on diversity in a post-graduate degree promoted having an inclusive attitude. Pedagogies that combine formal training and planned hands-on experience with people with disabilities have been shown
to improve preparedness and positive attitudes towards inclusion” (Vaz et al., 2015, p. 2).

Experience and training alone will not be able to fully effect and sway an opinion, but it can improve the outlook.

The results of the surveys showed that male teachers, teachers fifty-five years or older (compared to thirty-five to fifty-five), and teachers with low self-efficacy in their teaching skills had more negative outlooks on integration, whereas teachers who have reported training in teaching students with disabilities have a more positive attitude towards inclusion (Vaz et al., 2015).

**Conclusion**

There are ways SE students can successfully be integrated into GE classrooms, but according to the research there are steps that must be taken in order for it to work as intended, to benefit the students to reach success. A major barrier is the view of the GE teacher. If they do not have the vision and motivation for integration, they are much less likely to use techniques towards inclusion. Ways found to help improve these numbers were educating future educators in their credential program about collaborative and inclusion techniques in their classrooms. There are developed techniques that can be taught to the GE teachers to improve their confidence in teaching SE students along with their GE students. The support is shown from both GE and SE parents which is vital to have that home support, however, teachers feel administrators are falling short of their involvement and support. In order to have successful integration, GE teachers must be further educated to build their confidence, knowledge, and experience working with SE students and collaborating with SE teachers, the GE students need to be prepared and educated in order to fully accept students with special needs, the program must have support from all areas, and lastly, implementations of successful teaching techniques.
METHODOLOGY

The research conducted by this paper was limited and chosen based off the concepts presented in the theoretical framework of the Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCRIT) and the interview of experience of a community partner.

Theoretical Framework

Integration is an expansive topic in which it can be looked at through a matter of different lenses all emphasizing different focuses. So, in order to narrow this vastness, I researched and was guided by a framework known as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCRIT). This is inclusive of Disability Studies which is explored and explained in an article by Smith and Erevelles (2014). The article explains how the framework emphasizes the variations, separation, and limiting factors between the medical and political/social model of constructed ideas and views of those with disabilities. Some people have the developed view that those with disabilities are on-going patients in need of care and treatment, which in turn diminish society's view of them. Instead of being viewed as active members of society capable of many things, they can be seen as “projects” or “[...] dependent objects of charity… thereby rendering them historically inert or invisible” (Smith & Erevelles, 2014, p. 33). Limitations imposed on those with disabilities also stems from the societal discrimination and lack of accommodations of our world today. Although there is a horrific past of the treatment of those with disabilities, society has not fully reflected and grown. People with disabilities can still be thought of as “less-than” or “incapable”. If DisCRIT is simply viewed as a movement towards inclusion in schools however, it will directly leave out the importance of the contexts keeping it from being understood as a political concept and identifying those with disabilities as a political minority (Smith & Erevelles, 2014).
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Having the DisCRIT framework as a lens for my research helped emphasize the urgency and the larger impact the treatment of those with disabilities has on society. By identifying the disabled community as a political minority and viewing inclusion, integration, and the treatment and rights of those with disabilities as a political concept, it extends the relevancy and urgency beyond the opinions of teachers. Although education policies are beginning to reflect this political perspective, some teachers continue to think of it as an additional work-load requirement instead of an opportunity to give disabled students the rights they deserve and have historically been denied. Mentioned directly in the article was an opposition of a proposal regarding Disability Studies curriculum for teachers in which the reviewer complained about adding another minority group to study and understand in their “[...] overflowing plate of issues to deal with in public school classrooms” (Smith & Erevelles, 2014, p.31). Separately mentioned in the article by Smith & Erevelles (2014), it was noted that people without disabilities often separate themselves from those with disabilities unless they are in a controlling, benefactor position. The article specifically highlighted that students studying to become teachers complain about making modifications and creating accommodations for students with disabilities, which in turn cements their disempowering ways of understanding and interacting with disabled students. By observing the DisCRIT framework through the research of this paper, it shows integration (and beyond) is not just a problem of personal preference, optional based on your passion, interest, and time. It is a prevalent problem in need of fixing within society revolving around the rights and acknowledgment of those with disabilities, and it can start in the school system and education of our future educators.
Community Partner Interview

Through the course of fulfilling my Special Education Minor, I have observed in many Special Education classrooms. At a local middle school, I observed in the Moderate-Severe classroom and even ended up subbing for the classroom another day. I was able to accompany a few students into integrated settings through this process, and acknowledged the little amount of actual interaction and instruction the special education students had while they were being “integrated”. Because I had the greatest opportunities and experiences in this classroom, I decided that its teacher, whom we will call Mr. Sped, would be a great professional partner to accompany my Capstone research project.

Mr. Sped has worked as an Educational Specialist for the past three years, he followed the path of his mother who also worked as a Special Education teacher for her career. As a current Moderate-Severe teacher, he has a contemporaneous view of the integration movement. He also has experience in working with methods and has insight into what has worked and what has fallen short of the “integration call”. He is in the trenches of this research from the perspective of someone who has been instructed on how to work and teach special needs students. For the general education teacher audience, who I mostly aim my project towards, this insight can help aid them to see integration’s importance, and learn from someone who has experience working with the students entering into their classrooms. Mr. Sped, provided great perspective, advice, and thoughts on the successful implementation of integration that happens to also align with other research that aids in answering my Capstone research question and therefore is a great community research partner.

In the interview, I asked Mr. Sped on his personal outlooks and understandings of popular topics in the integration department, as well as personally successful techniques and advice for
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general education teachers and school administration on how to integrate special education students. This question aligned with one of my sub-questions: what is integration and how does it impact students? Mr. Sped gave his take on special education integration. He gave the inside of the importance of integration into the students daily lives as it gives them different opportunities to interact with general education students. This impacts his students greatly, exposing them to “typical” behaviors and the social skills of other students. Going beyond just the special needs students, Mr. Sped also brought to light the importance integration has in the lives of general education students. It allows those students to interact with students with both physical and mental disabilities, giving them a greater understanding and compassion for students they normally wouldn’t interact with. This also would benefit general education students by helping them remove stigmas and creating a more positive campus culture. Within the topic of integration, there is a conflict on the amount students with special needs should be integrated; partially, or fully. Mr. Sped believes for Moderate/Severe, partial integration in elective subjects and PE is best as it amplifies social interactions more than academics. He noted however that students can also be successful in core classes, but that it might be harder and overwhelming for some students.

I was very interested in gaining Mr. Sped’s thoughts and advice for general education teachers as it directly applies to myself, and my audience. Mr. Sped acknowledged one of his reservations about integration would be general education teachers not holding students with special needs accountable, and that they would look to support staff (classroom aids, paraprofessionals, etc) to handle behavioral outbursts in class. When asked what he thought it would take for successful integration, Mr. Sped, emphasized the importance of communication. From his perspective, he thinks the education teaching community might not always have full
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buy-in of the program, but that with communication of topics, assignments, and projects and how they can be altered, he thinks it can still be successful. Without my Special Education minor and experience in Special Education classrooms, I would not know certain techniques and ways of working with students with disabilities to help them reach their fullest potential. I still could learn more. Mr. Sped encouraged more adequate training on how to incorporate students into general education classrooms, since that often is not part of our education. He hopes to see more conferences and trainings to help general education teachers gain more tools so they do not have to rely on support staff to help the special needs students while the general education teacher teaches the rest. Eventually, Mr. Sped sees the role of Special Education teachers changing to that of a team teacher, where they push into specific periods to help general education teachers and students during those classes. This idea is starting to be implemented through playing with logistics to make it as successful as possible while maintaining class with the proper support.

One tool recommendation Mr. Sped has was the implementation of a “cheat sheet”. He has had personal success with this tool. It allows the teacher to get a quick glimpse at information about a student. This would include insights of their dislikes, likes, motivations, and any potential behaviors that could occur, their triggers, and how to handle it when they arise.

I feel I gained a lot of insight and inspiration from Mr. Sped as my community partner. He is currently in the middle of this topic finding the best ways to implement special needs students into general education classrooms and his advice to us general education teachers as integration becomes more prominent is greatly beneficial to my research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After evaluating the research gathered through the literature review and interview, we can conclude that there are different themes that, in combination, lead to unsuccessful integration
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programs. However, now acknowledging these barriers, we can focus on improving those areas through directed adaptations and education to lead to the successful integration of SE students into GE classrooms.

Discussions of Finding

Common themes appeared across both the research and community partner interview to give a comprehensive view at the aspects and views of what stands in the way and what supports successful integration. It was revealed that integration is mostly viewed as an opportunity for GE and SE students to interact and learn from each other. Parents of both GE and SE students, research, and Mr. Sped all agreed that integration did not only benefit the SE students, but that it also provided GE students with greater compassion and understanding of people who have disabilities or may be “different” than them. That being said however, the GE students are not being prepared to accept SE students, and it has created an even greater barrier in an inclusive classroom, leading to an unhealthier classroom environment. The societal acceptance and fight against prejudice emphasized in the DisCRIT framework supports the need for a prepared and understanding society. Educating children on the history of mistreatment of this group and the diminishing of patronizing ideas is important in recognizing the disabled community as a politically recognized minority group. The research also revealed that the attitude of teachers towards the topic of integration is an important factor in the program’s success. Teachers have a large lack of knowledge on the topic which does not aid this attitude development. It is shown that there is little to no training in various aspects surrounding integration ideas including knowledge on what their role in the program consists of. There is also little to no training in DisCRIT, regarding the history of those with disabilities and the understanding of people with disabilities as a capable group and the problem of their disclusion as a political concept. GE
teachers and SE teachers have little to no communication on the topic of shared students and that is an issue brought to light by the research and Mr. Sped’s emphasis on the importance of co-working. Lastly, there is a disconnect between administration and the teachers. The research shows that although administration feels they are reaching their duty, under their understanding of their role, the teachers feel they are not receiving the necessary support and help. All of the findings have led to the overarching view that there are multiple areas that need improvement and focus to reach successful integration.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

In our current education system, there is a movement and requirement for SE students to be integrated into GE classrooms, however, the tools and preparations have not been made to create an environment for the program to be successful. GE teachers have not been educated or prepared on how to work with SE students, collaborate with SE teachers, manage an integrated classroom, and provide necessary accommodations and modifications for the students. The feeling of being unprepared can affect their views of the integration program, and their support of the program is directly related to an aspect of its success. Without the support of parents, administration, or teachers it will be hard to implement the changes necessary to reach the full capacity of integration. The opinions of the GE students are also important to keep in mind. If the students are unaccepting of the SE students, the environment for both GE and SE students will not be a positive, successful learning culture. Again, it is an aspect of the unknown and unfamiliarity of students with special needs. Lastly, some administrations have a distant relationship with integration programs, keeping their roles to ones of paperwork, whereas teachers are asking for more help, acknowledgement, and support. For successful integration, the
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problems we have found through this research must be faced. Communication must be mended between all parties and the education of students and GE teachers needs to be increased. With those elements tended to, the integration of SE students into GE classrooms can be successful and in the end, everyone involved would benefit.

Implications and Recommendations

Through this research, we have gathered a comprehensive look at what is keeping school systems from reaching a successful integration program. By confronting these barriers, we can increase the effectiveness and achievement of these programs. The first step in the reinventing process is the education of current and upcoming teachers. As a student in a teaching program, I can attest that GE teachers are not prepared enough for integration practices. There are minimal classes regarding SE awareness, experiences with SE students, practices in creating modifications, education on classroom management with integration elements, and training on cooperating with SE teachers. I am under the impression some of that knowledge is covered in credential programs, however, developing a teacher's confidence regarding working with SE students will take time and experience. I would encourage a movement of GE teachers to enroll in more SE courses, possibly making it a part of the major course list. I would also encourage external training per school district, in order to best set the individual environments up for success. I personally have a minor in Special Education, and have lots of experience and passion for helping SE students, and I greatly see the benefit of having the knowledge, experience, and patience for those with disabilities as a GE teacher. Educating GE teachers will allow easier transfer of information to GE students on disabilities, and accepting those that may be “different” then them. In my classroom, I plan on having guest speakers, lessons, and culture studies of different disabilities, as well as including American Sign Language into our daily classroom
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routine. I also plan to actively reach out to SE teachers to include and welcome students with disabilities into my classroom. Lastly, there needs to be clear expectations on roles and responsibilities regarding the program. Administration, SE, and GE teachers should all gather together to discuss and identify their roles and expectations for the program. This also opens communication to discuss areas of improvement throughout the process of developing a new integration program. I hope to be an advocate in my future school for increased communication and collaboration.
REFERENCES


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Wang, H. L. (2009). Should all students with special educational needs (SEN) be included in mainstream education provision?--a critical analysis. *International Education Studies, 2*(4), 154–.
Community Partner Interview Email Confirmation

Hello [Redacted]

This is Lindsey Hunter, I am the Chico State student who observed in your classroom last semester. I hope you are doing well! I had a wonderful time in your classroom last semester and I had a great time subbing for your class. I am currently in an Introduction to Autism Disorders class, as well as my college Capstone. I was wondering if I could interview you, over email or phone call about your experience working with students with Autism Disorders. I am focusing my Capstone on the effects of integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms. I also was emailing to inquire if I could interview you about your thoughts and experiences with special needs integration into the classroom. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Lindsey Hunter

Hi Lindsey!

Absolutely, I’d love to do an interview for you. I am currently home under quarantine, but feel fine. You can either email me questions or call whichever works best for you.

Thanks,