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INCLUSION: LEARNING WITHOUT BARRIERS

A Thesis Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

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University Honors

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Has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University

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Abstract

This study analyzes the literature that has been written about inclusive education and the effect on students in the classroom and compares the information in the literature to three interviews with mothers who have had experiences with inclusive classrooms. Inclusive education is defined as the concept that students with disabilities, regardless of the nature and extent of their disability, should be educated with age-appropriate peers in regular classrooms (with needed supplementary aids and services) in the neighborhood school (Gartner, 2002). The main focus in this study is to examine how the parents view the learning of their child and how the parents view each type of specific learning environments. The study also focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of the different learning environments the families have experienced.

The significance of the study is to help inform families about the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education from other parent's perspectives. The study was also made to help schools realize the difference inclusive classrooms can make for their students. Overall, the research found that inclusive settings were the most beneficial to students if the right supports were provided, but due to perceived budget cuts, many schools were not able to provide the support students might need.

Introduction

Previous research has been conducted to see the educational benefits of inclusive schooling based on test scores and teacher recounts, but minimal research has been done on the views parents have concerning inclusive education. The goal of this study is to take information that has already been researched or documented and combine that research with parent interviews about inclusive education. The research questions addressed in the interviews were 'how the parents feel about the level of learning that is accomplished in an inclusive classroom compared to the learning accomplished in a self-contained classroom' and 'which setting their children learned best in and why'. The interviews were then compared to see the benefits to each learning environment.

Inclusive schooling can be beneficial for many students. Every student, with or without a disability, has the right to be a part of a classroom with his or her peers. Everyone desires friendships, relationships, and academic challenges, and children with disabilities need to have these relationships as well as typically developing peers (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014). Inclusion refers to the concept that students with disabilities, regardless of the nature and extent of their disability, should be educated with age-appropriate peers in regular class rooms (with needed supplementary aids and services) in the neighborhood school (Gartner, 2002). Self-contained classrooms are classrooms that only include students with special needs. The classroom has its own specially trained teacher or teachers who were educated in different ways to teach children with special needs. There are others in the classroom, called aides or paraeducators, who are there to provide assistance to the students. This was thought by educators

to be the best place for students to learn with others of similar cognitive ability, and not necessarily at their age level.

The study was done to help families learn about inclusive education and the benefits of having their child in an inclusive setting. Inclusive classrooms, or even partially inclusive classrooms, are important for the families to know about because it can be the best place for their students to learn. Inclusive schooling is a part of the law and it's a disappointing reality that families may not know about the option of inclusive schooling.

Literature Review

The Law

Inclusion became a topic of interest to educators and families after the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now renamed IDEA- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was passed in 1975 (Causton, 2015). IDEA supports free, appropriate public education to all students in the least restrictive environment. For most students, the least restrictive environment is in a classroom with age appropriate peers and learning materials. Some materials and assignments might be modified and there could be extra help in the classroom, but the students are still participating in each activity. IDEA states the following about how inclusion should be used in the schools:

> That to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (S. Res. 101-476, 1990)

Teachers:

The success of inclusion in the classroom is largely dependent on the disposition of the classroom teachers (Segall, 2012). According to Monsen (2014), there are three types of teachers: those willing to try inclusion with appropriate help, those who feel inclusion is detrimental to the students without disabilities, and teachers who do not think they are qualified

enough to meet the needs of both types of students in one classroom. Even though it is hard to imagine, resistance to inclusive classrooms is a common problem. To help the teachers feel more comfortable in inclusive settings, some schools found that by educating the teachers about the disabilities of their students and by giving their teachers the opportunity to interact alongside students with disabilities, the teachers' worries were put to ease. The teachers then felt like they could be a part of an inclusive school setting because they had seen how to interact with students with disabilities (Segall, 2012).

As teachers become educated about inclusion, they learn how to adapt their teaching styles to include students with all abilities and learn how to collaborate with other professionals to maximize the effectiveness of their lessons. Many conceptions the teachers have of inclusion are different than the reality of what inclusion looks like. Inclusion means that children will go to their neighborhood school, be put in an age appropriate general education classroom, be accepted into the class and school environment, be given help in areas when they need it, and to be taught with appropriate accommodations and collaborative teaching (McLeskey, 2000). Teachers should not have students "dumped" on them or be given students without considering appropriate supports. By learning what inclusion means, teachers become more open to the idea and are willing to give inclusion a chance.

Types of Inclusion:

Inclusion done the right way benefits both the teachers and the students. There are many different types of inclusive settings including students being in a classroom all day without the help of an aide, or in a classroom part of the day with an aide, or to be fully in a special education class or even a different residential school. These are the multiple settings that a child can be in and they are shown on the continuum in figure one that was found on Inclusive

Strategies (2010). The continuum shows the least restrictive environment (most inclusive setting)

at the top of the triangle and works down to the most restrictive environment.

The Placement Continuum

General Education with No Supplementary Aids or Services

General Education with Supplementary Aids or Services

Resource Support (placement in a special education classroom less than 40% of the special day

Self-Contained Placement(placement in a special education classroom more than 40% for the school day (ex. Instructional, DD, DI, and DLP classes)

Separate Special Education Day School

Residential Placement
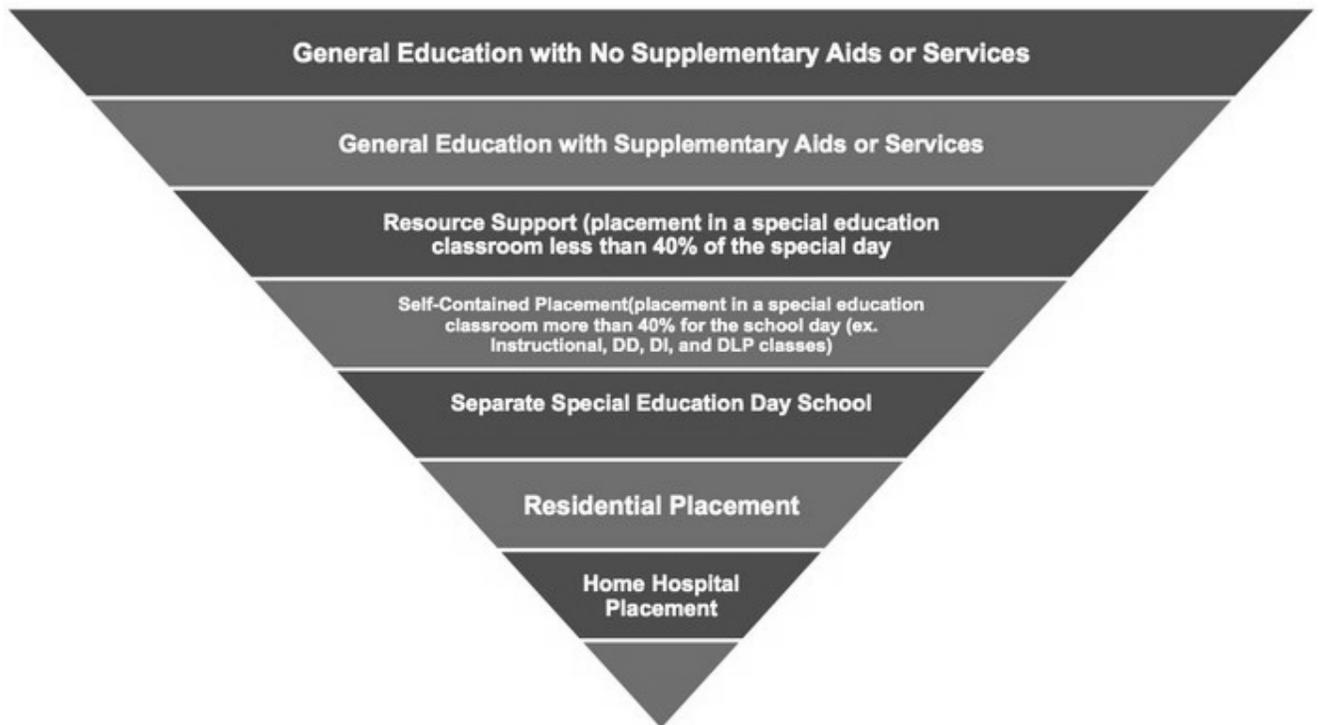
Home Hospital Placement

Figure 1. Inclusion continuum- Goes from top to bottom displaying the most inclusive setting to

the least inclusive setting (Inclusive Strategies, 2010)

Inclusion with other professionals:

To have a successful inclusive classroom, there are many different professionals that

need to work together to create the fully inclusive environment. One of those professionals that

will work closely with teachers is a speech-language pathologist. In many general education

classrooms, students are pulled out for speech-language therapy with a certified speech-language

pathologist. As defined by the IDEA law,

Speech-language pathology services includes; (a) identification of children with speech

or language impairments; (b) diagnosis and appraisal of specific speech or language

impairments; (c) referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the

habilitation of speech and language impairments; provision of speech and language

services for the habilitation or prevention of communicative impairments; and, (d)

counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding speech and language

impairments. (S. Res. 300.34, 2004)

Speech-language pathologists (SLP) work with a variety of different abilities and can

provide one on one instruction or group work. If a teacher is working in an inclusive classroom,

lessons will have to be planned with integrated services from the SLP about the specific therapy

techniques that are needed for students in the classroom (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014).

These therapy techniques can be used with the whole class and in some cases can benefit

multiple students at once. If the SLP helps integrate therapy into every day activities in the

classroom, pull out therapy would not be needed and the students can be fully integrated into the

class. There are multiple ways that therapy can be integrated into the classroom so that students

do not need to leave.

A technique to incorporate SLP goals into everyday lesson plans is to set up stations at

one point during the day (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014). At this time, students can rotate

between a group led by the lead teacher, one led by the SLP, and one that is self-led. During this

time, the SLP can incorporate therapy into his or her lesson to help improve the child's speech

they are working with. For example if the SLP is trying to help a student say the beginning 's'

and 'sh' sound in a word, the small group lesson could be about ships and how they sail on the

ocean. This lesson will seem routine to all the students, but will help target the specific sound

goals of the student that receives services from the SLP.

Another way for SLP goals to be integrated into the lessons is to teach the general

education teacher specific ways to word sentences to benefit the students in the class. For

example, the simple therapy technique of recasting can be taught to the general educators to

assist in building longer, more complex sentences. Recasting is when you take what the student

says and add more detail and depth to the phrase. For example, the student says, "Cow jump,"

the educators' response might be "yes, the cow jumped over the fence." When educators use

recasting and adding more to the sentences students use, students' learning can improve without

changing the teaching style dramatically.

SLPs are an asset to many schools because they are able to help students understand

language and be able to express themselves. They are also able to teach general education

teachers techniques to help improve their students' speech. The SLP is important in the schools,

but most important in an inclusive classroom, because they are another person that can help the

children grow accustomed to a learning environment.

The Families' Role:

A contributing factor to the success of inclusive education is communication between the

educational professionals and the families of the students. Kluth (2003) talked about how

important it is to learn everything you can from the families of the students you are teaching,

because they know their children best and are able to give advice on how to approach situations

with their children. As Kluth (2003) stated, "[the family] can provide more rich and detailed

information about a student than any professional we can ask or any report we can read"(p. 58).

The information provided by families gives educators a glimpse of how families have made it

through difficult situations. Families may be able to tell educators what motivates their child and how to achieve the best results if you want their attention.

    If families are ignored, dismissed, or otherwise prevented from participating in the education of their child, the student's program will suffer – skills and knowledge gained in the classroom may not be reinforced in the home; any competencies the child demonstrates in the home will not be practiced and perhaps even seen, in the classroom; and new learning inspired by the synergy of a home-school partnership will never be realized (Kluth, 2003, p. 58).

Working with families will benefit the classroom and individual students in many ways, but educators have to keep in mind that not communicating with families can be detrimental to the education of their students.

Benefits to inclusion:

    Benefits of inclusion can be seen in different ways with different students. Causton (2015) discussed the differences an inclusive classroom can make in the life of one student: she wrote about the story of Matthew. As the observer walked into the special education classroom at the end of the hall, they saw Matthew. Matthew was a fourth grade student who was assigned to a self-contained classroom with other autistic children. At that point in time, Matthew was supposed to be working on math, but was focused more on the problems of the other children in the class than on what he was supposed to be doing**.** Four months later, the same observer walked into a general education classroom that Matthew was in, and the scene was vastly different from four months prior. At this moment, the observer saw Matthew interacting with other students, focusing on the math problems in front of him, and answering the questions in

class. Matthew's personality had changed to that of a more open and focused person Causton (2015).

The scenario with Matthew is an example of how inclusion can change the learning potential of a student. Fruth (2015) discussed his findings that students with disabilities performed better in inclusive environments than in the segregated environment of a self-contained classroom. The other students in Matthew's class were there to help him succeed and participate in class. Finke (2009) said the students often work together in groups to promote teamwork and inclusion. She also wrote, "Kid thinking and speaking at times can be clearer to the kids than when said by an adult. Other peers can help the child understand what they are learning about." When a child is given that role to help others learn, it boosts their self-confidence and helps the general education students learn to be compassionate leaders.

The confidence that students gain when learning in an inclusive environment helps promote the growth of social skills in everyday environments that can then be transferred to activities outside the school setting (Kluth, 2003). Another skill the students learn in an inclusive environment is how to express themselves in appropriate ways. Kluth (2003) shared a story from a mother, Arlene M. Smerdon, about how her daughter is able to get involved in extracurricular activities due to the growth that has occurred because of inclusive education.

> Inclusion has been ongoing and authentic in the case of my daughter's education. Credit goes to the staff in her inclusive environment, as independence has always been an important goal. To that end, many learning opportunities have been afforded to Chelsea and peers have been drawn in to support her in those situations. One of the best outcomes has been her social growth and learning. She has not only participated in a high school drama class but, with the encouragement of her drama teacher and classmates, she

auditioned for and performed a dramatic interpretation of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky"

in the school talent showcase. I was initially worried about the after-school rehearsals.

Who would supervise? "The staff couldn't possibly be asked to stay after school on their

own time, could they?" As it turns out my worries were unnecessary, as staff and students

had already taken all of these factors into consideration and the event went off without a

hitch. This positive exposure led to many more peer contacts in the days after the event.

(Kluth, 2003, p. 61)

By having classmates and teachers that are encouraging and understanding, Chelsea was

able to learn social skills and gain the confidence needed to participate in the school's drama

performances. Without the help of inclusive education, Chelsea and Matthew might not have

been able to gain enough social skills to be successful in class and later on in the real world.

Inclusive education gave Chelsea and Matthew the ability to learn along with their peers and

gave them the chance to succeed in the least restrictive environment. Their ability to participate

in classrooms with their general education peers allowed them to not only grow their skills but to

also impact the other students around them.

Considering inclusive educational settings is required by the law and has

benefits. Students with disabilities, peers, and educators gain valuable experience from being

educated in inclusive classrooms. Families may or may not be aware of the continuum of special

education services, therefore it is important to consider their experiences and perceived needs of

their children.

Methodology

Research for this paper was qualitative and consisted of a review of literature and personal interviews. Interviews were conducted with families that responded through a list-serve and a posting on a closed social media site. All participants signed a release form before any questions were asked. Interviewees were given a questionnaire (Appendix A) to fill out before the interview started and then did an interview either in person or over the phone with a specific set of questions. The interview questions were prewritten and are attached in Appendix B.

 The interviews occurred with three parents of children with special needs who live in Midwestern states. The parents interviewed had the option to pass on questions or discontinue the interview altogether. Interviews took approximately 10-15 minutes per person and each interview was recorded so that correct information was cited. Interviews were transcribed into documents by listening to the recordings of the interview. Pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality of the participants in both the transcription and in the results section of this document. After transcriptions were made, all recordings were deleted from the recording device.

There were three families interviewed about the types of schooling their children had. All interviews took place with the child's mother. The questionnaire and release forms were filled out before the interviews were given and then handed to the interviewer. The children discussed were 5- to 14-years-old and are currently in kindergarten, third grade, and eighth grade.

The interviews were analyzed by comparing the transcripts to find similar trends among the three. There were four common trends that were found between the interviews. These trends were further explored and compared to the research found in the literature review. Next, the interviews were searched for answers to the research questions. Information pertaining to the

research questions was found in both the interviews and the questionnaires that were filled out

before the interview took place.

Results

Case 1: Andrew

Andrew is a 5-year-old boy who is currently enrolled in kindergarten. Andrew is diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) and Autism. Andrew has been a part of three different learning environments, one being a fully inclusive classroom, the second being in an inclusive classroom 50% of the time, the third being a special education classroom with inclusive large group time and specials approximately 1.5 hours long.

Andrew's educational history starts with preschool. During his preschool years, he was in an inclusive classroom 50% of the time with the correct supports. According to Sarah, Andrew's mother, he learned best in this partially inclusive setting. He had more one on one time with paraeducators and the staff seemed to know how to better handle the classroom with him in it.

In kindergarten Andrew was placed into a general educational classroom full time with limited supports. According to Sarah, this was due to budget cuts and Andrew did not fare well in the general educational setting. There was too much stimulation for Andrew and this caused him to go into sensory overload, resulting in Andrew acting out his frustrations in class. The general educational teacher did not know how to calm Andrew down, therefore she sent him to the office on a regular basis. This resulted in Sarah thinking that his general education teacher "did not have the time of day for him". Sarah talked about how this setting was a setback for Andrew, because his IQ dropped from 119 to 104 when he was retested. It was also a setback because Andrew thought he was misbehaving all the time due to being sent to the office, when in reality he was just reacting from sensory overload.

Currently, Andrew is spending most of his time in the special education classroom and is in the general educational setting for larger group time and specials. Sarah states that this is the best option for now because the school district does not have the funding to have more help in the classroom. Sarah enjoys having Andrew in the general educational classroom because of the large group time. This allows Andrew to interact with other kids and to hopefully be able to handle the sensory stimulation better in larger group settings.

Case 2: Ryan

Ryan is a 9-year-old boy that is currently in third grade. Ryan has a diagnosis of autism, which has allowed him to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) since first grade. An IEP is a plan that is made in schools to help get students what they need and set goals to help them through school. Ryan's IEP allows him to have special education support with social skills and other subjects he struggles with while taking tests, but also gives him the opportunity to be in a general education classroom the majority of the time. Ryan has the help of a full time aide to make it possible to be with his general education peers all the time.

Ava, Ryan's mother, was very adamant about getting the best education for her son. Ava and her husband believed that being in a general education classroom is vital because that is where Ryan gets to see age appropriate social skills modeled by the general education students. She talked about how intelligent Ryan is but how "he is just not good at the game of school or the game of socializing." With this social interaction and modeling, she hopes that he will start to learn from them.

One of the difficulties that Ava noticed with Ryan being in an inclusive classroom is that Ryan is authentically aware of his difference and that can cause anxiety. For example, Ava

mentioned that at times Ryan can get aggressive and when that happens he has to be removed from the classroom because hitting peers or teachers is not allowed. She understands that that is necessary, but after this happens Ava talks about Ryan feeling shame and knowing that he is different.

When Ava was asked if she knew about inclusion, she gave a well thought out response:

> Inclusion, I think, is to make every attempt to keep the peers, the curriculum, [and] the setting as similar [as possible] to the norm of the population of what everyone else gets. For the students that are labeled special ed or gifted, [they] get what they need because they are on the edges of the population. But that they also have a taste of the norm of what everyone else is getting.

Ava then proceeds to tell the interviewer that she does not believe that inclusion is extremely hard to successfully accomplish, but that it can be hard to successfully work with other educators. She said working together with all the different educators in the inclusive classroom can be hard because each person has their own ideas and their own beliefs and it can be difficult to change the ways of developed professionals.

Case 3: Josh

Josh is a 14-year-old boy that is currently in eighth grade. Josh has been diagnosed with Asperger's, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Josh is currently in eighth grade and is in a transitional stage to attend a new school. Josh has been in three different educational settings. He started out in general education, then moved to a behavioral classroom format and is now in a transitional stage where he is doing half days in the behavioral setting and half days in the general education setting.

Josh's first educational setting was general education with his own paraeducator. According to his mother Emma, the general education setting was not the best fit for him. As Josh got older, the school district kept having budget cuts, which resulted in the school losing paraeducators, but keeping the special education teacher. Josh's educational time was split between two classrooms. For the last year he was at this school he spent 40% of his time with the special education teacher when more support in specific subjects was required and then would spend 60% of his time in the general education classroom with his peers.

The second education setting that Josh was in was the behavioral classroom. For Josh, this meant that he had to move schools and go to a building that only had classes for students that had behavioral difficulties. This school district has an elementary school, a junior high school and a high school specifically for students with behavioral, physical, or emotional needs. Its goal is to be able to give support to those students who have emotional, behavioral or physical needs. The school has placed supports along the way to give their students access to the best education possible. There are speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, special education teachers, and paraeducators on site at all times.

 In Josh's specific building, they use a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) that helps students learn ways to manage their anger and provide professionals for when students act out. The school teaches both the students and teachers special restraints to use when the students become physical. The school also uses an isolation room for when students get extremely worked up and they need a quite environment to calm down.

When asked by the interviewer, Emma said that the behavioral classroom setting has been the best learning environment for him because it has "allowed him to really calm down, get to know himself better and mature and come to terms with his disorder". She said that in the

general education setting, Josh did not have support when he needed it. The move between the two schools was a difficult transition, but the overall result was worth it.

The behavioral setting was the best environment for Josh, but there were also some disadvantages in this setting. Emma said:

Because they are in a behavioral setting, the kids are not given homework. They are not challenged as much as [children in] general education classrooms are. So when your child becomes more eligible for transition setting where [the educators] are wanting to try and incorporate them back into the general classroom format, it's really a mountain to climb because they are so behind. Because in the behavioral setting, they don't want to upset them any more then they could be and homework tends to be a frustration for these kids… so they tend to do it all in the classroom. They tend to then be behind one or two grades. Even if they are highly intelligent kids academically, they are behind their peers.

Even though Emma believed that the behavioral support program has been the best for Josh, she still thinks that the best learning environment for kids with special needs is in an inclusive classroom. She talked about how the inclusive setting could work well if there were not any more budget cuts and if there was enough support in the classrooms. Since Josh is in the transitional stage to go back to an inclusive setting, she is worried about Josh not having the support he needs and not having the ability to do anything about it.

Summary:

In all three interviews, multiple educational settings for learning were discussed. There are advantages and disadvantages to each learning environment. Table 1 lists all the different types of learning environments that were talked about in the interviews. This table synthesizes all

three of the interview responses to improve the understanding of the differences between the

learning environments. The chart was made to better see the advantages and disadvantages of a

fully inclusive classroom, a partially inclusive classroom, a special education classroom, and a

behavioral classroom.

Table 1
Different Educational Settings

Type of Setting	Advantages	Disadvantages
Fully inclusive classroom	Participate with general education peers all the time Peer modeling of appropriate behaviors Learning is more productive	Environment can be over stimulating Need more individual support Teachers need to work together to form plans Students can feel like they are put on display when they are not able to do an activity
Partially inclusive classroom	Students can learn from peers Students can get individual support for subjects that they struggle with Learn in an environment that is not over stimulating The ability to leave the environment if specific skills are needed to be taught	Transition times are difficult Going between settings can be stressful for both teachers and students Teachers have to coordinate lessons with each other Expectations can be different in each room
Special Education Setting	Specified learning for every subject Lessons are made to benefit the students learning Specifically trained teachers Support all the time	No typically developing peer modeled behavior Learning is less productive due to the number of student and various needs in classroom
Behavioral classroom	Specifically trained teachers Behavior plans are well developed Learning is focused on the students Support readily available Specialists are available all day Specific safe places are available to cool down in	Students are not pushed to learn as much as possible No typically developing peer modeled behavior Very little interaction with the community

Note. This table is a summary of the findings of educational preferences. The table shows the different learning environments and the advantages and disadvantages to each environment as stated by the interviewed families.

Discussion

The three families that were interviewed had things in common with each other, but also had different responses to the types of learning environments their children were a part of. The trends that were seen were that all families thought that inclusive education was the best learning option if the appropriate supports were provided, that for inclusion to happen all educators and families had to be on the same page, that peer interactions were an important aspect in the education of their child, and that sometimes a child needs specific support that cannot be given in an inclusive environment.

Inclusive settings were a part of all three families' educational experiences. Andrew and Josh both had a difficult time with a fully inclusive program, whereas Ryan had an amazing experience with a fully inclusive classroom. Even though Andrew and Josh both had difficult times in a fully inclusive setting, their mothers still believed that it was the best learning environment for their children if certain problems were addressed. The difficulties that occurred in their inclusive classroom settings were lack of teacher involvement/training, the lack of support by the schools administrator and the teacher, and overall budget cuts that caused a reduction of staff.

The lack of teacher involvement in the inclusive program is a big factor in the success of a classroom. As Monsen (2014) said, there are three different types of teachers. The ones that support the inclusive classroom and will do what they can to make it successful for everyone involved, a teacher who will "deal" with an inclusive setting, and the teachers that will outright refuse having any part to do with an inclusive setting. These types of teachers were described in the interviews and the teachers were normally cited as the main reason why inclusion either worked or did not work.

Andrew had experience with both a teacher that worked well with inclusion and a teacher who wanted nothing to do with inclusion. In his preschool class, the preschool teacher took the time to get to know him and learn what his strengths were. The lessons had been tailored to fit every students needs and there were the correct supports put in the classroom. All of these elements are necessary in an inclusive setting and they were present for Andrew.

On the other hand, when Andrew was in kindergarten, the teacher did not make the effort to learn about his diagnosis or to adapt the lessons so that he could fully participate. The teacher reacted by sending him to the office every time he acted out and did not take the time to figure out why he was acting out. In the end, it resulted in Andrew becoming overstimulated and caused problems in the future because the overstimulation was paired with bad behavior. Andrew did not understand that he was not being bad, but just needed to address the circumstances a different way. With more education on Andrew's disability and a discussion with Andrew's parents, the kindergarten teacher could have learned about his diagnosis and about different techniques and supports that could help him learn the content and acceptable classroom behavior.

Josh had an experience similar to Andrew's. He was put in a general education class until the fourth grade. In that general education class, he had a teacher that cared a little about his learning, but did not fully put in the effort to make it the best possible situation. At the beginning of his elementary school days, Josh had a paraeducator with him at all times to help him throughout the day, but he lost that paraeducator during fourth grade due to perceived budget cuts and that is when he transferred programs. His mother questioned if he would have been able to continue his education in the community school if the teacher had taken the time to learn more about Josh's disability, or if the pull out school was still the best option.

On the other hand, Ryan had a wonderful experience with an inclusive classroom. Ryan had a teacher that learned about his disability and structured the class in a way that worked for both the general education students and his abilities. He also had a special education teacher that was there to support the general education teacher throughout the day. There were times when Ryan needed to be in a one-on-one setting and he could be taken out of the classroom and supported in that way.

Another challenge perceived that the families ran into when trying to provide the correct supports for an inclusive environment was in lieu of budget constraints. Josh's mother mentioned that the reason that Josh had to leave the neighborhood school was because the school cut the budget and an aide was not provided for Josh in the classroom. Without this funding, the school was not able to provide the necessary adaptations to promote Josh's full learning potential. This is not a state a school wants to be in, but it is also a hard circumstance for the families. The families want their child to have the necessary help for them within the local neighborhood school district, but when that is not available families can be forced into something they do not necessarily want.

Andrew's mom also saw a challenge with the budget with his kindergarten school. In kindergarten, Andrew was put in a fully inclusive classroom without an aide because the school did not have a special education teacher or an aide on the payroll. Sarah had to fight to get a special education teacher hired, and the hiring of a special education teacher was the reason that Andrew was taken out of the inclusive environment. Andrew ended up learning more with the special education teacher than in the general education room because there was more support for him.

All three families mentioned that an advantage in the inclusive setting is that there are peer interactions that allow their children to see age appropriate behavior modeled all around them. As Fruth (2015) said, it is important for these peer interactions to occur because it allows the students to learn more about working together and sometimes it is easier to understand a peer's explanation of a topic than it is to understand a teacher's perspective.

Inclusive education is not only important for students with special needs, but it is also important for the general education students. Typically, there are no two classrooms that are the same. There are times when there are students that have difficulties with math or reading or spelling, but they still participate in everyday class activities. They just might need some extra help. If students are exposed to others that have problems with math, reading, or spelling, then why can't they be exposed to other students who are different than them? All children learn by different learning strategies and some are more different than others. When children are exposed to kids with different abilities, it helps them realize that they are people too and that they are not scary. The students learn that they can work with people who are different from them and even become friends with them. Those friendships can help students learn to accept people with all abilities for who they are on the inside and not based on outward appearances. That acceptance can transfer into situations in the community by they way they treat those around them.

As shown in Kluth's (2003) story about Arlene M. Smerdon and her daughter, being a part of an inclusive setting can open doors for the student to be involved in other things. Once Arlene's daughter, Chelsea, was a part of an inclusive classroom, it opened doors for her to be in the school's drama program and participate like any other typically developing student. By participating in the school's drama program, community members are able to see a successful inclusive setting at work and that can promote more community-wide acceptance.

Like the drama program, inclusive environments are beneficial to the school as a whole because they encourage the staff to work together and also to educate themselves on the different types of students. The staff does not only include teachers, but a whole team of people including the speech language pathologist, the occupational therapist, and even the behavioral therapist. By learning to work together with different professionals to have an inclusive environment, the staff will be able to learn from different fields and gain information that can help them create stronger lesson plans that should increase the learning of the students. Teachers might learn how to incorporate strategies to improve the language utterances of all of their students or learn from the occupational therapist how to incorporate therapy in the everyday classroom. These therapies or ideas are not only good for the students that have individualized education plans (IEP) but can also be good for the general education students.

Even though there are multiple positives to being in an inclusive classroom, there are times that an inclusive setting is not the best place for a student. There were examples in all three interviews that showed moments when students benefited from other educational settings. Sometimes they were taken out for short times for additional classes or therapy, other times the child was over stimulated and needed a place to calm down, and then there were instances where behavior became a problem and the student needed to be removed.

In Josh's case, his parents perceived an inclusive setting was not where he learned best. Josh learned best in an environment that was specifically trained to handle his behavior disorder and that was able to teach him the skills to appropriately handle his own aggression. This environment was not in a neighborhood school, but in a community wide school that specialized in the necessary supports for behavioral and emotional disorders. If Josh had stayed in his neighborhood school without having necessary supports, he might not have been able to learn

about ways to control his anger or not learn them as quickly as he was able to in the alternative school district.

With Andrew, his parents perceived the inclusive environment was not appropriate all the time because he needs the individual support that will help him learn how to handle stimulation and ways to not become overstimulated. A special education room was a place that had low stimulation and normally the classrooms were not as loud. The quietness was necessary at that time and a partially inclusive model, both the general education classroom and the special education classroom, was the best option.

Ryan also had not participated fully with an inclusive classroom. It was true that he was in the general education classroom about 95% of the time, but there were times that he was pulled out for specific training in social skills. This was a class that his typically developing peers do not need, but that Ryan needs. This was the only time that Ryan is away from his general education class unless there is a need for him to take a test in a different format.

Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations of this study. First, there was a limited time frame to conduct the study; therefore, calls for participation was only open two weeks. Another limitation was that there were only two list-serves utilized during the interview process; therefore, a limited number of families knew about the opportunity to participate. A third limitation is that there were only three responses to the initial search for families; therefore, only a small pool of information was available to be used on the project.

In the future, a recommendation would be to reach out to other social groups or list-serves that could help obtain more families to be interviewed. Also in the future it would be

helpful to have a longer time frame to have the request to be interviewed out in the community.

Further research could be done to compile a larger sample of data to look at the benefits of inclusion from other parts of the United States. If research was done across multiple states, different types of learning environments could show up and more comparisons could be made to see where children learn best. If research was done with families' all over the country, then resource books could be made to help schools, teachers, and families create the best learning environment for their children.

Conclusion

Inclusion can be a beneficial form of education for all children involved. The purpose of this study was to learn about parents' view of inclusive instruction for their children. Past research shows why inclusive schooling can be beneficial for all children involved and how it is possible to make an inclusive classroom work successful. However, the research does not take into consideration the views that the parents have about their students' education or what work best for their children.

In this study, three different families were interviewed about their child's schooling and their perspectives of their child's learning in each environment that they were in. It was found that even though all participants had been in a fully inclusive environment or partially inclusive environment, not all participants had learned the best in the inclusive environments. Challenges with inclusion occurred when the schools did not put the proper supports in the classrooms with the students. If there were proper supports provided for these students then inclusion could have been more successful. All students receiving special education services should have an individualized education program (IEP), which should be based on their needs.

      In the future, this study could help families see how inclusive schooling works. It also gives the perspective from families regarding the positives and negatives within an inclusive environment. The study may assist school personnel in understanding parent perspectives related to inclusive education and supports for students with disabilities in light of IDEA's legal requirement of a free and appropriate education.

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Appendix A

<u>Demographic Survey</u>

Directions: *Please answer the questions below*

1.) How old is your child? _____

2.) What is your child's current grade level in school? _____

3.) What is your child's diagnosis?

4.) Is your child in a general education classroom?

Yes, All the time ☐ Yes, Part of the time ☐

No, not at all ☐

5.) If yes all the time, how long have they been in a complete inclusive setting?

6.) If yes part of the time, how long are they with their general education peers?

7.) If no, what type of classroom is your child in?

8.) What kind of services has your child received?

9.) Is your child still receiving these services? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1) What type or types of learning environment(s) has your child been a part of?

2) What would you say are some positive things about the environment (s)?

3) Were there any problems with the environment (s)? If so, what were they?

4) Do you know what inclusion is?

5) Have you been a part of an inclusive classroom?

6) How did your child learn in that environment?

7) In your view, did your child learn better in an inclusive environment or a pull out classroom? Why or why not?

8) If you haven't had the chance to be part of an inclusive environment, would you like to try it? Why or why not?