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# Effective Instructional Practices in the Inclusive Classroom

Bianca Gallo

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**EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN THE  
INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**

**Honors Thesis**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Education**

In the School of Education  
at Salem State University

By

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The Honors Program  
Salem State University  
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## Abstract

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that children with disabilities are educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs."-- otherwise known as an inclusive setting. How do teacher attitudes and practices correlate with effective inclusive education? Studies show that if a teacher gives students higher expectations, they are more likely to perform to higher standards. Thus, by giving a student with disabilities the opportunity to be included in a general education classroom, they are usually held to a higher standard. However, whether this motivates or discourages the student is then based on the teacher's attitude and school's resources. In this qualitative study, 61 hours were spent observing two second grade classrooms in the same town, but at schools with different demographics. One of the schools contained students primarily from lower socio-economic backgrounds, while the other school contained students who were predominately middle class. Data was recorded in a chart that contained instructional practices in inclusion classrooms. The results show that teacher attitudes and practices differed significantly in the two classrooms observed in that, positive teacher attitudes and use of encouraging language, effective socialization, support services, and balanced exposure to flexible grouping strategies—all key factors for effective inclusive education, were much more prominent in one of the two classrooms observed. Future research should be conducted over a greater period of time and in a greater variety of classrooms for more accurate results.

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## **Introduction**

The topic of inclusion in elementary education classrooms is one that has become increasingly popular over the years. It is an issue that is academically relevant, especially in the sense that it has brought about some controversies. As a future educator, I am interested in classroom dynamics and the ways in which students can perform to their fullest potential. Education as an institution has more than one function; it is not just a place for academic learning. Through education, one learns social skills and acquires behavior essential for effective participation in society. In other words, schools complete socialization and socially integrate diverse populations, while developing knowledge that relates to social life. I am interested in education and its functions, as I am eager to look at ways in which a classroom can be most successful and can produce these outcomes. I have spent much of my pre-practicum time observing and doing field work in inclusion classroom settings. Here, I have been able to explore some of these topics, while beginning to better understand the different approaches for helping students to learn in a way that will help them to reach their fullest potential –both academically and socially.

The mission of inclusion is to educate all students, including those with disabilities, in a classroom together. The legal definition of inclusion states that students with special needs are educated with children who do not have disabilities, and that the students with special needs will spend most or all of their time in a general education classroom. Typically, an inclusion classroom will contain students both with and without individualized education programs (IEP's), all of which participate in the age-appropriate general education classroom in their designated school. Students with disabilities will receive specialized instructions according to their IEP's within the context of the

curriculum of the general education class. Dr. Joy J. Rogers states the following definition and purpose of inclusion: “This term [inclusion] is used to refer to the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with the other students)” (Rogers, 1993, p. 2).

Prior research found that teachers’ attitudes and practices were key factors for an effective inclusive classroom and student success. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to carry out a comparative observation of two teachers in two different inclusion classrooms, and to what extent they differ in their approach to teaching in an inclusive classroom. I will observe the instructional practices of teachers in inclusion classroom settings. I think that if a teacher gives his/her students higher expectations, they are more likely to perform at higher standards. Thus, by giving a student with disabilities the opportunity to be included in a general education classroom, they are held to a subsequently higher standard. Research shows: “The traditional view of achievement in schools is that success is a function of talent and motivation; the talented and motivated are high achievers” (Seligman, 1998, p. 5). In contrast, if a teacher gives his/her students lower expectations, they are more likely to perform at a lower level. Students who do not feel that much is expected of them by their educators, who serve as role models, typically will lower their expectations of themselves. *Diversity, Community & Achievement*, a publication by Teach for America (2011), tackles this idea of high expectations by referring to Merton’s concept of self-fulfilling prophecy and a prior study

known as The Harvard Test of Influenced Acquisition (*Diversity, Community, & Achievement, 2011*). Results show that students are successful because teachers believe in their potential. Thus, the results confirm the power of high expectations, while also demonstrating that the potential for academic success is limited when teachers succumb to assumptions about students' limitations in ability. In either case, high expectations or low expectations, the possibility for motivation or discouragement for the student is then based on teacher attitudes and school resources.

## **Literary Review**

The intention of inclusion is more than just involving a child with disabilities. It is “a philosophy of education based on the belief in every person's inherent right to fully participate in society.” (“National down syndrome,” 2012, p. 1) With that being said, inclusion allows for differences to be accepted. An inclusive classroom setting is one that empowers and supports diverse learning, both socially and academically, among students of all aptitudes. Before a child with a disability is placed into the general education classroom, it is decided that he/she will perform more successfully than if placed in a mainstream or substantially separate classroom. Thus, for inclusion to be seen as effective and successful, all staff and partners of a child’s education will work together to enhance a child’s learning and socialization. By examining literature about successful inclusive practices (Knight, 1999; Smith and Smith, 2000; NJCIE, 2010; Lane et al., 2003), benefits of inclusion (Campell, 2007; Staub, 1996) and disadvantages of inclusion (Bailey and du Plessis, 1997), we are able to get a better understanding of the equity and effectiveness of inclusion classrooms.

### *Successful Inclusive Practices*

There are several practices that aid in effective results when teaching in an inclusive setting. Bruce Allen Knight (1999) discusses the philosophy of inclusion, while also outlining the advantages and some concerns of implementing inclusion in general education classrooms. His research about inclusive practices includes concepts from Peter Westwood (*Commonsense Methods for Children with Special Educational Needs, 1997*). Knight writes about aspects necessary for students with learning disabilities to be successfully included in regular education classrooms. “These include: for teachers and students to develop positive attitudes towards students with disabilities; a commitment by

staff to work collaboratively by sharing responsibilities and expertise; to develop productive links with outside agencies and services; to continually update teachers' professional development; to liaise with parents; and to adapt curricula and teaching methods to suit students' needs" (Knight, 1999, p. 5). He concludes that teacher behavior, attitudes, and skills, as well as student acceptance of differences are important factors in determining successful inclusion of students. These practices for success, in combination with effective and explicit teaching, fall in line with much of the other literature and research studies examined below, all of which were conducted with relevance to inclusion classrooms.

Smith and Smith (2000) conducted a study in which six inclusion classroom teachers were interviewed about their experiences teaching in this type of classroom setting. The interviewees were chosen at random in a school district in Nebraska. Findings showed that among these six teachers, there was an even divide in their type of experiences. Three said that their experience had been a success, while the remaining three said that their experience had been unsuccessful. The analysis of their interviews shared a common theme for factors for success. Smith and Smith (2000) concluded that in order for inclusion to be successful, classroom teachers should have specialized training to prepare them for teaching in an inclusion classroom. The interviews also shared the frequent feedback for consistent paraprofessional support along with adequate time to collaborate and make accommodations in lesson plans. Furthermore, they found that organized classrooms were essential for instruction; this would include the number of special needs children that are included at a time. Once each of these adjustments had been made within the classroom settings, Smith and Smith (2000) stated, "Both

successful and unsuccessful teachers remarked positively about the practice of inclusion, particularly about the critical value of a sense of community” (Smith & Smith, 2000, p. 164).

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCIE, 2010) created a guidebook of quality indicators for effective inclusive education. The indicators were identified after an extensive review of literature, along with the examination of comparable documents containing indicators that were developed and successfully used to advance inclusive teaching and learning practices in eight schools. Eleven indicators were pin-pointed and included: leadership, school climate, scheduling and participation, curriculum, instruction and assessment, program planning and development, program implementation and assessment, individual student supports, family-school partnerships, collaborative planning and teaching, professional development, planning for continued best practice improvement. The indicators chosen were then evaluated and piloted in five schools across various districts in New Jersey. The purpose of identifying the indicators was to learn about key factors needed in order to have an effective inclusive setting, to assess a school’s practices, as well as to serve as a reflective process and a resource for improvement. Thus, the guide book created shared these ideas and how they should be evaluated. Furthermore, students were expected to have certain social and behavioral competencies, and when they lacked these skills, teacher expectations often were lowered. It became important that teacher expectations were clear, especially due to the fact that these skills were not explicitly taught (NJCIE, 2010).

Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2003) conducted a study in which they examined teacher expectations of students’ behaviors that teachers deemed important for school

success. Teachers from kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms rated which of 30 social skills they believed would be most important for school success. Their results shared that cooperation, assertion, and self-control were of greatest importance in general education classrooms, while special education classrooms put a little less emphasis on self-control. In their findings, they discussed the benefits to students being aware and informed of the teacher expectations coinciding with these three themes. Lane et al. (2003, p. 476) concluded: “Knowledge of teacher expectations also has the potential to positively influence the focus and efficacy of interventions generated by the prereferral intervention and multidisciplinary teams. Finally, knowledge of teacher expectations has the potential to promote responsible, successful inclusive experiences for students receiving special education services.”

Limitations can be found in each of these cases in which successful inclusive practices were found. For example, the NJCIE (2010) quality indicators, might have been slightly skewed due to the fact that they were for a guide for New Jersey schools. Knight (1999) mainly based his article on other literature, and so it was more an article of advice and philosophy than a research study. Smith and Smith (2000), in contrast, conducted interviews; however, their research focused mostly on how individuals and practices outside the classroom could benefit inclusion and not as much on what steps could be taken inside the classroom. Lane et al. (2003) was limited based on the fact that the data was not confirmed by direct observation and the expectations could be individualized. Also, the study did not examine teacher expectations across separate instruction areas.

### *Benefits of Inclusion*

Some benefits to inclusion are that there is a respect for diversities when all students are included in a classroom. Students become better rounded individuals as they learn with students whose physical, academic, emotional, and social conditions all vary. By utilizing the inclusive setting, there is also the benefit of outward growth; it aids in helping classroom members, both disabled and not, become productive members of society.

Michael Campell's (2010) study, *An Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to Examine the Impact of Classroom Inclusion on Elementary School Students*, investigated the impact of classroom inclusion on nondisabled students. More specifically it explores whether integration of students with disabilities will lead to peer-inclusion. Data was collected from surveys across third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms (teachers, students, and parents). The results showed that the integration had a positive impact on the intent to include, while interaction had a mixed impact on the intent to include.

Benefits of inclusion can also be found through the work of Debbie Staub (1996), a project coordinator at the University of Washington's Consortium for Collaborative Research on Social Relationships. Her work involved studying the impact of social relationships for children with and without severe disabilities. Much of her work was conducted at the Emily Dickinson School in Redmond, Washington, where she served as the coordinator for the Inclusive Education Research Group. Through several different studies she found significant findings. Friendships, self-esteem, personal principles, patience, and comfort level with people who are different were all listed as positive results for disabled and non-disabled students. While she had examples and reasons why

each of these characteristics were associated with positive results, it is important to consider that inclusion situations may vary and that this particular study might not be accurate for all school settings, though the results were also found in accordance with other studies.

### *Disadvantages of Inclusion*

It is also shown that there are some disadvantages to inclusion. However, most of disadvantages can be avoided with the proper inclusive instructional practices. James McLeskey and Nancy L. Waldron (2011) along with Jeff Bailey and Diane du Plessis (1997) share some of the possible disadvantages to education in inclusive classrooms.

McLeskey and Waldron (2011) examined educational programs for elementary students with learning disabilities. They sought to find an answer to the question: Can they be both effective and inclusive? With the belief that instruction should be high quality in order to produce successful learning experiences for students with learning disabilities, the components for high quality, intensive instruction were then accounted for. Grouping, instructional design, delivery of instruction, independent practice, and progress monitoring were the main categories for each of these components. By examining prior research, McLeskey and Waldron found that teachers had difficulty providing focused, intensive instruction for students with learning disabilities in general education classrooms. Also, findings shared that teachers tended to make adaptations in their general education classrooms in order to allow for a more manageable curriculum for students with learning disabilities. These adaptations included reduced workload, altered assignments and homework, and accommodations on tests. The main problem was however, that these adaptations were consistently used with the entire class, and not

for just students who had learning disabilities. If intensive, high-quality instruction could avoid these negative results and be executed appropriately, they would significantly increase achievement levels for students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, their research led them to find that for most elementary students with learning disabilities, inclusive instruction was not able to ensure the achievement of important reading and/or math skills, nor was it likely that high-quality, intensive instruction for students with learning disabilities could be delivered in this type of setting. Lastly, researchers stated that special education resource classes typically were not equipped to provide the high-quality, intensive instruction that was needed to accelerate academic growth for students with learning disabilities. Thus, this research revealed that full inclusion was inadequate when trying to meet the needs of most elementary students with learning disabilities.

In Bailey and du Plessis's (1997) article, *Understanding Principals' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Schooling*, they reported qualitative data of 189 principals in Australian state school systems. They tested their attitudes towards inclusion by administering a survey. The results showed that there were benefits and disadvantages to inclusion; the most common benefits were for the included student, peers, school community and society as well as social justice rights, while the disadvantages were nearly 50% focused on resources and support for classroom teachers. Other disadvantages noted after the surveys were processed were the factors surrounding teachers, such as work load, stress and training, and possibility of lack of advanced learning for non-disabled students. However, it is important to also take into account that the survey did not share a grade level for the results, which may have affected the responses.

### *Equity in Inclusion*

A major question is whether there is equity in education when it comes to inclusion? The cost of education for special needs learners is more expensive; they should be placed only in classrooms where the teachers have the appropriate training. According to Susan Mandel Glazer (1997), federal funding should be placed on educational needs of the student and with that should be ongoing professional development. “How to notice differences, techniques for managing instruction within the confines of a school day needs to be part of the training” (Glazer, 1997, p. 88). Time management seemed to be key when educating any group of children, but even more so for an inclusion class. It was seen to be most beneficial in terms of time to have special teachers, such as paraprofessionals working in the classroom rather than constantly having the child be pulled out or to not have any assistance at all. Disruptions to the class could be avoided if paraprofessionals were working with students alongside the teacher.

### *Summary*

In summary, it appears that some of the key conditions for inclusive practices are the following: Positive attitudes and collaborative planning and teaching amongst staff and parents, well organized classrooms, effective leadership, and a welcoming school climate. Effective academic development strategies include program planning, development, implementation, and assessment. Support services are also crucial to developing a successful inclusive environment including individual student supports, paraprofessional support, and peer supports. In addition, curriculum should be adapted to students’ needs. Lastly, knowledge of teacher expectations for students and specialized

training for inclusion teachers can also help to improve chances of success and lead to a sense of community.

There are some conditions that might distract from success in inclusion classrooms. One of the most commonly noted problems with inclusion is a greater need for resources and support for classroom teachers and students. Teachers tend to become overwhelmed with the additional workload and training.

While inclusion becomes more and more popular in school systems today, it is important to consider the amount of preparation that teachers are given and the possible variation in strategies for success within the schools. The articles reviewed examine these ideas, while also providing some suggestions to improve the quality of inclusive classrooms, with the main goal being success for all—disabled and non-disabled students, as well as educators and other collaborators. The factors included in the articles may not be the only quality indicators for success in inclusion, but they provide a solid and cohesive background for teachers to aid students to reach their fullest potential. It would be beneficial for teachers, administrators, and collaborators to improve their skills by focusing on key factors for success, while also recognizing the ways in which inclusion is unsuccessful and how they can avoid negative outcomes.

## **Hypotheses**

Effective instructional practices in inclusion classrooms are affected by teacher attitudes and practices. Flexible grouping and peer supports will promote student cohesion and will maximize learning. Classroom responsiveness such as teacher language and behavior and classroom organization will provide an effective learning environment for both disabled and non-disabled students. Frequent use of routines, modified goals and instruction, as well as multiple formats, materials, and activities will be effective instructional practices in the inclusion classrooms.

Positive teacher attitudes and effective teaching practices correlate with student success. Success is difficult to measure, though past research has shared some insight about what makes a “successful” inclusion classroom and effective instructional practices in order to do so. According to the literature, some key variables found to make a difference in student success in inclusion classrooms are support services, knowledge of teacher expectations for students, specialized training for inclusion teachers, positive attitudes, collaborative planning, well organized classrooms, and effective leadership. These characteristics were used to develop my hypotheses.

## **Data Collection**

The method of this study was participant observation over a period of three months in two separate elementary schools in Peabody, Massachusetts; a total of 61 combined hours in both settings over twelve weeks in the fall of 2012. Both classrooms were second grade inclusive settings. Observations took place at the same time (11am-2:45pm) and same day of the week (either Monday or Friday), with two exceptions due to scheduling problems. A date and time log was kept to track observation hours and to ensure that equal time was spent in each of the classrooms. (See Appendix for Data Collection Time Log) In addition, teachers in both classrooms were consulted in order to gain a better understanding of the student make-up and classroom dynamics.

## Results

Class A was located in a low income neighborhood, while Class B was located in a middle class neighborhood. Class A consisted of six male students and nine female students, or a total of fifteen students all together. These student's racial and ethnic backgrounds were very diverse, with Caucasian students being the minority. There was one special education student, identified as having a cognitive disability. Class B consisted of a total of sixteen students: nine females and seven males. In contrast to Class A, the class had limited racial diversity, with only one non-white student. Class B included two students with disabilities: one autistic student and one student who was diagnosed with a cognitive disability as well as autism.

Class A had one lead teacher who remained in the classroom for the entire school day. In addition, different professionals and teaching assistants offered student support for certain subjects throughout the course of the day, while occasionally a paraprofessional would assist the student with special needs. In Class B, there also was one lead teacher who remained in the classroom for the entire school day. But, unlike Class A, Class B had the consistent support of two full-time paraprofessionals who remained in the class with the students, mainly assisting the two students with special needs. The attendance of the paraprofessionals was noted as a factor that affected instructional practices in the inclusive classroom settings.

Using key factors listed in previous research, I developed a chart of proven effective instructional practices in inclusion classrooms. The chart (p. 18) was divided into four categories: (1) Flexible grouping, (2) Peer supports, (3) Classroom Responsiveness, and (4) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. Each of the variables

had subcategories based on how they would be measured. For most of the variables, tallies represented the number of times each factor had occurred. For some variables, a four-point frequency scale was used: frequently, sometimes, rarely, never. Also, for two variables that would remain consistent for the year (Helpers and Rule Creation), it was recorded whether they were included as part of the classroom practices.

Flexible grouping was measured by types of instruction: Whether or not students were working in groups or alone, and whether or not the inclusion student sat alone. These instances were tallied based on occurrence.

In terms of peer supports, tallies were taken for the number of times students worked with a “buddy”. Also, a yes or no was recorded to show whether or not there were designated classroom “helpers”.

Classroom responsiveness was evaluated based on teacher language and behavior, as well as the organization of the classroom. Teacher language and behavior were measured in terms of encouraging or negative comments, the ability to maintain a calm and controlled attitude, and the promotion of student socialization. The promotion of student socialization was measured based on the visible effort of the teacher to involve all students in classroom lessons, activities, and interactions. Classroom organization was measured based on whether or not there was a class or day schedule for the students and teacher to refer to, as well as the number of tallied days in which the lead teacher had planned lessons.

Finally, the last category measured included curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Assessment indicators for classroom effectiveness were taken from NJCIE’s (2010) guidebook of quality indicators for effective instruction in inclusion classrooms.

Out of a list of 11 indicators, I selected only those appropriate for my study, which afforded observations to be made for only a relatively short period of time. In order to measure curriculum, instruction and assessment, I ranked how often the following indicators occurred: (1) Teachers incorporated visual, tactile and kinesthetic materials and activities to meet a variety of learners' needs; (2) Teachers used class-wide routines and procedures to support classroom management and learning; (3) Teachers modified curricular goals and classroom instruction using the same or similar, age appropriate materials for assignments, homework and tests when a student with disabilities required a modified curriculum; (4) Teachers used multiple formats to provide instruction to individual students, pairs of students, small groups and the whole class.

The chart on the following page represents the data collected.

Data Collection Chart:

<b>Effective Instructional Practices in Inclusion Classrooms</b>	<b>Class A (Total visits: 9)</b>	<b>Class B (Total visits: 8)</b>
<i>Flexible grouping</i>		
Students are in groups.	9	5
Students sit alone.	9	8
Inclusion student sits separate from class without instructional aid.	3	0
<i>Peer Supports</i>		
There are “buddies.”	0	2
There are “helpers.” (Y/N)	Yes	Yes
<i>Classroom Responsiveness</i>		
There is rule creation. (Y/N)	Yes	Yes
<i>Teacher Language &amp; Behavior</i>		
Teacher uses yelling/negative comments. (“Just forget it and sit down!”)	22	3
Teacher uses encouraging comments. (“You can do it!” mentality)	7	13
Teacher maintains a calm/controlled attitude.	3	8
Teacher promotes student socialization.	0	7
<i>Organized Classroom</i>		
There is a class/day schedule.	8	8
Teacher has lessons planned.	6	8
<i>Curriculum, Instruction, &amp; Assessment<sup>1*</sup></i>		
Teachers incorporate visual, tactile and kinesthetic materials and activities to meet a variety of learners’ needs	Sometimes	Frequently
Teachers use class-wide routines and procedures to support classroom management and learning.	Sometimes	Frequently
When a student with disabilities requires a modified curriculum, teachers modify curricular goals and classroom instruction using the same or similar, age appropriate materials for assignments, homework and tests.	Rarely	Frequently
Teachers use multiple formats to provide instruction such as individual, pairs, small groups and whole class.	Frequently	Frequently

1. <http://njcie.net/pdf/tools/quality-indicators-for-inclusive-education-manual.pdf>

\* ranked on the following scale: (1)Frequently (2)Sometimes (3) Rarely (4) Never

## **Analysis and Interpretation:**

### ***Flexible Grouping***

In terms of flexible grouping, Class A had students sitting in groups more often than Class B (Class A: 9 out of 9 times, Class B: 5 out of 8 times). The number of times that all of the students sat alone were equal and each day it was marked off for both classrooms that this type of grouping had occurred. Flexible grouping was also measured by the frequency of cases in which the inclusion students sat alone. This is seen as an ineffective practice, unless they are given the attention of a paraprofessional or teaching assistant. In Class A, the inclusion student was recorded to be sitting alone 3 times over the whole period of 12 weeks, without the support of a paraprofessional or learning assistant. In Class B, the two inclusion students, when separated from class lessons or activities while doing modified work, were always assisted by a full-time paraprofessional.

### ***Peer Supports***

Class A and Class B both used “helpers” in the classroom during the twelve weeks of observation. The helpers were responsible for various tasks throughout the day and would rotate over the course of the school year. Class A, however, did not exhibit the use of “buddies,” which would act as a peer support. Class B used buddies a total of two times in eight visits, when a few members of the fourth grade assisted in the second grade students’ learning by offering support and assistance.

### ***Classroom Responsiveness***

In terms of instructional atmosphere, both classrooms had a set of clearly defined rules. The rules were posted on the walls of the classroom so that teachers and students

could reference them at all times if needed. Moreover, the disparity between the two classrooms' organization was minimal: a class schedule was planned every day but one for Class A and every day for Class B. However, the teacher in Class A did not have lessons planned for three of the nine days, whereas the teacher in Class B had lessons planned for each day.

A major difference between Class A and B was the emotional atmosphere, specifically teacher language and behavior. In this regard, it appeared that Class A in general had less effective instructional practices than Class B. The teacher in Class A was encouraging seven times and calm/controlled three times within nine days of observation. At times when she was calm or controlled, she talked in a soft spoken voice and encouraged her students to take a deep breath along with her. Her encouragement would include sayings such as, "You can do it, I know you can" or "This is easy for you, you just have to think a little, but I know you can do this". But along with a positive emotional climate (7 tallies), a negative climate was recorded three times as often (22 tallies). For example, she referred to her students as "you," at times shouting "YOU sit down and eat and put that book away" and "YOU get over here now." Teacher A also discussed her students with other teachers in a negative way. For example, she exclaimed (loud enough for everyone to hear): "My class is the only class I've had where my helpers don't do their jobs. I can't believe these kids, I really can't," or "Ms. Bianca, parent-teacher conferences are in just about two weeks and my goodness is it going to be tough when all I'll have to say is that my students don't do their work, they don't listen, and they are constantly disturbing me when they shouldn't be." Research indicates that high teacher expectations lead to higher student success. When expectations are low and

encouragement is not shown, students generally perform worse and will not reach their fullest potential (Teach for America, 2011). The frequent yelling and negativity in Class A might prove a reciprocal relationship between the lack of student success and negative behavior; thus, indicating that the responsiveness in this inclusive classroom was not successful. The students would often roll their eyes in response to the teacher's requests or sometimes would ignore the classroom rules. Some students would act out by talking back or interrupting other students, while others would express negative feelings: "This is too hard" or "I can't do this, I give up."

Yelling and negativity by teachers leads to an achievement gap: some children flourish in their education, while others are left behind. In the article from *Teach for America* (2011), the authors addressed the achievement gap and the power of high expectations. The relationship between the two can be seen when looking at teaching approaches in Class A. The teacher in Class A talked down to her students and held low expectations for them. During the time that I spent as a participant observer, she frequently told me that her class was "a tough group" and that she often did not have patience for their "constant neediness". In front of her students, she made comments such as "My class never listens" or "These kids ruin more things than any other class in the past." These comments might give students negative impressions of themselves and cause them to have lower expectations of themselves. Therefore, when students were asked to do something, they were constantly seeking the teacher's attention, quite possibly because they weren't confident in their work.

In Class B, the teacher was much more encouraging towards her students, in terms of verbal cues, but also due to classroom structure. The teacher in Class B only

yelled or expressed a negative attitude 3 times (in contrast to Class A: 22 times). She made encouraging remarks thirteen times (Class A: 7 times) and demonstrated a calm/controlled attitude during all eight visits. She frequently expressed high expectations for her students, treating each student with the same amount of respect. All students would follow by the same class rules, with no exceptions for any of the students. Encouragement was expressed in comments such as, “I believe in you!” and “I have a tough project but I know you can all do it! If you need help, just ask.” Furthermore, the teacher in Class B had a reward system for her students; when the children completed their homework, did a good deed, or remained on “green” (good behavior) all week, they would get fake money. The money was to be saved up for the end of the month when they would shop at the class “mall”, which contained small toys and treats. This allowed students to be rewarded for good behavior and helped them to gain a better understanding of how to spend and save money. This two-fold system also encouraged students to perform to the best of their ability. In contrast, Class A did not have a reward system, thus there was less incentive to work towards success. It is important for teachers to have high expectations, and to reward when expectations are met (*Teach for America, 2011*). This was a key difference between the two classrooms.

Another factor that corresponded with language and behavior was the promotion of socialization. In other words, did the teacher encourage the inclusion students to be involved in all classroom lessons and activities? The teacher in Class A did not promote socialization once in a total of 9 visits, while the teacher in Class B only failed to do so once in a total of 8 visits. Thus, with this being entirely absent from Classroom A, those students who were included never really get to experience “full” inclusion. Promotion of

socialization has a three-fold effect on inclusion. It allows for students to not only become part of the class academically, socially, and behaviorally, but it also works toward student integration in the school and the community, while contributing to “full” inclusion. By separating special needs students, teachers are limiting opportunities for socialization with other students. Encouragement to be involved and engaged in classroom activities allows all students to make an effort to share in one another’s learning. Class A and Class B revealed contrasting results when socialization was recorded. In Class A, the student with special needs was held to an entirely different standard; he was not asked to be part of assignments that required active participation or individual presentations. This made a difference in the classroom dynamics, as there appeared to be a sense of exclusion and lack of togetherness for all students. Also, the one special needs student in Class A was frequently separated, which might contribute to low expectations he had about himself, while leaving his classmates with the feeling that he was different and separate. In Class B, on the other hand, when the class was presenting a project or assignment, doing calendar activity, or actively participating in a lesson, *all* students, including the two special needs students, were held to the same expectations and given the same encouragement to become a part of the class.

### ***Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment***

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment, are some of the fundamental aspects of education. Class A and Class B showed varied results. Although Class A’s teacher used multiple formats of instruction “frequently”, she “rarely” modified curricular goals, and only “sometimes” incorporated a variety of materials and activities to meet the students’ needs. Also, she only “sometimes” used class-wide routines and procedures to support

management and learning. In contrast, the teacher in Class B used all four approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, performing all of the practices listed above “frequently.”

Included as a part of these effective strategies for curriculum, instruction, and assessment are the teachers’ ability to adapt lessons to a variety of learning styles. There are various ways students learn: visually, auditory, kinesthetic (movement) and tactile. Class A sometimes carried out this type of instruction, most notably in the use of journals and spelling lessons. For journals, students would write a few sentences and then transform their sentences with a drawing that would correspond with what they were writing. For spelling lessons, the students in Class A would orally go over their words as a class. Afterwards, they would write the words on lined paper, copy the words onto a flashcard, and then “build” their words on a magnetic board three times each. Though this repetition tied in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning, it was the only consistent use of adaptation in instruction. In contrast, Class B demonstrated the ability to carry out this style of teaching, which is commonly identified as an element of differentiated instruction. The use of auditory tapes, picture journals, partner reading, math groups, etc. were some of the ways in which a variety of instructional practices were displayed in Class B. Daily, students would have the opportunity to take part in certain subject lessons that included different teaching and learning techniques. Students also used classroom centers, which involved students rotating through learning stations, to carry out these activities for curriculum based learning.

Another factor affecting curriculum, instruction, and assessment is the use of class-wide routines and procedures. In Class A, sometimes students’ homework was

posted on the board. Also, the teacher would occasionally post a goal on the board such as, “Do not correct other classmates when speaking” or “Patience.” It revealed that these styles of classroom management and learning procedures were inconsistently used. Furthermore, calendar activity, which is required by Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks, was not completed every day in the same form—some days it was done as a class, while other days it was up to the students to find time to do it on their own. In Class B, these procedures for instruction were frequently part of daily routines. Homework was consistently recorded on the board and students would copy assignments into their notebooks at a given time at the end of each day. The calendar activity was completed the same way each day, with the students all participating as a class. Also, the students in Class B had daily activities, or routines throughout the 12 weeks of observation.

For students with disabilities, modified curriculum and goals in Class A were rarely recognized in observation. The only modification recorded was a reduction of spelling words from 14 to 5. This allowed for the student to be involved in the spelling lesson and test, without an amount of learning that would have been too extensive. In other instances, the teacher would simply say to the inclusion student, “Find something else to do quietly.” In case an entire lesson was deemed too difficult, the student with special needs would typically go to a subject learning specialist to receive support outside of the classroom. Also, the class was divided into three guided reading levels: “below level”, “on level”, and “above level.” This matched each student’s reading level with curriculum based on Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores, which are required by the school district. In comparison, the assignments for the special needs

students in Class B were modified when needed, but with the help of paraprofessional support in the classroom. For example, if a math lesson was too advanced, the student with special needs would work on the foundations of that particular math concept with a paraprofessional. Frequently, the teacher in Class B adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of the special needs students. The support of two full-time paraprofessionals seemed to make this much easier for the teacher in Class B. It appeared that the teacher was likely to be more successful in this category of instructional practices.

Finally, instruction is more effective with the use of multiple formats. In Class A, the teacher provided her class with a variety of instructional settings such as individual, pair, group, and class-wide lessons. The students often read in small groups for some lessons, while they also read as individuals each day. Some days, the class would do a reading activity as a whole, which allowed for all of the students to be involved in the same lesson. Partner work was also demonstrated in terms of reading and journal entries, in which the students would complete the assignment on their own, and then share their work with three different classmates. Similarly, Class B's students worked in multiple formats to learn the curriculum. Reading and math were done as individuals, in groups, and as a whole class. Centers were divided into small groups and subjects were rotated during this model of instruction. Lastly, in Class B, students also did individual oral presentations.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Firstly, I conducted research in only two school systems and classrooms over a short period of time, approximately 61 hours. Without the ability to research a more significant number of schools and classrooms over a long period of time, I was unable to focus on all of the factors that would contribute to an effective inclusion classroom. I was able to examine how teachers in the two classes differed, but had to eliminate other factors that may have contributed to student behavior. For example, I did not have access to information regarding student backgrounds. Student home environment is key when considering a child's behavior and impacts how they act and perform in school. The degree of care and support does effect social skills and academic success of children. Furthermore, the time of day that I observed might have affected my data on flexible grouping. Mornings typically would have included time dedicated to group work, in which I would not have been present. My arrival times were consistent for the most part and I was able to observe Class A during group reading time each day. Class B, on the other hand, had different events (i.e.: firefighter appreciation event, second step meetings, recycling rally) to attend on some afternoons, which cut into their group work time. This might explain why Class A was consistently in groups for some of their learning over the course of a total of 9 observation days, while Class B had 3 days out of 8 where they were not placed in groups. Finally, I was unable to connect my methods with student success, as I was not able to access teacher gradebooks, student progress reports, or report cards.

## **Conclusion**

My hypothesis proved itself to be true: Effective instructional practices in inclusion classrooms are affected by teacher attitudes and practices. Flexible grouping and peer supports promoted student cohesion and maximized learning, as seen in both Class A and B. Classroom responsiveness, such as positive teacher language and behavior and classroom organization provided an effective learning environment for both disabled and non-disabled students. Frequent use of routines, modified goals and instruction, as well as multiple formats, materials, and activities were effective instructional practices, most notably seen in Class B.

Class A had less effective instructional practices for inclusion than Class B. The key differences were found in teacher language and behavior, as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, these results cannot show statistical significance, due to study limitations. The study was based on limited observation in two classrooms. The teacher in Class A used yelling and negative comments more frequently than encouraging comments, while the teacher in Class B was rarely found using negative comments. Also, the teacher in Class A failed to promote student socialization, while the teacher in Class B encouraged student socialization all but once in a total of 8 visits. Furthermore, Class A and B differed greatly in terms of classroom instruction. The teacher in Class A did not consistently incorporate a variety of learning materials, activities, routines, or procedures to meet the students' needs. Additionally, the teacher in Class A did not modify curricular goals or classroom instruction when needed. This was contrary to the practices used in Class B, which included a consistent variety in learning techniques and procedures, alongside the use of curricular and instructional

modifications when needed. Class B also benefited from consistent support of two full-time paraprofessionals.

The literature, along with my participant observation, showed that the proper use of effective instructional practices can greatly impact the experience of students in an inclusion classroom. There were a variety of factors that contributed to success, primarily the immense importance of teacher language and behavior (emotional atmosphere), as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment approaches (instructional atmosphere). Furthermore, many problems with inclusion exist due to a lack of resources and proper educator training, which often leads to inclusion classrooms that are unsuccessful (Knight, 1999). However, it is still important to see that the all students' goals are being met, whether disabled or non-disabled (NJCIE, 2010). If the purpose of inclusion is to educate all students together and requires that the child will benefit from being in the class, then it is imperative for teachers to create a classroom environment which allows for students with disabilities to learn in conjunction with their peers, which leads to positive socialization and the likelihood of student success.

For future studies, I would suggest spending a greater length of time observing a larger number of classrooms, in a variety of school districts. This would allow for more accurate results, as a more thorough observation could have taken place. Furthermore, I would not only focus on the effective practices of inclusion, but also the ineffective practices of inclusive education. With that, I would also try to incorporate a greater number of indicators for each of these factors, rather than just focusing on a few of the key components. With these adjustments, the study would have been more precise and well-rounded, specifically in terms of the quality of data collected. Finally, if I were to

be permitted to do so, I would have liked to have access to student background information, which may have helped to find additional key factors determining student performance levels and success.

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## Appendix

### Data Collection Time Log

<b>Month</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Minutes</b>	<b>Classroom</b>
<b>September</b>	24	3	30	Class A
<b>October</b>	1	3	30	Class A
	5	3	30	Class B
	12	3	30	Class B
	15	3	35	Class A
	19	3	45	Class B
	22	3	40	Class A
	26	3	30	Class B
	30	3	30	Class A
<b>November</b>	2	3	45	Class B
	5	3	30	Class A
	9	3	45	Class B
	16	3	30	Class B
	19	3	30	Class A
	26	3	30	Class A
<b>December</b>	3	3	45	Class A
	7	3	45	Class B
<b>Total</b>		51	600	
		<b>61 TOTAL HOURS</b>		Class A: 9 days (32 hours)
				Class B: 8 days (29 hours)