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Effective strategies for creating socially developing and accepting inclusion classrooms

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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR CREATING SOCIALLY DEVELOPING AND ACCEPTING INCLUSION CLASSROOMS

by
Kristin Bishop

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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at
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Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Kristin Bishop
EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR CREATING SOCIALLY DEVELOPING
AND ACCEPTING INCLUSION CLASSROOMS
2008/09
Dr. David Hespe
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this study was to investigate and determine the most effective
strategies for creating a socially developing and accepting inclusion classroom.
The study was conducted as teacher research and uses both quantitative and
qualitative research methods. The population used in the study was that of a first
grade inclusion classroom. All students who were given parental consent
participated. A classroom observation rubric, student surveys, and student
interviews were completed pre-implementation. Strategies for creating a socially
developing and accepting inclusion classroom were implemented; reading
pertinent literature, discussions, and lunch conversations. During this time
student artifacts were collected. After the implementation the observation rubrics,
student surveys, and teacher interviews were completed. The pre-implementation
observation rubrics and student surveys were analyzed to note any change in
student feelings toward their classroom environment. At the end of the study
student feelings towards the classroom environment and peers had changed
positively due to the strategies implemented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my mom and dad for their constant encouragement and motivation. I want to thank my parents and Aunt Dot for instilling their beliefs about God and right and wrong in me that has led me to my research question. I want to thank Ken for his faith in my ability to finish this. This study is for the students who are in need of a friend and the teachers out there helping them. I want to thank Dr. Hespe for his direction, encouragement, motivation, and effort in advising me throughout the completion of my thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

Preface

Introduction

"The better part of one's life consists of his friendships." - Abraham Lincoln

"Looks like we are stuck with them," Mike says to Nick, referring to Elijah,

Brendan, and Jayson, his special education peers. Miss Brown and I have just finished

teaching a lesson about campaigning, part of an election unit. The students were asked to

get into groups of four to create a political party, a campaign poster, and a slogan. We

discussed how to split the students up into groups for this lesson over and over, but

finally decided that it was important that the students chose their own groups, since as a

party, they would have to find common interests and beliefs. Sadly, our worst fear came

true, the special education students were not embraced by any of their peers. Nick ended

up leaving Mike preferring to work in a group with three girls, one being a special

education student.

Brendan and Elijah sit down at the lunch table next to some classmates and

suddenly there is a mass exodus. The second lunch table is suddenly full, leaving the

four special education students on one half of the first table. Miss Barnett asks the

students to spread out and some reluctantly walk over to the first table.

In their Writer's Workshop journals, Elijah and Brandy write only about friends

that they know outside of school, none are about friends in their school or class.

These are just some of the realities that special education students face everyday in school. They do not have the same friendships that I cherished in school. I loved school up until the fifth grade when my best friend and I were separated for the first time. We relied on each other, I needed to be there for her and she for me. These students do not have these relationships that make school a place that they want to be. As the Lincoln quote notes, friendships make life better and more enjoyable. Special education students should not be excluded from this.

Purpose Statement

Many researchers find that special education students are not accepted by their general education peers, have a low social status, and fewer friends (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985; Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Wiener, 2004). Students with learning disabilities reported having friends that were up to two years younger than they and friends that did not attend the same school as they (Weiner & Sunohara, 1998). These students are without supportive friendships in the classroom. It is found that the reason for this discrepancy is due to learning disabled students' trouble with interacting with their peers because of their inability to communicate and poor "social perception" (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985).

Inclusion was created so that special education students could be integrated and socially accepted by their general education peers (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). One of the definitions for inclusion is "the process that maximizes the interaction between disabled and non-disabled pupils showing that much value is placed on implementation conditions that foster good relations between students" (Pijl, 2007, p.1). The relationships that special education students are supposed to build with their peers

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will give them a sense of belonging by having relationships where they are supported and in return supportive (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998).

However, as wonderful as this sounds, inclusive classrooms are not fostering social development for the relationships between special education and general education students that parents and educators thought inclusion would bring (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). Another study found that special education students don't often interact with their general education peers and that when they do these interactions are not positive (Gresham, 1982). There are multiple reasons why inclusion is not working as planned. "Non-handicapped children [have] negative attitudes toward the handicapped, handicapped children's social skills inadequacies, and regular class teachers' poor attitudes and inadequate skills for teaching handicapped students" (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985, p. 132). It is noted by many that there is more to a child than just academics and that social integration and personal development are just as essential to a child's growth (Center, Ward, & Ferguson, 1991; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Sale & Carey, 1995). Students who are not taught social skills will become even more inappropriate leading to even more isolation (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Social skills training is necessary for students' long term success (Vaughn, 1985). Students without these skills are at risk for underachieving in academics, unsuccessful friendships with other students, and poor relationships with teachers (Walker & Severson, 2002; Asher & Coie, 1990; Kavale & Mostert, 2004; Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999).

It is important for all students to have social skills and friendships in school. However, this is not happening for the special education students. Although there are

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many suggestions for how to create classroom communities that support social development and skills along with friendships, there have not been any studies done that actually test these strategies. The following study will report the views of the participating students both before and after the implemented strategies. The strategies will include social skills training, disabilities awareness, restructuring of classroom structures, for example, lunch seating, grouping, and recess. The goal of the study is to find the most effective strategies for creating a socially developing and accepting general education classroom for special and general education students.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Special education students are not receiving social skills in the classroom that are necessary for making and keeping friends. Likewise general education students are not receiving instruction about accepting those who are different. The inclusive classroom is physically placing special and general education students together, but that is not enough. The students are not integrated and do not act as a cohesive classroom community. Special education students do not belong to their general education classrooms; they are often without friends, and lack the necessary social skills to make or keep friends. Their general education peers lack empathy and understanding. What are the most effective strategies for creating a socially developing and accepting general education classroom for special and general education students?

Story of the Question

My story really begins as a student in the 4th grade. There were always students I never saw except briefly at lunch or during specials throughout elementary school that were in their own class. This class had a teacher that I knew I would never have the

chance to have. I knew these kids were different, but that was the extent of my knowledge about them. However, in 4th grade, in the middle school, the self contained classroom was across the hall from my own classroom. I saw these students more often. My friend and I noticed that two of the students who had specials with us were without friends as they played alone during recess. We would often try to play with them at recess, teaching them how to shoot a basketball. The boy was always very mean to the girl, making himself feel better by putting her down. It was hard to be nice to him while trying to stop him from being mean. Throughout the next five years in middle school, I watched as these students became more and more rejected by my peers. This upset me, but being a kid and sometimes selfish, my friend and I didn't always feel like having to be their only friends; there were some other things that we wanted to do at recess. I felt torn; why was this the way it had to be?

Fast forward to the year 2008 in my Fall Clinical 1 placement A in Miss Barnett's 4th grade classroom. There are four students in this classroom that remind me of the "different kids" I knew growing up. They leave the classroom for resource center and then return for specials, writing, science or social studies. Each time these students reenter the classroom they are unsure of what they should be doing or what has gone on in the classroom while they were away. I watch these students stay together or wander alone during recess without any general education friends. During lunch when they sit down next to some of their classmates, their classmates get up and change their seats. After having a teacher's lunch with one of the special education students and watching her eat and listening to her choice of topic and words, I could see how some students might not want to give her a chance if they did not understand her. She had poor eating

habits, spitting while she talked with her mouth full, and wasn't very nice in they way she spoke (her home situation is not ideal and it shows). Listening to conversations during art class, one special education student tried to participate in the conversation with his peers, but he took so long to articulate his thoughts that the boys moved on without him. The other two special education students often act inappropriately in order to get any attention possible from their classmates.

Why is it, that with a push towards least restrictive environments and the new wave of special education, students are facing the same problems that those in my grade, faced more than 10 to 15 years ago? Something needs to be done, and with my education and leadership position, I am ready to help make the change that I started at recess in the 4th grade.

Organization of the Thesis

The chapters to follow are the journey to the answer of my research question. The second chapter will review relevant literature and detail the problem special education students face in the inclusive classroom and their inability to form friendships with their general education counterparts. It further explains all of the factors involved in creating a socially developing and accepting classroom for special and general education students in the general education classroom. The third chapter contains the context of the study and the methodology used to conduct the study. The fourth and fifth chapters review the findings, discuss the significance of the data, and further research to be done.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

There will always be special education students in schools. As noted in the Individuals with Disabilities Act, special education students are to receive their education in the least restrictive environment (Cohen & Spenciner, 2005). Inclusive classrooms are the least restrictive environments that students can be placed in. However, although special education students' academics are supported in this setting, their social development, interactions with peers, and classroom acceptance, are often overlooked. Inclusive classrooms must be socially developing and accepting in order to benefit the whole special education student. This chapter will explore research in special education, the idea of inclusion, the reality of inclusive classrooms, the social status of special education students, the importance of social development and teaching social skills, the responsibility of teachers to teach these skills, and some strategies to use in the inclusive classroom to fully embody the need for a more socially developing and accepting inclusive classroom.

Special Education

This study focuses on the needs of special education students within the inclusive classroom. It is important to know what special education is and the types of students that are classified under special education. Special education is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) "as specifically designed instruction,

at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability" (Cohen &

Spenciner, 2005, p.6). "Specifically designed instruction means: adapting content,

methodology, or delivery of instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a

disability and ensuring that the child has access to the general curriculum so that the child

can meet the educational standards that apply to all children [Sec. 300.26(b)(3)(ii)]"

(Cohen & Spenciner, 2005, p.6).

In order for a child to receive special education he must become classified.   In

order to be eligible for special education a child must meet the following criterion: "(a) a

student must have a disability and (b) that disability must adversely affect the student's

education performance (Sec. 300.7)" (Cohen & Spenciner, 2005, p.7). There is often a

third included that states that a child needs and would benefit from special education (J

Finch, public presentation, Fall 2007). There are 14 categories in which a child may be

classified: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance,

hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment,

other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment,

traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment, including blindness (Cohen & Spenciner,

2005).

The idea of inclusion comes from the fourth principle of IDEA. The fourth

principle states that a child must be placed in the least restrictive environment (Cohen &

Spenciner, 2005). Students are to remain in the general education classroom unless they

are unable to be successfully educated there (Cohen & Spenciner). Students are to start

in the general education classroom and then other settings are considered from that point

not vice versa as it had been where a student would start out in a more restrictive setting

and then earn being placed in the general education classroom (Cohen & Spenciner, 2005). If a special education student is placed in the general education classroom with support of a special education teacher they are in an inclusive classroom.

Inclusion

With the addition of inclusion, general education teachers are no longer teaching homogenous groups of students; they are now responsible for teaching a diverse group of students (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). A reason for inclusion is so that special education students can be integrated with and socially accepted by their general education peers (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). With a push for special education students receiving their instruction in the least restrictive environment, inclusion has become a much talked about idea. However, what inclusion truly is has become lost through interpretation.

There are a few definitions but there are common key components for a true inclusive classroom. The first is "removing barriers to learning and participation for all students, thus encompassing a large diversity of pupils and providing differential education to reflect this diversity" (Pijl, 2007, p. 1). Another defines cooperative teaching as "an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings" (Whinnery & King, 1995, p.5). To be an inclusive classroom there must be both a general and special education teacher in the classroom to teach both the special and general education students.

It is the third definition that this study is focusing on. It states that it is "the process that maximizes the interaction between disabled and non-disabled pupils showing

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that much value is placed on implementation conditions that foster good relations between students" (Pijl, 2007, p.1). This last definition is a reason why parents have pushed for their special education students to be placed in inclusive classrooms. Parents want their students to have the opportunity to socialize with and build relationships with peers of the same age (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Pijl, 2007; Center *et al*, 1991; Gresham, 1984; Larrivee, 1985; Stainback, Stainback, & Wilkinson, 1992; Strully, Buswell, New, Strully, & Schaffner, 1992; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). The relationships that special education students are supposed to build with their peers will give them a sense of belonging by having relationships where they are supported and in return supportive (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). With the inclusive classroom there is a decrease in labeling, the special education teacher is there to support the special education students but will also help any other students in need, preventing any obvious differences in students (Whinnery & King, 1995). The increase of acceptance of learning disabled students in the inclusive classroom over pull-out programs is also another reason for inclusion (Wiener, 2004).

The definitions of inclusion state that special education students will be supported in the general education classroom both academically and socially. That is the ideal for inclusive classrooms. However, with a push for academics sometimes the social aspect of the student can be forgotten.

The Reality of Inclusion

Inclusion is a wonderful thing when it is implemented correctly. Although the placement of special education and general education students in a classroom together is a great beginning, the physical placement alone is not enough and will not create

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relationships between the two groups of students (Pijl, 2007; Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). One study found that at risk students were more accepted by their general education peers and more socially integrated in the classroom than special education students, leading to the finding that the physical placement is not enough (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). Inclusive classrooms are not fostering social development for the relationships between special education and general education students that parents and educators thought inclusion would bring (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). Another study found that special education students don't often interact with their general education peers and that when they do these interactions are not positive (Gresham, 1982). It is assumed that special education students will model and mimic the behavior of their peers, but it is does not just happen (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985).

There are multiple reasons for why inclusion is not working as planned. Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias, 1985 argue that "Non-handicapped children [have] negative attitudes toward the handicapped, handicapped children's social skills inadequacies, and regular class teachers' poor attitudes and inadequate skills for teaching handicapped students" (p. 132). It was found that even without the label, special education students were not accepted in their general education classroom (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). This leads to the belief that it is the special education students' lack of social skills that leads to the rejection (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). However, teaching special education students social skills alone is still not enough because even when social skills are learned there is still rejection (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). The reason for the rejection was found in the unchanged perception that general

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education students had for their special education peers (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). In order to create a more socially developing and accepting inclusive classroom there needs to be a change with both the special education and general education students. This type of environment requires attention to all students within the classroom.

Social Status of Special Education Students

Special education students are not integrated into the inclusive classroom as the program ideally would have them. Research has found that students with disabilities were not integrated into the classroom the way their general education counterparts were by a large discrepancy (Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). It is found that the reason for this discrepancy is due to learning disabled students' trouble with interacting with their peers because of their inability to communicate and poor "social perception" (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). Special education students are often lacking in social skills due to multiple factors; physical, sensorial, or intellectual capacities (King *et al.*, 1997). Special education students having poor social skills is not a new idea and is well known (Cartledge & Milburn, 1983; Gresham, 1982).

The way to find out whether or not special education students are socially integrated into their class is by looking at their peer status. Peer status can be defined as "the extent to which children are liked or disliked by groups of peers they encounter regularly, such as classmates" (Schneider, Wiener, & Murphy, 1994). Many researchers find that special education students are not accepted by their general education peers, have a low social status, and fewer friends (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985; Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Wiener, 2004). In one study students were asked to watch two videos, one containing a learning disabled student and one without learning disabilities. After

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watching the video students filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaire found that students believed the non-learning disabled boy was better in the areas of play, communication, academic behavior, would be a better friend, do better work, and would participate in class (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985).

There are other reasons why special education students have a hard time developing relationships with their peers. When it comes to choosing friends, students choose those who are most similar to them (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). This is called 'homophily,' it is based on age, gender, educational attainment, values, and interests (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; McPherson *et al*, 2001). This is a reason why special education students may often find themselves alone and without friends. They often have a hard time finding someone like them or their peers have a hard time finding similarities between them. It was found that the factor of kindness was not as important for general education peers in selecting friends as play and sports skills were in making friends (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). Special education students are less likely to be identified by their peers as friends (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Students with learning disabilities reported having friends that were up to two years younger than them and friends that did not attend the same school as them (Weiner & Sunohara, 1998). The most upsetting thing that was found was that the learning disabled students feel that their general education peers were more intelligent than they (Whinnery & King, 1995). Special education students should not feel inadequate or poorly about themselves in school; school is place where students' self esteem should be built up. There is a need for inclusive classrooms to be more socially developing and accepting.

The Importance of Social Development and Teaching Social Skills

It is noted by many that there is more to a child than just academics and that social integration and personal development are just as essential to a child's growth (Center, Ward, & Ferguson, 1991; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Sale & Carey, 1995; Salend, 1998). A court case in 1989, Daniel R. R. v. State Board of Education, found that the "non-academic benefits to the child of interaction with non-handicapped children" must be considered when placing a child in educational settings (Elbaum, 2002, p.216).

Social development and skills are important for children to have in order to succeed in school, friendships, and life in general. Social support and development are fundamental to learning and to life (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). There was a list created of skills necessary for elementary students to have; exposure to print, adequate expressive and receptive language, ability to follow directions, problem solving skills, and interpersonal skills (Hersh & Walker, 1983; O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beene-Frankenberger, 2002; Walker, Irvin, Noell, & Singer, 1992). There are social skills that are necessary for success in school.

Students who are not taught social skills will become even more inappropriate leading to even more isolation (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Social skills training is necessary for students' long term success (Vaughn, 1985). Students without these skills are at risk for underachieving in academics, unsuccessful friendships with other students, and poor relationships with teachers (Walker & Severson, 2002; Asher & Coie, 1990; Kavale & Mostert, 2004; Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999).

Students need to have friends. There are different types of relationships but horizontal relationships are the most important relationships for a child's development (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Schaffer, 1996). These are relationships with peers with "equal status" (Frostad & Pijl, 2007, p. 16). Friends also help children develop a sense of self worth and appealing social skills (Wiener, 2002). "Rejection by peers" and isolation prevent further social development as self image, confidence, and sense of belonging are lacking (Asher & Coie, 1990). Even having just one good friend in class usually means a higher feeling of self worth even if the student is not accepted by the class as a whole as there is less of a feeling of loneliness (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997).

Teacher's Responsibility

According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards for special education teachers of early childhood students and the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) principles, it is the classroom teacher's job to promote social development in students (http://www.emu.edu/maed/INTASC. html). In the second CEC standard, teachers must have the knowledge of "influence[ing] supportive relationships on the social and emotional development of young children." The fifth standard requires that teachers create social environments that will allow the children to succeed in group settings.

The second and fifth INTASC principles relay the duty teachers have in their students' social development (http://www.emu.edu/maed/INTASC.html). The second principle states that "the teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development" (http://www.emu.edu/maed/INTASC.html). The fifth principle requires

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that teachers use their knowledge of motivation and behavior to create a "learning environment that encourages positive social interaction…" (http://www.emu.edu/maed/INTASC.html).

It is a teacher's responsibility to look at the child from more than just the academic standpoint and to see the whole child. When children enter school it becomes the main place for students to socialize (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). What happens in this environment can be beneficial or detrimental to a child (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). A child's social skills, self esteem, and social behavior works with or against a child's academic potential (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). Having a learning disability along with any other factor like ADHD, being an English Language Learner, living in poverty, or having a poor classroom environment leads to even more socialization problems (Wiener, 2004). Although many of these factors can not be controlled the teacher can and should change the classroom environment so it is more conducive to the success of the learning disabled student and their needs (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985).

What Can Be Done

A classroom that is socially developing and accepting "effects student attitudes, interest, productivity, engagement, and academic achievement" (Walberg & Greenberg, 1997). It is the teachers who need to take responsibility of the classroom environment and instruction in order to create a community that fosters social development and relationship building (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). It is found that if a child makes at least one friend in the class they can often become accepted

by the group as a whole (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). At the very least teachers need to strive for each student to have at least one friend.

The classroom environment itself must be changed before expecting any social growth or development from the students (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). There needs to be understanding and preparation done by both teachers and students to have success (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). Teachers are able to first assess the social climate of their classroom by using the Learning Environment Inventory and My Class Inventories (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999; Fraser, Anderson, & Walberg, 1991). These will at least offer insight into the workings and feelings inside the classroom that the teachers may be unaware of.

It is necessary for teachers to look at their classrooms as unique and to not look at social skills training as one size fits all (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). It is very important that teachers create social instruction according to what the general education students find to be important in friends and also what teachers find to be most important in students (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). Some students may never gain all social skills but at least they will have the ones most necessary to cope in life. This means that teachers will need to find out from their students what they as a unique class find to be important. It was found that students often find that being skillful at play and sports is more important than being kind (Cartledge, Frew, & Zaharias, 1985). This does not mean to ignore teaching students kindness, but to be aware of what is important. This may mean that the special education students will have skills training in play and sports

and that some general education students may need some skills training in the importance of being kind.

Because special education students are often academically lower than their peers it is a good idea to allow them to succeed at something else. Teachers should get students involved in non-academic programs and clubs so their peers can see them in new settings (Wiener, 2004). Special education students can not do this on their own; they need their teachers to help create these opportunities.

Conclusion

When considering the best ways to create a socially developing and accepting inclusive classroom it is important to consider all aspects that surround this idea. One must first know about special education, inclusion, the reality of inclusive classrooms, the social status of special education students, the importance of social development and teaching social skills, the teachers' responsibility, and some strategies to use in the inclusive classroom. As discussed in this literature review, special education students are often lacking in social skills and their acceptance by peers is low (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998). Social skills need to be taught and it is the classroom teachers' responsibility. There are many ideas about what should be done in the inclusive classroom. However, many of these strategies have not been tested. This study aims to create a plan that uses instruction and classroom management that lead to a socially developing and accepting inclusive classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Inclusion is taking place in classrooms throughout the United States. Students with disabilities are being placed alongside general education students but neither forming bonds with their classmates nor becoming accepted members of the class. This research will determine the effectiveness of strategies to create socially developing and accepting inclusion classrooms for special education students.

This study will be conducted as teacher research. "Teacher research is based upon close observation of students at work" (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 5). This type of research "is rich in classroom anecdotes and personal stories" (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p.2). More than one type of methodology is used; qualitative and quantitative (Hubbard & Power, 1999). Qualitative research was used to help determine and understand student and teacher feelings regarding behaviors in the inclusion classroom environment. Quantitative data was used to help determine whether or not the strategies implemented changed student feelings about the classroom environment. Data will be collected in multiple forms. Surveys will be given at the beginning and the end of the study to help determine the attitudes and perceptions of the students towards school, peers, and their classroom environment. A teacher journal will be used to document critical events and be a source for questioning strategies implemented and develop possible solutions to issues or problems found or encountered.

Teacher observations will provide insight to the various interactions between the students and teachers. Student artifacts will offer insight to student feelings and knowledge about topics taught and discussed. Student interviews will allow for candid discussions concerning the attitudes and perceptions towards school, the classroom, peers, and friendships. Teacher interviews will allow for deep and candid discussions concerning the attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion, special education, and the classroom. The data above will be used to find the most effective strategies for creating a socially developing and accepting inclusion classroom by viewing the class on both an individual level and a whole class level using the students' perspective as well as the teacher's perspective.

Context

This study took place in a first grade inclusion classroom in an Abbot School District in South Jersey. The school educates students from Preschool to third grade (New Jersey Department of Education). Core to the school's curriculum are the reading and math programs; Success for All and Everyday Math (New Jersey Department of Education). The total cost per student is $18, 387 (New Jersey Department of Education). There is an afterschool program that offers childcare until 6:00 PM. Eight of the 17 students in my classroom attended the afterschool program. During the 2007-2008 school year 13.1% of the students had IEPs (New Jersey Department of Education). There are a number of languages spoken at home including Bengali, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, and others (New Jersey Department of Education).

The inclusion classroom involved in this study contained 17 students. There are seven males and ten females in the classroom. The average first grade classroom during

the 2007-208 school year contained 20 students (New Jersey Department of Education). Five of the students in the classroom had IEPs and three of the IEPs were for behavior and not academics. There was a total of 140 first grade students enrolled in the school containing 807 total students during the 2007-2008 school year (New Jersey Department of Education). There is high mobility rate in the school, 24.9% during the 2007-2008 school year compared to the state average of 10.8% (New Jersey Department of Education). In the first grade inclusion classroom two students had left during the year and one entered the classroom.

Attendance was a significant issue in the classroom in which the study took place. One of the student's with an IEP was absent and tardy more days than she was present. During the 2007-2008 school year, 94.5% of students were present on average each day. There is a school wide incentive program to encourage student attendance. Each classroom door has PACUBS and a room number, this stands for Perfect Attendance Cubs. Each time all students are present the paper clip goes to a new letter, once the paper clip has moved all the way to the end the students receive a new colorful pencil and the teacher receives a pass to leave school 15 minutes early. The students in my classroom earned this twice during my four months. This meant that all students were present for only 18 days on average.

There was both an elementary and special education teacher in the classroom. The special education teacher was present for Language, Math, Science/Social Studies, and Health. The general education teacher was alone during homeroom, Writer's Workshop, and Enrichment while the special education teacher was in class support in

another first grade classroom. Both teachers have been in the school district for at least fifteen years.

I was present in the classroom to complete my student teaching in elementary and special education. I was in the classroom from January 20th until May 8th. During this time I took over the lesson plans one subject a week. I co-taught with both the elementary and special education. During my research I had to work within the confines of my cooperating teachers, the school's principal and superintendent, and the school's curriculum.

Research Design/Methodology

The goals of the research are to find effective strategies that create socially developing and accepting inclusion classrooms that integrate the general and special education students. Much of the research will be student led. First, a note will be sent home to all of the students' guardians in the first grade inclusion classroom in order to obtain permission for the students to be allowed to participate. All students with returned permission slips will participate in the study.

I will be using surveys with the students to find out their comfort level in the classroom. All participatory students will be given a fifteen yes or no question survey as follows: I like to ask questions in my classroom, I have a lot of friends in my class, I like math, my friends go to a different school, I am scared to ask questions, I am friends with everyone in my class, I like coming to school, I like reading, I like gym class, I know everyone in my class, I like lunch time, I talk with my friends at lunch, recess is fun, I always play with the same people at recess, and I am an important part of my classroom. The yes or no survey will be administered at the very beginning of the study in order to

get an inside perspective on students' feelings about their classroom environment and their peers.

Observation rubrics will be used to record student conflicts or disagreements prior to the implementation. Using an observation table I will record my classroom observations regarding who the conflict happened between; teacher and both special and general education students, special education students, general education students, special and general education students, teacher and general education student, or teacher and special education student. The rubrics will be used to record who the conflicts happen between most frequently and the types of conflicts that occur. Knowing the types of conflicts that take place and who the conflicts happen between will allow me to further tailor my mini-lessons to the needs of the students, whether it be learning how to act socially around the teacher or peers.

After reviewing the student surveys, students will be interviewed about their feelings about the classroom environment. Students who are present in the classroom during the Writer's Workshop and Enrichment period will be interviewed. The questions to be asked are as follows: what is your favorite part of school, who are your friends, what things do you and your friends like to do together, what do you like most about your friends, what would make you not want to be friends with someone, do you enjoy working with a partner or in groups, is there anything that makes you nervous or upset about school, what would make school better for you, is there anything that your teachers could teach you that would make school better, and is it more important that your friends are nice or that they play games well? Student interviews will be used to determine what students want in a friend (social skills needed to be accepted by classmates) and what

could be done by the teachers to make school better for the students. These methods will help to guide me in the choice of what strategies to use and implement within the classroom.

Interviews with the classroom teachers will be done as well. The teachers will be asked a series of ten questions: what are your feelings about inclusion, did you volunteer to be part of an inclusive classroom, do you have any previous experience in an inclusive classroom, does the school offer any support to you being a part of an inclusive classroom, what are some of the things that you do to try to encourage integration of general and special education students, was there a lot of collaboration done by you and your co-teacher in the beginning of the year or prior to the beginning of the school year, what kind of collaboration takes place between you and your co-teacher, are there any other skills that you teach the students considering that your classroom contains both general education and special education students, have you talked to your students about disabilities and special education, and from your experience do you think a special education student's disability factors into whether or not his classmate's accept him? The interviews will delve into what has been done in the classroom to promote social development and acceptance of peers. Knowing what has been tried and what has been successful or unsuccessful will also guide the strategies to be used. The teacher interviews will also be used to determine teacher attitudes towards inclusion and what social skills teachers find to be important for students to have in order to be successful in school.

There will be numerous strategies implemented throughout the research period based upon the survey and interview discussed above. After the initial data is collected I

will create lessons plans that integrate the social skills that are needed for students to be successful according to both their teachers and their classmates. There will be diversity and disability awareness in the form of literature (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). Structured out of class activities will also be used to create student interaction (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). Students will also be given assignments that need to be completed at lunch that will encourage conversation and understanding of each other. For example, find out what your partner likes to do after school, what is your partner's favorite food, etc.

Throughout the implementation of these methods I will be keeping a journal. I will be writing in my journal about any events that really stood out to me. Student work from the social skills instruction will be collected. Group activities completed after reading a book and discussion, such as charts, will documented by photograph.

After 2 weeks students will be given the same 15 yes or no survey again to see if there has been any change in their comfort level after the implementation of strategies. This one will be looking for a change in students' feelings and attitudes about each other as well as a change in their feelings about their classroom environment. The same observation rubric will be used again as well.

Looking Ahead

In the following two chapters, the data will be analyzed, reported, and interpreted. In chapter four, the data will be reported to see if there were any changes of thought and feelings in the surveys from the beginning to the ending of the study. The interviews and journal will be used to help determine which strategies were most effective. The student artifacts will help determine what the students' picked up and learned from each mini

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lesson. The fifth chapter will discuss the conclusions and the implications of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

After all permission slips were signed and returned 16 of the 17 students were

allowed to participate in the study. The student who was not given permission was not

excluded from activities but his work was not included in the study. The study took place

over 4 weeks divided into a pre-implementation (first week), implementation of

strategies, and post-implementation phases. During the first week, the yes or no survey

was taken, observation rubrics were completed, and students were interviewed to

establish baseline data. Below is the information derived from the first week of the

study.

Pre-Implementation Survey

The yes or no survey consisted of fifteen questions. Below are the results.

Table 1: Yes or No Survey

Question	Yes	No
I like to ask question in my classroom	8	8
I have a lot of friends in my class.	11	5
I like math.	7	9
My friends go to a different school.	3	13
I am scared to ask questions.	5	11
I am friends with everyone in my class.	7	9
I like coming to school.	6	10
I like reading.	10	6
I like gym class.	11	5
I know everyone in my class.	10	6
I like lunch time.	13	3
I talk with my friends at lunch.	10	6
Recess is fun.	12	4
I always play with the same people at recess.	7	9
I am an important part of my classroom.	9	7

The class took the survey at the same time. Since the students were in first grade and at different reading levels, I read aloud the questions and asked the students to circle the yes or no next to the question after I read it. There were 16 surveys tallied due to one student not given permission. The students were evenly split on the first question. Half like to ask questions during class and half do not. The majority of the students, eleven, claim to have a lot of friends, while five claim to not have a lot of friends in their class. Nine enjoy math and seven do not. Only three of the students said that their friends went to a different school. Eleven students said that they were not afraid to ask questions in class while five said that they were afraid. Only seven students said that they were friends with everyone in the class and nine said that they were not. Ten students said they did not like coming to school and six said they liked coming to school. Ten students said they liked reading and six said they did not. Eleven students said they like gym class while five said they did not. Only ten students said they knew everyone in their class and six said they didn't know everyone in the class. Only three students do not like lunch time and thirteen do. Ten students talk with their friends at lunch and sixteen do not. Twelve out of sixteen of the students think recess is fun. Seven people play with the same people at recess while nine do not. Only nine of the students found felt that they were an important part of the classroom.

Pre-Implementation Observation Rubrics

Four observation rubrics were completed to establish baseline data the week before the implementation of strategies to make the classroom more socially developing and accepting. The following is the pertinent information derived from the observation rubrics.

On April 7, 2009, there were two conflicts between special education students. The conflicts were that students could not stand in line next one another and the other and two students were making comments toward one another. There were four conflicts between the teacher and a special education student. One conflict was a student forged her father's signature and the others were open defiance from the student.
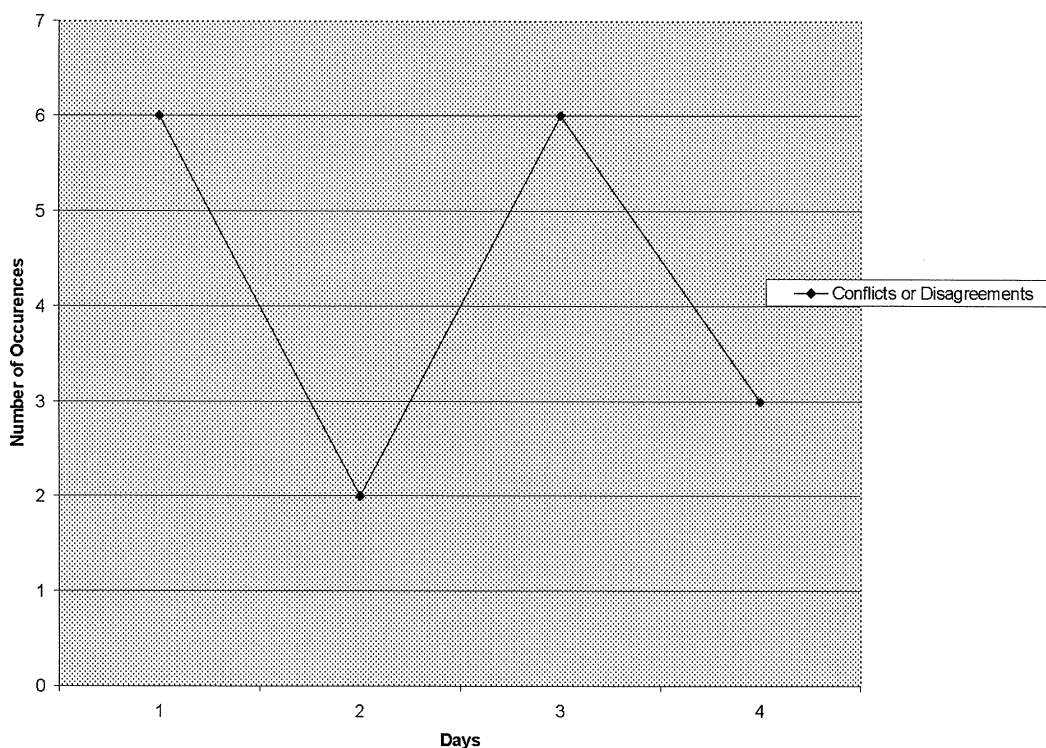
One April 8, 2009, there were two conflicts total. One was between a special education and general education student. The special education student was teasing the general education student. The second conflict was between two general education students and involved teasing.

On April 9, 2009, there were six conflicts. One conflict took place between two special education students; some inappropriate comments were made from each. One conflict took place between a special education and general education student. One took place between two general education students. Three took place between a teacher and a general education student.

On April 10, 2009, three conflicts took place. The first was between a general education and special education student. There was teasing going on between the two at lunch. The second was between two general education students. Again there was teasing going on at lunch between the two. The third was between two general education students. Inappropriate comments were made between the two.

The following table is a line graph presenting the number of conflicts or disagreements that took place by day from April 7, 2009 to April 10, 2009.

Table 2: Week 1 Conflicts or Disagreements

The number of conflicts and disagreements was not consistent during the four

days observed. The average number of disagreements was about 4.25 a day according to

the observation rubrics. Four of the disagreements that occurred were between special

education students. Three of the disagreements happened between a special education

and general education student. Three of the disagreements occurred between general

education students. Four occurred between a special education student and teacher and

three between a general education student and teacher. Table 3 below shows the

disagreements just described.

Table 3: Disagreements or Conflicts by Type

Bar chart titled "Conflicts or Disagreements by Type" with y-axis labeled "Number of Occurences" ranging from 0 to 4.5. Legend: Disagreements or Conflicts- Week 1. Values: Special Education Student and Special Education Student = 1; General Education Student and Special Education Student = 3; General Education Student and General Education Student = 1; Teacher and Special Education Student = 4; Teacher and General Education Student = 2.

Pre-Implementation Student Interviews

The following are students' answers to ten interview questions administered during week one. I conducted the interviews which were done in pairs during enrichment period. Some students receive tutoring throughout the entire period and were therefore unable to be interviewed. The student answers are below.

1. What is your favorite part of school?

Student 1: "Playing outside."

Student 2: "Learning math."

Student 3: "Music."

Student 4: "Math."

Student 5: "Library, I get books."

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Student 6:"Math, it's fun."

Student 7: "Nothing, I don't like school."

Student 8: "Library, it's fun to get books."

Student 9: "Recess, playing on the playground and with others."

Student 10: "Lunchtime, I talk to my friends and eat."

Student 11: "Nothing."

Student 12: "Math."

2. Who are your friends?

Student 1: "In this class."

Student 2: "In this class and neighbors."

Student 3: "Someone somewhere else."

Student 4: "Neighbors at home."

Student 5: "This class."

Student 6: "Grade above."

Student 7: "Other classes."

Student 8: "In this classroom."

Student 9: "In this classroom."

Student 10: "People in other classes and this class."

Student 11: "Other classes."

Student 12: "In this class."

3. What things do you and your friends like to do together?

Student 1: "Tag and hide and seek."

Student 2: "Play tag in junkyard and outside."

Student 3: "Play at the park."

Student 4: "Play tag."

Student 5: "Play on the bus, can't play in school or recess."

Student 6: "Girl stuff, toys."

Student 7: "Video games."

Student 8: "Eat lunch, play jail break."

Student 9: "Play baseball."

Student 10: "Play outside with dog and sisters."

Student 11: "Play soccer."

Student 12: "Play games and play outside, sports like basketball."

4. What do you like most about your friends?

Student 1: "Nice to me and funny."

Student 2: "They are nice to me and funny."

Student 3: "Nice and my teachers too."

Student 4: "Don't know."

Student 5: "They play with me."

Student 6: "Everything, makes me laugh."

Student 7: "Makes me laugh."

Student 8: "Playing with them."

Student 9: "Funny and smart."

Student 10: "Funny and nice."

Student 11: "Nice, pretty, helpful."

Student 12: "Nice, they like me, they think I am cute."

5. What would make you not want to be friends with someone?

Student 1: "Be mean to me, push me off the slide."

Student 2: "Be mean to me."

Student 3: "They are mean."

Student 4: "If they are mean to me."

Student 5: "If they yell."

Student 6: "Don't share, mean to me, says mean things."

Student 7: "Nothing."

Student 8: "Mean to me."

Student 9: "Mean to me."

Student 10: "Steal my stuff and mean to me."

Student 11: "Fight, wrestle, and hit."

Student 12: "Argue, be made at me."

6. Do you enjoy working with a partner or in groups? Why?

Student 1: "Yes it's fun, play with friends."

Student 2: "Yes, because it is fun to work with them."

Student 3: "Yes, because."

Student 4: "No, I like to work alone."

Student 5: "By self, I don't want any noise, I like peace and quiet."

Student 6: "Partner or groups, I like working together."

Student 7: "By self it is fun."

Student 8: "With a partner, it's fun, sometimes I am the tiniest."

Student 9: "Both, I like to talk."

Student 10: "Yes, because I get to talk to my partner."

Student 11: "No, some people don't play with me outside during recess."

Student 12: "Yes, they are my best friends, they are nice to me."

7. Is there anything that makes you nervous or upset about school?

Student 1: "Yes, if someone pushes me and I get a broken arm."

Student 2: "Upset when do hard stuff in Math and Science, hard homework."

Student 3: "Going on the stage and singing."

Student 4: "You get in trouble."

Student 5: "No."

Student 6: "When people push me."

Student 7: "Nothing I don't get sad."

Student 8: "No."

Student 9: "Nothing."

Student 10: "No."

Student 11: "Yes, because no one plays with unless I ask them."

Student 12: "When I broke my leg Friday."

8. What would make school better for you?

Student 1: "No homework, go outside for recess everyday."

Student 2: "More gym, more specials, more recess."

Student 3: "Teach about animals."

Student 4: "If you didn't get in trouble."

Student 5: "Staying home."

Student 6: "If people weren't mean to me."

Student 7: "If I was allowed to work by myself."

Student 8: "Learn about animals."

Student 9: "Longer lunch."

Student 10: "Ice cream all day."

Student 11: "If everyone was friends."

Student 12: "Easier questions."

9. Is there anything that your teachers could teach you that would make school better?

Student 1: "Use a computer better, use a Sharpie better."

Student 2: "Teach how to keep desk and classroom clean, teach to tie shoes."

Student 3: "Teach about the zoo."

Student 4: "No."

Student 5: "No."

Student 6: "Teach how to ride a two wheeler, read small words."

Student 7: "Nothing."

Student 8: "Teach about animals."

Student 9: "Do more fun activities."

Student 10: "Write on slates more."

Student 11: "Teach me quarters."

Student 12: "Teach me math because I like math."

10. Is it more important that your friends are nice or that they play games well?

Student 1: "Nice."

Student 2: "Nice."

Student 3: "Play games well."

Student 4: "Both."

Student 5: "Both."

Student 6: "Be nice."

Student 7: "Play games."

Student 8: "That they're nice."

Student 9: "Both."

Student 10: "Nice to you."

Student 11: "Play games and be nice."

Student 12: "Both."

Data Collection During the Implementation of the Strategies

Mini Lessons

The mini lessons took place during the last period of the day which is divided into Enrichment time and Writer's Workshop time. During this time students who receive math and reading tutoring are pulled out. Due to tutoring, not all of the students took part in the listening and discussion of the literature. I read I Can Accept Others by Jenette Donovan Guntly. Questioning and discussion took place during this time. The book People by Peter Spier was read and a poster about why being different is good was created as a class. What Can You Do? by Shelly Rother was read. A poster about what each student was an expert at was created. How to be a Friend by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown was read. Students wrote sentences and drew pictures showing how they could be a friend. I read Making Friends by Fred Rogers and discussed the different aspects of becoming friends with the students. I Can Show I Care by Jenette Donovan

Guntly was read and discussed. Students wrote sentences and drew pictures about how they show they care.

<div align="center">Student Artifacts</div>

The following are some of the sentences from student work completed after the literature was read and discussed. The students' spelling has not been changed nor was grammar corrected.

I Can Show I Care Writing

"One way I can crae adout who drop their books."

"I lisin to people when my frends tock to me to I cker."

"I know when somewon fawl I can help them. One way I can help a frend is when the faw. I can help a frend with thir homework."

"I play with friends when it is sunny outside to show I care."

"When the teacher is talking I have to be quieit."

"I care to wurck qwite when I drow or write."

"I can show I car by helping my partner wen he/she neds help on a problem or neads help on mathboxes."

"I can show I care because I will help them when they fall and get hurt."

"I know one way I can show is laking at my teacher when she is talking you should be quwiyet so you can hear her. If you don't want to lisin you will not know when she ask you a qyeshtan or a anser."

"I lisen to my frend when thir speeceing to show I care."

"One way that I care is to sit with my friends."

I Can Be a Friend Writing

"I can be a friend because I can treet them nice and playing a game with my frends cindly."

"Making frands is when you be nice to a boy or a girl thats how you make frands."

"I will invite Daminan, Alonnah, Lyndsie, Mason, To play tage with me."

"I would share my toys. Next, I'll play with them."

"I can show them by sharing toys with them. I can give them wat ever thay want. I lik my friends."

"I can share to be a frend."

"I can share to b a frend I will sare my toys. I will sare a toy with my frend."

"Plaing hand wisp had igoninas."

"I can be a good friend by sharing. I can be a good friend by playing games if they asked me to play. I can be a good friend if they asked me to eat with them."

"I love to play with Kira to day. We love to go on the play grad."

"I love to play tag with my frends. I'm very nice to my frend."

Lunch Conversations

Students were randomly paired with partners to sit with at lunch and complete conversation assignments. Students' names were drawn from a bucket each day. Some of the conversation starters were: how do you show someone you would like to be friends with them, what are the best ways to be a friend, what is your partner's favorite thing to do after school, what are five interesting things about your partner, etc.

After lunch before beginning math and during the filling of the homework folders, I would choose names out of the bucket and ask the students to share their partners'

answer to the conversation starter they were assigned. Students who had completed the task received a ticket, an incentive that all students want. Some students had not completed the task due to being moved during lunch because of poor behavior. One student did not do the task and when I confronted him he had no reason for not talking with his partner.

Teacher Journal

I kept a journal throughout the four weeks of the study. The following are significant observations that I made. The first week, one general education student drew a picture of another general education student in the classroom being hit by a car by a burning building. He wrote, in his phonetic writing, "I don't care." The student drew the picture in his Social Studies journal where he was supposed to be writing about the weather. This journal is looked at by the teacher's before it is collected. He had tried to put his away before having it looked at. When I asked him to see it he covered the picture up and tried erasing it. When confronted he said that he didn't know what it said and that he didn't mean to write it.

The majority of the disagreements or conflicts that happen within the classroom happen between two special education students. When I first began my student teaching my cooperating teachers informed me that I had to watch these two students because the one could become violent towards the other. These two students have IEPs that are due to behavior and not academics. The two are separated as much as possible within the classroom. They race and fight over getting in line first, winning or losing whole class games, etc. The one student becomes frustrated and angry when the other answers questions in class or speaks. They will often choose the same people to play with outside

at recess and fight. When playing football outside one day they were found rolling around on the ground fighting over the football.

During inside recess the two have difficulty playing with others. They don't play fair and are often left out. During the survey one of these students said that she didn't like recess because "no one likes me or wants to play with me." She will often race for a game that she knows the other student wants but is unable to find anyone to play with her.

One special education student is absent or tardy more days than she is present. She misses out on many social interactions with other students. When completing a how to paragraph about dying eggs, after missing the actual egg dying due to being absent, she said that eggs came from the ground. She misses out on real life age appropriate experiences and has less to relate to the other students. She willingly asks to make up work during recess, which is a time most students do not like to miss.

Another special education student has an IEP for academic reasons. Although you can pick him out after watching him as a student with an IEP, he gets along well with the other students in the class. He is very friendly and gets along with all of the students because he is good at playing. During indoor recess he will play puppets with others or is perfectly content doing a puzzle alone which most students choose to do.

The last special education student gets along well with others as well. She also has an IEP for behavior. She plays well with others at recess and is always surrounded by others. During lunch she must often sit alone because she can't focus on eating when sitting with her class. She has toilet issues and often has accidents. Although many of

the students don't notice right now, if this persists in later grades there will be repercussions and teasing.

During the week there are a lot of issues during lunch time. When I go to pick the students up from lunch they are at me with complaints and problems that happened while they were eating. One student punched another's milk and it spilled all over another. One student poked another with a pencil, one student took another's money, fighting over seats, and teasing. Sometimes the students say that they have gone to a lunch aid and they didn't get the help they needed. When I talk to the students about their actions they have no answer, they simply don't know why they did something or they tried asking for help.

During the implementation the student discussion gave light to some interesting information. During the reading of one of the books I had to stop multiple times to talk to the students about active listening. We talked about how they felt when someone was talking when they were talking, or if someone wasn't looking at them when they were talking to them. They said that it would make them sad and hurt their feelings. We discussed that teachers feel the same way when students talk and that it gives the impression they do not care. A minute later the students were talking and looking away during the reading. They can discuss and understand what is expected of them but they still do the opposite.

When reading a book about making and keeping friends and getting along one boy said that he couldn't. He simply stated that he can't get along with others, he couldn't learn and that was that.

When reading a book about finding out what you are good at, the students became excited. The students were happy to share with the class what they were an expert at. The students enjoyed helping each other come up with what they were good at. The students were excited about creating the expert chart. During this time I shared some things that I was good at but also things that I had trouble with or areas that I needed help.

One day during journal writing, one student was having difficulty writing and had nothing on her paper. I went over to her and explained that I was in disbelief because she was our writing expert and I knew she could write. Some of the students heard me and said "yeah you are the expert." Very quickly her journal page was filled as her hand began racing.

Before assigning the students lunch partners I talked to them about the idea, expectations, and rules. The students were very excited the first day of lunch partners. They anxiously waited to hear who their partner was. Only one student said "awww" after finding out he was paired with a girl. After lunch I asked the students how their lunch conversations went and not all students had completed the task. The next day the students were quick to remind me about the conversations and asked who they were sitting with. They were anxious each day about finding out who their partners were.

Post-Implementation Teacher Interviews

Both the special education and the general education teachers were interviewed by me one on one. Below are their answers to the questions.

Special Education Teacher Interview

What are your feelings about inclusion?

"I like it if it with the right teacher (co-teacher) and it's an advantage for all of the students. It's better for the general education students."

Did you volunteer to be part of an inclusive classroom?

"No, resource room was dissolved and the school pushed for inclusion. However, if given the I would have."

Do you have any previous experience in an inclusive classroom?

"Yes, Two year ago."

Does the school offer any support to you being part of an inclusive classroom?

"Dr. S, she observed and discussed her observations of how we worked together."

What are some of the things that you do to try to encourage integration of general and special education students?

"Don't single out, shouldn't be able to tell who is a special education student."

Was there a lot of collaboration done by you and your co-teacher in the beginning of the year or prior to the beginning of the school year?

"Yes, doesn't work unless you did, organization is key."

What kind of collaboration takes place between you and your co-teacher?

"Report cards, progress reports, lesson plans, and planning during lunch."

Are there any other skills that you teach the students considering that your classroom contains both general education and special education students?

"Positive reinforcement, make students feel good about themselves."

Have *you talked to your students about disabilities and special education?*

"Students are too young to talk about self esteem, talk about self confidence and discuss strengths and weaknesses, and accepting disability."

From your experience do you think a special education student's disability factors into whether or not his classmate's accept him?

"Depends on the disability, kids don't see it in general."

<u>General Education Teacher Interview</u>

What are your feelings about inclusion?

"Today there isn't much difference between regular education and an inclusion classroom. There are the same issues each type of classroom and as long as it is with the right teacher to work with it's good."

Did you volunteer to be part of an inclusive classroom?

"They asked if I would do it and I agreed. It was random pairing, I volunteered to do it next year if I am with the same special education teacher."

Do you have any previous experience in an inclusive classroom?

"Yes, first five years, the teacher came in for Science and Social Studies."

Does the school offer any support to you being part of an inclusive classroom?

"Dr. S observes inclusion rooms. She provides feedback, makes up timelines for action plans for improvement. She comes back again to see if the action plan was implemented. There are special education meetings for inclusion teachers and the school tries to create some common prep periods for planning."

What are some of the things that you do to try to encourage integration of general and special education students?

"Don't single out, spread the special education students out around the room with general education students. Both special education and general education students are paired together. When making modifications you can use them for the whole class, especially in

first grade. Encourage early finishers to do more work, and to just include all students in everything."

Was there a lot of collaboration done by you and your co-teacher in the beginning of the year or prior to the beginning of the school year?

"Met some the first in-service days and talked and planned the first couple of days."

What kind of collaboration takes place between you and your co-teacher?

"We talk in the mornings and run through the plans for the day" (the teachers split the lesson plans and create them by following the curriculum given)

Are there any other skills that you teach the students considering that your classroom contains both general education and special education students?

"No, do visual, auditory, and model everything."

Have you talked to your students about disabilities and special education?

"Talked about disabilities, (special education teacher) is in a wheelchair, talk about different abilities in all areas, academics and other. I throw it during lessons, it's not put in as a lesson, but talk about it when appropriate."

From your experience do you think a special education student's disability factors into whether or not his classmates accept him?

"First grade, younger, no."

Post-Implementation Surveys

The same fifteen question yes or no survey given the first week of the study was given again the fourth week, after the implementation of the socially developing and accepting strategies. Below are the results next to the first survey results.

Table 4: Post-Implementation Survey

Question	Before			After		
	Yes	No		Yes	No	Positive Change
I like to ask question in my classroom	8	8		9	7	Yes
I have a lot of friends in my class.	11	5		12	4	Yes
I like math.	7	9		11	5	Yes
My friends go to a different school.	3	13		6	10	No
I am scared to ask questions.	5	11		7	9	No
I am friends with everyone in my class.	7	9		9	7	Yes
I like coming to school.	6	10		7	9	Yes
I like reading.	10	6		9	7	No
I like gym class.	11	5		12	4	Yes
I know everyone in my class.	10	6		13	3	Yes
I like lunch time.	13	3		12	4	No
I talk with my friends at lunch.	10	6		11	5	Yes
Recess is fun.	12	4		14	2	Yes
I always play with the same people at recess.	7	9		4	12	Yes
I am an important part of my classroom.	9	7		10	6	Yes

Post-Implementation Observation Rubrics

The following are the observation rubrics completed after the implementation. The previous line graph has been continued below as well.

On May 4, 2009, there were three conflicts. Two of the conflicts were between a special and general education student. One fight was over a seat at lunch and the other involved students pushing and irritating each other. The third conflict was between a teacher and special education student. The student was defiant and refused to follow directions.

On May 6, 2009, there were four conflicts. Two of the conflicts took place between a teacher and special education student. The students were behaving poorly in the hallway, talking and walking incorrectly. The last two conflicts occurred between a

teacher and general education student. One student was behaving poorly in the classroom and another was refusing to do work.

On May 7, 2009, there were two conflicts. The first was between a general education and special education student. The two students were fighting over a game during indoor recess. The last was between two general education students. One student was blowing into the other's ear.

On May 8, 2009, there were no conflicts.

Below is a line graph that presents the trend of the disagreements both pre-implementation and post-implementation.

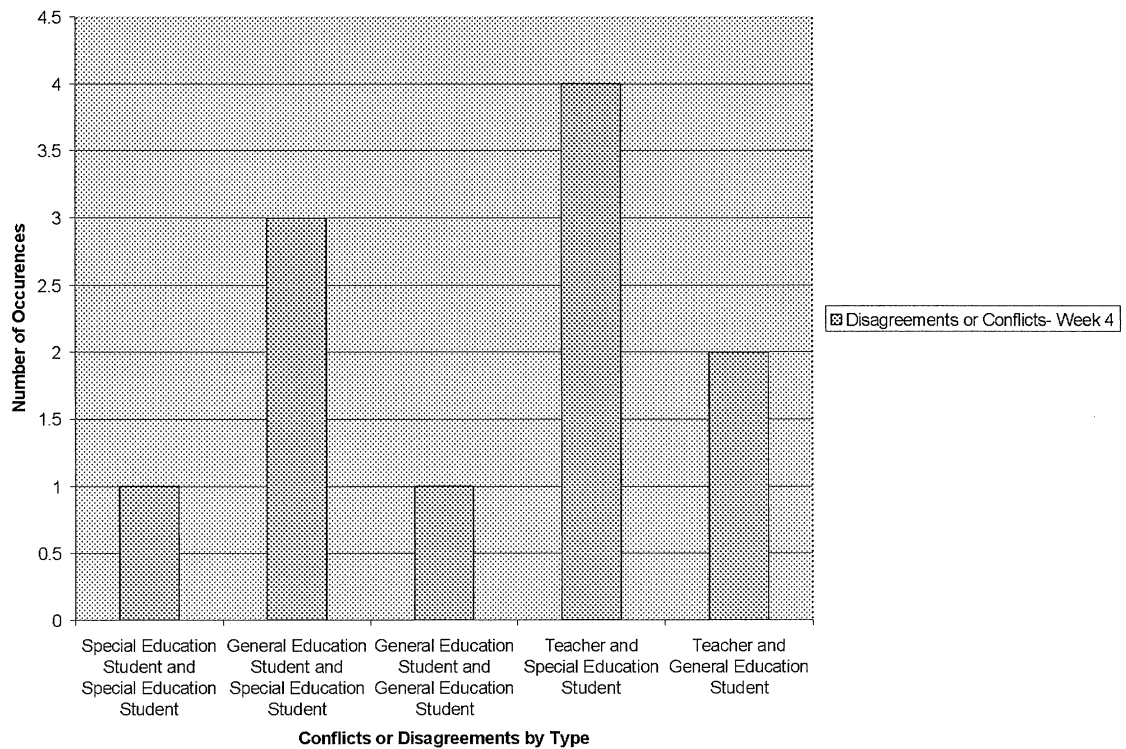Table 5: Conflicts or Disagreements Post-Implementation
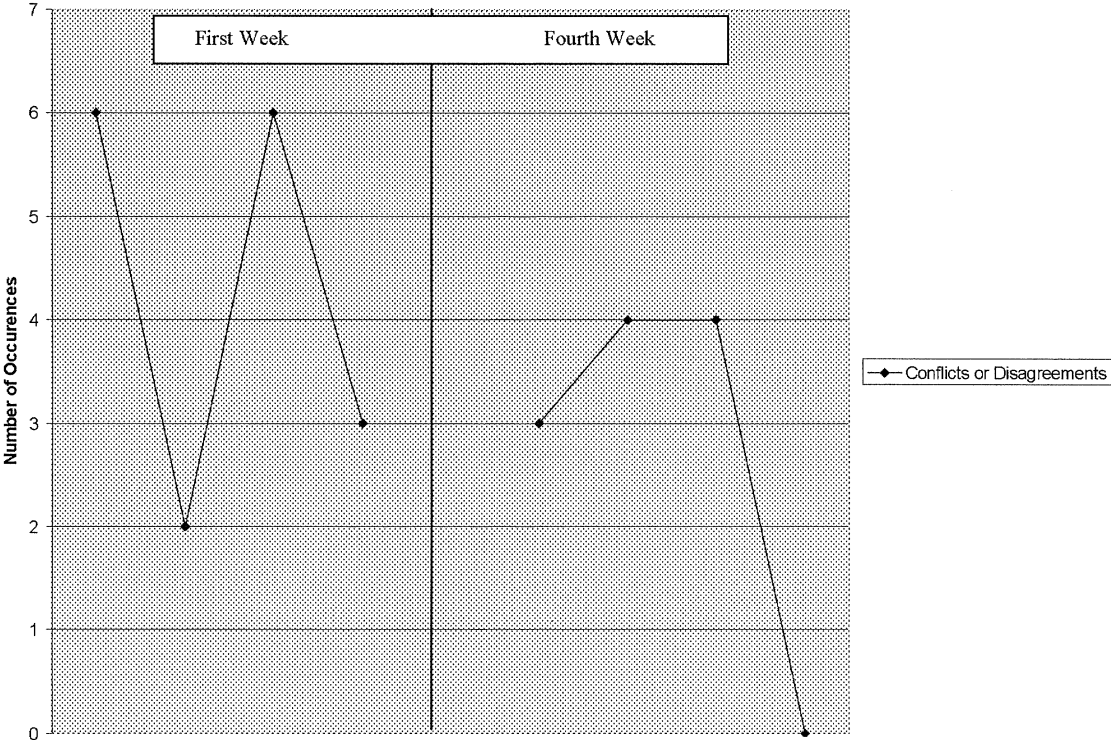
There was an average of 2.75 conflicts or disagreements according to the observation rubrics after the implementation. There was only one conflict or disagreement between special education students. There were three conflicts or disagreements between general education and special education students. There was one conflict between general education students. There were four conflicts or disagreements between a teacher and special education student. There were two conflicts or disagreements between a teacher and general education student.

The following table is a bar graph showing the occurrences of conflicts or disagreement by type.

Table 6: Post-Implementation Disagreements or Conflicts by Type

The following table is a bar graph comparing the number of conflicts or disagreements that occurred pre-implementation and post-implementation by type.

Table 7: Conflicts or Disagreements Pre-Implementation and Post-Implementation

Conflicts or Disagreements by Type
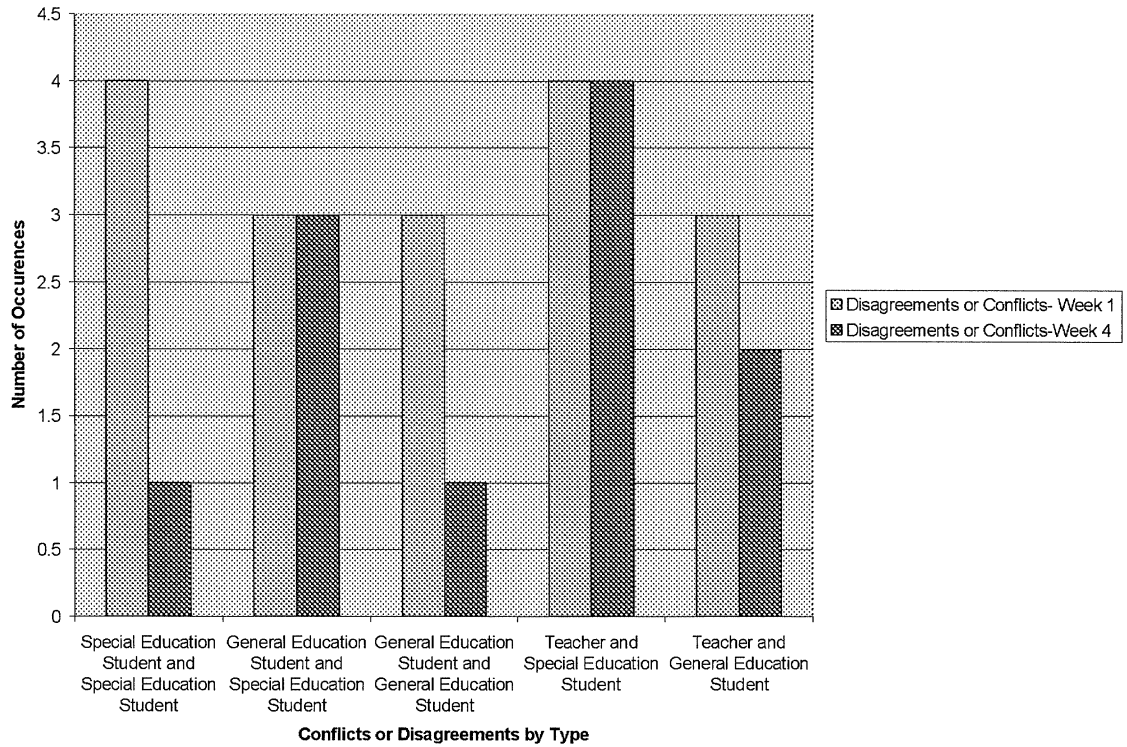
There was a decrease in conflicts or disagreements between special education students. The disagreements or conflicts remained the same between the general education and special education students. The conflicts or disagreements decreased between the general education students. The disagreements or conflicts remained the same between the special education students and teachers. The conflicts or disagreements decreased between the general education students and the teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Further Research

Introduction

Each piece of data brings insight to the research question, what are the most effective strategies for creating a socially developing and accepting inclusion classroom, as well as the feelings and ideas that surround it. Each method extracts different information or is able to get more of the same information in a different way.

When I first walked into my student teaching first grade inclusion classroom, I was not able to identify the five students with IEPs. This was completely unlike my previous student teaching placement where I could quickly identify the students with IEPs. My question and thesis was going to be different than I had previously planned since this classroom appeared to be different from the ones I had previously been in where integration between special education and general education students had been poor. My research was now not only going to include that strategies that I implemented but also the strategies that my teachers implemented prior to my becoming a part of the classroom.

Answering the Research Question

The strategies implemented in the study, lunch conversations and reading literature about being different, being a friend, and discovering strengths and discussions following each book, are effective. Although these strategies only took place over a period of two weeks, there was a change in student attitudes as found in the yes or no surveys. Although the changes were not drastic; one student felt more comfortable asking questions in class after the implementation, one more student felt they a lot of

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friends in class, two more students were not afraid to ask questions in class, one more student liked coming to school, one more student said that he talked to his friends at lunch, two more students said that recess was fun, three less people said that they played with the same people at recess, and one more student felt that he was an important part of the classroom. One student becoming more comfortable in the classroom is a success. Changing the views of more than one student further shows the strategies effectiveness. Students' feelings about their environment and themselves changed within two weeks, imagine the positive changes that could take place if the strategies were implemented in the beginning of the year and throughout the year.

Students need to be taught social skills and be given the opportunity and outlet to discuss them. The students' discussions brought to light students' ideas about themselves, making friends, getting along with peers and teachers. Students need to be able to talk to an adult about their feelings and what is expected of them in order to be functioning well in school and with peers.

Students need to be given the social opportunities to practice social skills taught and discussed in class. Teaching and talking about the skills is not enough. Students need an outlet to practice these skills. Students can be given the opportunity during group activities, recess, or as I did, at lunch. Lunch can sometimes be a scary time for students who feel they have no friends and no on to talk to. Pairing students up and giving them topics for conversation helps jump start social interactions that students need. The pressure is off the students because the teacher is making them complete an assignment. The students in my class enjoyed being paired up and kept reminding me about pairing them even after the implementation of the strategies ended.

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The more comfortable the student is in the class the better the environment. Post-implementation surveys showed that two students were no longer afraid to ask questions in class. If students are more willing to ask questions they will learn more. After reading a book about being good at different things and talking about what each student was good at I was able to use it later in class. One of the students was refusing to write in her journal saying she couldn't when the class and I reminded her that she was our go to expert writer. Her attitude changed and she began writing.

Teacher Accountability Due to Research Findings

The research showed that creating opportunities for social interactions, lunch conversations, and reading literature and discussing it made a positive influence. Teachers who work with students in inclusion classrooms need to do more than just worry about the academic side of the student. The whole student needs to be educated. Teachers need to make the socialization of special education a priority like they do the curriculum. Students see things around them and sometimes don't know understand it. They need an outlet to discuss things such as how to be successful in school and with their peers. Teachers need to teach students and provide students opportunities to be successful socially.

Research Results and Literature

Inclusion requires that teachers "maximize the interaction between disabled and non-disabled pupils showing that much value is placed on implementation conditions that foster good relations between students" (Pijl, 2007, p.1). Parents with students with IEPs want their students to have the opportunity to socialize with and build relationships with peers of the same age (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Pijl, 2007; Center *et al*, 1991; Gresham,

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1984; Larrivee, 1985; Stainback, Stainback, & Wilkinson, 1992; Strully, Buswell, New, Strully, & Schaffner, 1992; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). Teachers need to create these opportunities. It doesn't take much and it doesn't have to take away from academics. Within the two week period of implementation; reading stories, discussions, and lunch conversations, student surveys showed a change in student attitudes in a positive way. Even if a few students' feelings towards school and each other can be changed in two weeks then implementing these strategies in the beginning of the year in every inclusion classroom more students' perceptions of each other and school would b changed for the better.

Limitations

This study had multiple limitations. The research question itself was one that can be difficult to record the success. This may also be a reason why schools are more concerned with the academic successes of special education students and not the social successes or inadequacies.

Doing the research in a student teaching position was a limitation of the study. Although the cooperating teachers were wonderful and accommodating, the classroom was not my own and I did not have total control or the final say in the way things worked in the classroom. I also came in the middle of the school year and certain routines and expectations had been set without me; seating in the classroom and at lunch, morning and afternoon routines, and rules. There were things that I would have liked to have done but was unable to do so because it was not my own classroom. I would have wanted to have a morning meeting that would consist of greeting, sharing, an activity that requires cooperation with peers, and news and announcements (Fenty, Miller, & Lampi, 2008).

I would also have used peer role models, pairing students who are lacking in social skills with a student who exemplifies proper social skills (Fenty, Miller, & Lampi, 2008). I wasn't given control over the placement of students in the classroom. Also, on an individual basis, students who need more help socially would have had teacher lunches with another peer to help further practice social skills. I was not allowed to have lunch alone with students and my teacher used her lunches to get work done so I didn't want to impede on her routines. My position also did not allow me to bring in guests.

Time was also a limitation. By the time the IRB passed my research study and I was able to receive the students' permission slips there was only about a month left in my student teaching. My students were in first grade and had a difficult time getting their parents to sign and return their permission slips stating whether or not they could participate. I had a week to do collect data pre-implementation, two weeks to implement strategies, and a week to collect post-implementation date. Time factored into many of the ideas mentioned above. In order to have effective morning meetings students would need to practice them first, which for first graders could take about two weeks. The same is for the peer role models. Students would need time to get adjusted to one another. The two week period of the study was not long enough.

The age of the students was also a limitation. Since the students were in first grade they could not truly appreciate what I was asking them to do when completing the survey. Surveys could not be completed alone they had to be done orally as a whole class due to reading restrictions. Some of the interview questions needed to be explained to them and they still did not always grasp the intention of the question.

The major restriction was that this study was done in only one inclusion classroom. The students were in first grade, which the general education noted in her interview made a difference. When asked, *from your experience do you think a special education student's disability factors into whether or not his classmates accept him?* She answered, "first grade, younger, no."

I would be interested to see if the strategies implemented would be as effective in the older grades. As content becomes harder and the difference in academics becomes more evident are the strategies still effective. Does reason for why the student receives special education matter as well? Out of the five students with IEPs only two were classified for academic reasons. Does this make a difference?

Future Research

This study has generated even more questions surrounding the topic of effective strategies for creating socially developing and accepting inclusion classrooms. Due to the limitations stated above. I would implement the strategies that could not have implemented in this study. I would use peer role models, guest speakers, morning meetings, and lunches with the teacher. The study would take place in the beginning of the school year instead of the middle. The study would take place in a grade level above first grade to see if different skills need to be taught to students at different ages. At each grade level students' ideas about what is important in a friend or what a student needs to know to be accepted by others probably changes.

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