

**Title of Study:** *Should Alternate Curriculum Integration Lead to Full Inclusion?*

**Dates of Study:** 2018-2019

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**Purpose of the Action Research:** *The purpose of this study is to determine and identify both positive and negative impact(s) of full inclusion, within elective classes, on the special needs population and within general education classrooms in a high school setting.*

**Research Question/Hypothesis:** *The research questions for my action research study are:*  
1) *What are the benefits of full inclusion on both the special education and general education students in select elective classes?* 2) *What are the negative impacts of full integration/inclusion on both general education students and students with special needs?* 3) *What would be the effect on resources, such as course availability and paraprofessional supervision, at the school site to have full inclusion rather than elective integration?*

**The Existing Need:** *In my public high school there are a lot of benevolent adults that believe children with disabilities should be fully included in a larger high school experience. I, on the other hand, would like to understand fully, the positive and/or negative emotional and mental impact on the children in the alternative curriculum program as well as the children in the general education program. I believe that to fully implement appropriate inclusion, we should understand more than just the quantitative data that is out there. I feel that we should look at the emotional and mental impact of inclusion.*

**Research Connection:** *Genuine acceptance seems to be lacking when you read the research. There is little empirical data on the sustainability of relationships developed within these inclusive settings. This must make one wonder if the short-term inclusion is worth the possibility of long-term isolationism once K-12 education is over. Meaning, what happens with these students when the class is over and the students without disabilities are no longer mandated to interact with students with disabilities. I feel that this is a major disservice for these students. "Inclusion is a complex proposition that requires more than helping a youth develop a superficial friendship with a prosocial peer or increasing classmates' tolerance and acceptance of disabilities and behavioral differences" (Tkachyk, 2013, p.19).*

**Participants:** *This study will take place within the elective courses offered at our school, all grade levels. This may include; art, painting, music, drama, dance and my class Associated Student Body (ASB). As part of the action research, my class ASB, which includes 5 students with moderate to severe disabilities, 3 males and 2 females, will also be included. Of these 5 alternate curriculum students, 2 have an intellectual disability, 2 are autistic, and 1 is classified with multiple disabilities, visual (MDV). The other elective classes included in the study will have a similar enrollment.*

**Grade:** 10-12

**Intervention:** , I will design my interventions to increase the number of positive interactions, including classroom contacts as well as out of classroom contacts, that alternate curriculum students have with general education students and vice versa. These interactions would be in the form of verbal conversations, high fives, friendly greetings when crossing paths, etc. . During lunch, I will attempt to increase the number and frequency of general education students sitting with and eating lunch with our alternate curriculum students from 1 day a week to 3 days a week. In the beginning our general education students will eat in the designated areas assigned to the alternative curriculum students, and slowly begin to move those that can to other areas on campus to eat lunch. To help general education students feel more prepared to interact with their fellow classmates, I will implement a protocol in which the integration coordinator on campus will meet with all elective courses in the first week of the new semester.

**Results: RQ1:** What are the benefits of full integration/inclusion on both the special education and general education students in select elective classes? The data showed that when given the right parameters and strategies the general education students were able to successfully interact, without adult prompting, with their special education counterparts. In addition to the benefits seen inside the classroom, there were positive interactions observed during passing periods and lunch. **RQ2:** What are the negative impacts of full integration/inclusion on both general education students and students with special needs? Although there was some very encouraging data, there was also data that suggested a negative side to increased exposure and interactions. The data suggests that the students have no issue with their peers, but given the choice, they are choosing to stay within their peer cliques. **RQ3:** What would be the effect on resources, such as course availability and paraprofessional supervision, at the school site to have full inclusion rather than elective integration? After speaking with our APSCS, it became clear that resources would be taxed in order to increase the number of integrations.

**Conclusions:** As I reflect on the data collected, I have come to several conclusions. To assume that you can just integrate is a misnomer. First, there are no exact answers for my questions, even when discussing financial implications of integration. There are several questions that must be asked and answered in terms of personnel and whether there are enough sections to meet the needs of both the general education students and the special education students at the same time. To properly integrate, you would need nearly one-third more teachers on a campus to account for the lost seats in any given section. As all things in education require money, the idea that integration is dependent on proper funding means that it will almost always be difficult to implement at schools with lower populations.

**Recommendations:** I would recommend that our administration implement the integration presentations as a standard practice. These seem to make a positive difference for the general education students and thus it increases the possibility of positive interactions inside and outside the classroom.