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Justin Heskett
heskettju@minnstate.edu

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Inclusion in the Classroom: Addressing Antecedents of Challenging Behaviors

Justin Heskett

Department of Special Education

Minnesota State University Moorhead

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Abstract

The study aimed at identifying the antecedents of challenging behavior of a student who was identified as Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD) in her inclusive secondary classes. This study was directed towards a student and her behaviors to help determine what, if anything, triggered different behaviors in the inclusive classroom. Information was gathered through paraeducators along with her teachers (e.g. general education teachers, special education teachers) observing the student. The information will be presented to administration to create a staff development on inclusion in the classroom. Analyzing the data, some of the triggers for behaviors were deemed inevitable, and some were eye opening. The results of the study will be used to create professional development opportunities for staff to increase awareness and skills to effectively include students with developmental cognitive disabilities in their classroom.

Inclusion in the Classroom

What is Inclusion in Education?

Inclusion in the classroom has a different look now, then it had 30 years ago. Inclusion may be defined as 100% placement in age-appropriate general education classes (Idol, 1997) or as a range of learning opportunities both within and outside the general education classroom (Baker & Zigmond, 1995). Inclusive education was initially seen as an innovation within special education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). Now, it is understood that the development of inclusive schools is much broader than that and requires significant school and system reform for it to become successful. Several educators and researchers have investigated the impact of inclusive arrangements on students' educational experiences as well as the effectiveness of these arrangements. With the passing of what is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, students with learning disabilities are given the same opportunities public education as the general population. This equal access may look different depending on the students. Some students with disabilities may be fully integrated into a traditional classroom. Whereas other students, are supported with special education teachers who co-teach inclusive classrooms and provide supports for the students.

For many students with disabilities, inclusive education has worked great and the students have excelled academically, behaviorally and socially. For other students' inclusive education has been a nightmare. According to Kurth et. al (2009) there are a wide variety of reasons why student may not succeed in those classrooms. Some possible reasons the student doesn't excel in these classes could be some of the following: (a) the student is anti-social or nonverbal, (b) the student shuts down in the larger class sizes, (c) the student wants to "hide" or

is “embarrassed” about his/her disability and may not want their peers to observe, and (d) the student simply becomes overwhelmed with the amount of work and isn’t used to that amount.

What Role does the Student Play?

The student plays a very vital role in his/her success in a general education classroom. Students with disabilities can have both positive or negative experiences educational and social aspects of schooling, often connected to the hidden curriculum or their positioning by others (Huber et al., 2001). In the earlier years of inclusive education, it was believed that students with and without disabilities have similar needs, abilities, and concerns (Wang et al., 1996). This theory was soon debunked based on each student’s varying needs in the classroom. Today we know some students might need help reading, or writing, while others might need help with math. Students with and without disabilities have very different needs. Students who practice strategies successfully to compensate for limitations associated with their learning disabilities can become successful college and graduate students (Wang et al., 1996). Likewise, students who have incorporated adaptive strategies are standouts in their ability to express their feelings and exhibit tolerance and empathy for others. The discoveries that students make correlates to the practice of skill building and mastery stay with them and continue to empower students to work to achieve their goals. The joy of learning replaces the feeling of frustration and avoidance and may be transferred to what students would experience in the workplace (Wang et al., 1996). If the student is willing to put in complete effort to become successful, that’s the best-case scenario that we can hope for.

What Role does the Special Education Teacher Play?

The special education teacher plays a vital role in inclusive education (OECD, 2005) Who knows the special education student better than the special education teacher? It is additional bonus if that same special education teacher is the student's case manager. A lot of schools engage in co-teaching in the general education classes. Co-teaching is when a general education teacher and a special education teacher teach together in an inclusive class. With the special education teacher present, teachers may understand the student's behaviors, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and evidence-based practices to implement in the inclusive classroom to help the students with disabilities. Co-teaching can be characterized as a means of bringing the strengths of two teachers with different expertise together in a manner that allows them to better meet student needs (Bauwens et al., 1989). Research is beginning to emerge demonstrating greater academic gains for students with disabilities when their teachers receive consultation and participate in coteaching (Schulte et al., 1990). Co-teaching helps the general education students, as well as the students with disabilities. The special education teacher can also help keep data on the goals the student might have listed in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the inclusive classroom. The most important role the special education teacher plays is the role of collaboration with the general education teacher (OECD, 2005). Both teachers should collaborate to discuss what worked and what didn't work. They should also collaborate to discuss different forms of teaching that was successful to help the students succeed. After all, they are a team, and can be a very successful team.

What Role does the General Education Teacher Play?

If inclusive education is to remain a legitimate aim, then understanding and actualizing what students find enjoyable and productive in the classroom needs to be harnessed, enabling the student to progress and experience a positive learning environment (Young, 2014 p.13). These conditions may depend on teachers' organizational skills and motivation to work within an inclusive classroom, the level of teacher talk, and their active participation in different collaborative activities (Hopkins, 2008). According to researchers Vaughn et al (1998) a number of factors have been identified that are said to be required for effective inclusive education. Those factors include: (1) appropriate training and education for teachers in inclusive classes, (2) establish the right of teachers to have inclusion in the classroom, (3) encouragement of teachers to promote inclusion in their class settings, (4) promotion of collaborative relationships between special education teachers and general education teachers, (5) focusing on the students not on ideology, (5) tailor-made curriculum to meet the needs of all students, (6) evaluation and monitoring of progress, (7) involvement of parents and (8) guarantee of equal social and academic potential for all children.

The most important factor is to ensure teachers are given appropriate training to enable teachers to consistently respond to the needs of all students (OEC, 2005). Most general education teachers do not know how to appropriately handle challenging behaviors of a student with disabilities. Additionally, teachers may not know how to follow a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). A second condition was establishing the right of teachers to choose whether to teach inclusive classes or not. Some teachers might not like the thought of educating students with disabilities in their classrooms. They should be given a choice before school starts to co-teach with a peer. Providing teachers choices only benefit the student academically, as they could get

the best teacher for them. They would have a teacher who believes in inclusive education and wants students with disabilities to succeed. The next factor was the encouragement of teachers to develop proposals for the implementation of inclusion. This is very important as the other teachers might have different ideas to try in their classes. The promotion of collaborative relationships between teachers of mainstream and special education was also important. This is vital to the student's success. This also makes the general education teacher a better overall teacher during this learning process. Both general education and special education teachers are able to learn from the other one. The next factor was focusing on the needs of the students not on ideology. There is a stigma that follows students with disabilities. Most of the time this stigma is incorrect. The sixth factor is developing a tailor-made curriculum to meet the needs of all students. It is important to use evidence-based practices to see what works and what doesn't for each child. The next factor is the evaluation and monitoring the progress of students and the support services. This is very important when it comes to the student excelling in the general education classes. This also helps the special education teacher to document the student's progress. The eighth factor is the involvement and participation of parents in the education process and decision making. This is crucial when it comes to the student's success. This would help the team to determine different routes to pursue regarding academics. This also encourages the parents to become more involved. The last factor was a guarantee of equal social and academic potential for all children. This is extremely important as we can raise expectations of our students and watch them excel. This also benefits both the special education and general education student when it comes to developing social skills along with their academics.

How to Promote Inclusion in the Classroom

Think about your own values and approach to disability, gender, and race. Does how you teach acknowledge the experiences of the students from different backgrounds? Is your approach non-stereotypical? Using stereotypes can alienate and marginalize people, using generalizations can have a negative effect on learners. If this occurs, students may shut down and will no longer be interested in what you are trying to teach. You can encourage alternative perspectives, debate ideas, and create an environment which is open to representation of different viewpoints (Ambrose et al., 2010). This may help all students get to know others in the class that may have different viewpoints on the subject that is being discussed. Another thing to think about when you're teaching in an inclusion environment is to ask yourself if students are being treated as as respected individuals and encouraged to share their own lives and interests. Building a good rapport with your students will allow students to become comfortable to share. If students feel comfortable and supported by the teacher, they will be more open to sharing their ideas, thoughts, and interests with teachers and the other students (Ambrose et al., 2010). This can be achieved quite easily and should be brought back into the classroom on a normal basis. The easiest way to do this would be on the first day of class, share some information about yourself with your students. Tell them what your interests are, why you like teaching, etc. This will help build important relationships with the students in class based on common interests.

Classroom climate is affected as well as by blatant instances of inequality directed towards a person or group of people, but also by smaller, more subtle "micro-inequities" that can accumulate to have significant negative impacts on learning (Hall, 1982). Teachers should help to improve student to student interactions. The way teachers deal with negative interactions is very important. When it comes to the student to student interaction, teachers help to improve in

numerous ways. One great way would be a placing student with disabilities next to a general education student and provide suggestions to help the students get to know one another. This is a great way to help students build social skills as well as getting to know one another. When negative interactions happen, it is very important for teachers to interject and remind the students that any negative interaction will not be tolerated. Teachers must also understand the interaction between the teachers and the students. Teachers need to make sure they are an approachable teacher. Students who feels like their teacher was approachable, demonstrated cultural responsive teaching, and treated students as individuals and respect reported a better course climate (Astin, 1993). If teachers establish ground rules about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, students will understand more clearly both teacher and other students' expectations. Teachers can promote expectations at the beginning of each course and involve students in putting together what everyone feels is acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. It is always a good idea to revisit this from time to time as a reminder to everyone. Finally, teachers need to set up the expectations of students. Teachers need to establish high expectations of all students. Research has shown that students respond better when they feel that their teacher has faith in their abilities and is not focusing on their inabilities. Teachers should plan learning activities that include participation from everyone and encourages success. Teachers can do this by creating an environment that is personalized to the students' needs and focuses on what students can do. This will not only make you a better overall teacher but will pay off in the long run when it comes to the success of each one of your students. Inclusive values are developed through a student's lived experiences and their exposure to other cultures and worldviews.

How to Respond to Behaviors in the Classroom

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is widely considered to be an umbrella framework for a continuum of programs and services intended to help all students succeed. Components include positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) and response to intervention (RTI) (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 2005). Teachers would use data to identify student needs, implement evidence-based interventions, monitor progress of students receiving those interventions, and inform next steps. Typical RTI models have three tiers: (a) Tier 1 includes evidence-based general instruction delivered to all students, (b) Tier 2 includes general instruction plus more intensive supports designed for some students, and (c) Tier 3 includes general instruction, plus high-dosage, high-intensity intervention (often 1:1) designed for only for some students. (Gartland et al., 2020). Three-tiered models seem to be the most prevalent in practice. In Tier 1, students receive evidence-based core instruction, and universal screening of all students is in place to identify those who may need more intensive instruction or intervention. Tier 2 is designed to provide those students identified through universal screening (and sometimes other assessments) with supplemental intervention designed to target identified needs. Students are regularly monitored to ensure that the student is making meaningful progress. Students not making meaningful progress are moved to Tier 3 intervention. In Tier 3, student progress is monitored more frequently, and specialized intervention is applied (Fletcher et al., 2009). Across all tiers, effective implementation of RTI requires that teachers use evidence-based instruction and intervention designed to meet specific needs to teach students. Also, teachers must diligently and accurately monitor student progress (Fuchs et al., 2012)

Students with developmental cognitive disabilities (DCD) will mostly fall into the Tier three RTI. (Gray 2004). A teaching intervention of increasing popularity used to increase positive behavior and decrease problem behavior in students with disabilities is Social Stories (Wright et al., 2012). Social Stories are individualized short stories used to assist students with disabilities in understanding social situations by describing and explaining appropriate behavior and providing examples of appropriate responses. These short stories outline specific steps for implementing the appropriate social skill and include short text and pictorial cues the student can read and see. The social story assists the child's accurate understanding of specific social information in a given setting or circumstance (Wright et al., 2012). The social stories used under Gray's (1998, 2000, 2004) approach contains four types of sentences. Those sentences are: (a) descriptive sentences, (b) perspective sentences, (c) directive sentences, (d) control sentences, (e) affirmative sentences and (f) cooperative sentences. Descriptive sentences appear at the beginning of the social stories. They describe different situations and the people involved in them, what is going to happen, and the causes of events. They also address the following questions: where? who? And what is going to happen. Perspective sentences describe internal feelings such as, the sensations, wishes, emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs of people in the situations depicted (Gray 2004). Directive sentences present social cues within situations and indicate the expected responses of individuals. Such responses may begin with "I will try", or "I will attempt". Control sentences are added to the story by the storyteller and describe more general observations and thoughts to reinforce the information presented in the story. Affirmative sentences emphasize the importance of directive sentences (Gray 2004). These sentences will begin with "it is good that" Cooperative sentences describe other actions and show who these actions can help and how. The ratio of the sentences is one directive sentence for

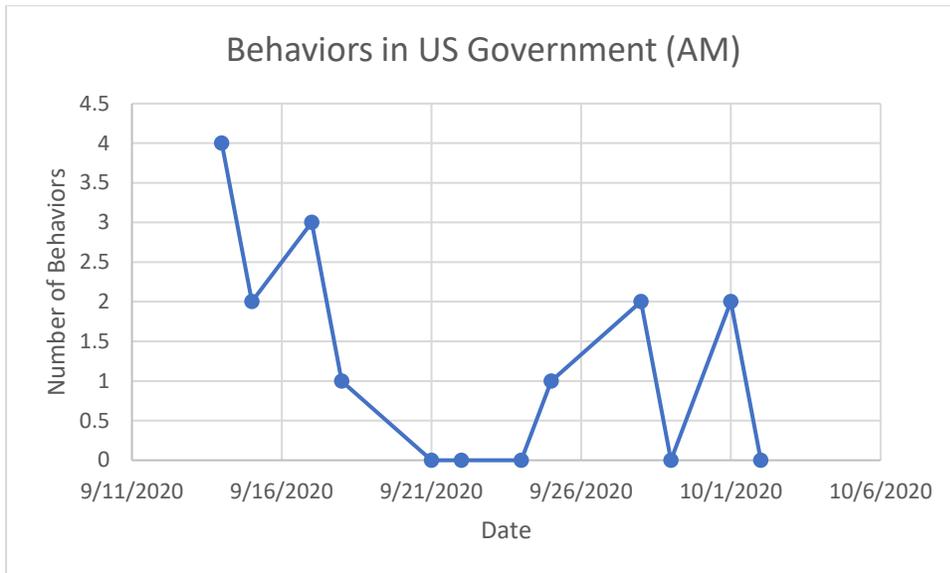
every two to five descriptive, perspective, affirmative, and cooperative sentences. Based on Gray's rules, when teachers utilize control and cooperative sentences in a story, a control sentence must be used with a directive sentence, and cooperative sentences must be used with descriptive and affirmative sentences (Gray, 2004).

Data Analysis Interpretation

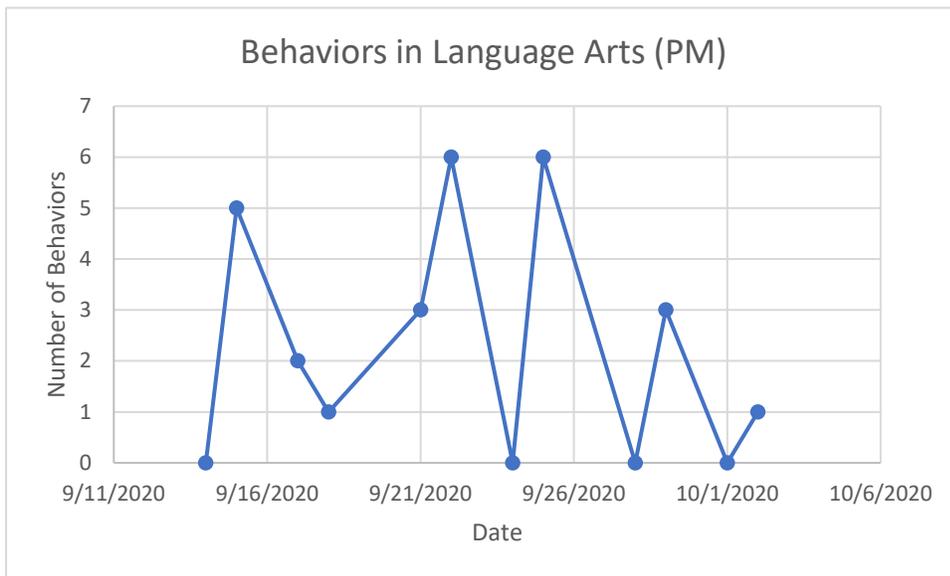
The data was collected using an Antecedent Behavior Consequence (ABC) chart. The data collected was from the students US Government class which was in the morning and the other class was the students Language Arts class which was in the afternoon. Figure 1 shows the numbers of behaviors during the US Government class. Figure 2 shows the data in a scatter plot form. Figure 3 shows the numbers of behaviors in the students Language Arts class. Figure 4 shows the data in a scatter plot form. Figure 5 has the number of both morning and afternoon figures listed. Figure 6 has both classes combined on a scatter plot.

Figure 1

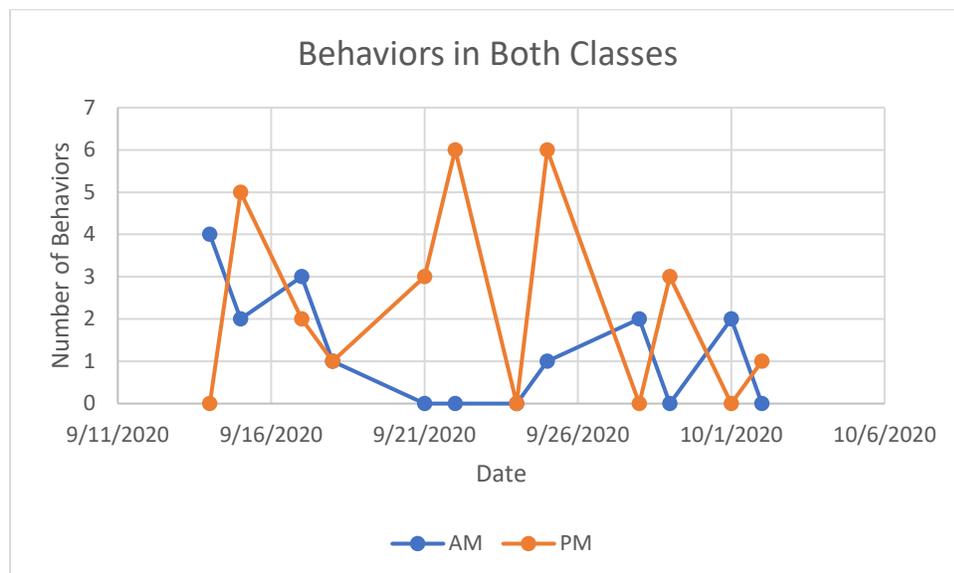
<u>Date</u>	<u>Behaviors</u>
9/14/2020	4
9/15/2020	2
9/17/2020	3
9/18/2020	1
9/21/2020	0
9/22/2020	0
9/24/2020	0
9/25/2020	1
9/28/2020	2
9/29/2020	0
10/1/2020	2
10/2/2020	0

Figure 2-**Figure 3-**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Behaviors</u>
9/14/2020	4
9/15/2020	2
9/17/2020	3
9/18/2020	1
9/21/2020	0
9/22/2020	0
9/24/2020	0
9/25/2020	1
9/28/2020	2
9/29/2020	0
10/1/2020	2
10/2/2020	0

Figure 4-**Figure 5-**

Date	<u>AM</u>	<u>PM</u>
9/14/2020	4	0
9/15/2020	2	5
9/17/2020	3	2
9/18/2020	1	1
9/21/2020	0	3
9/22/2020	0	6
9/24/2020	0	0
9/25/2020	1	6
9/28/2020	2	0
9/29/2020	0	3
10/1/2020	2	0
10/2/2020	0	1

Figure 6-

Conclusion

Inclusive education plays a very important role in all students and staff involved. Not only does it help build skills for the student with disabilities, but it also helps the general education teacher and students when it comes to alternative teaching and learning. The research also shows that the student with disabilities excel in an inclusive education environment both academically and socially. Understanding the antecedents of challenging behaviors will help staff to be better prepared to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. Further, the data will inform special education teachers to use evidence based practices to teach students with challenging behaviors.

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