Transforming Inclusive Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Secondary Classrooms: A review of the literature & research

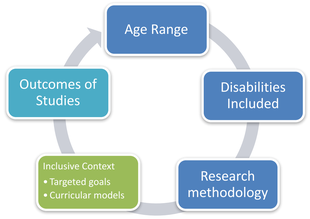
CSSE, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario

Shelley Moore, *University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus*

INTRODUCTION

- The learning experiences of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms has been a focus of research and advocacy for nearly three decades (Carter, Moss, Chung & Sisco, 2011).
- There is substantial research conducted in inclusive preschool and elementary settings (e.g. Dymond & Russell, 2004; Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickman & Al-Khabbaz, 2008; Cater et al., 2008), additional research, however, is needed to understand how these learning experiences impact students in high school (Carter et al., 2015; Dymond & Russell, 2004; Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickman & Al-Khabbaz, 2008).
- When studies are done in secondary contexts, they are often focused on non-instructional and non-enrolling settings such as the cafeteria, the hallway or other non-structured social situations such as before and after school.
- The general education classroom is the preferred context for accessing the curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities (Carter et al., 2007), as it expands social opportunities and creates a shared learning environment alongside their peers, while also increasing access to educators with content expertise (Carter et al., 2015).

METHODOLOGY



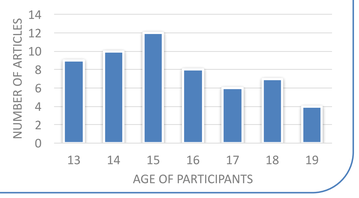
- A **systematic literature review** of 21 peer reviewed online research articles conducted between the years of 1996 and 2016.
- An **analysis** of the research in the field for students with intellectual disabilities, enrolled in, and receiving instruction in general education curricular classrooms in secondary schools.
- A **synthesis** describing what is missing in this quest for equitable educational service delivery for students with intellectual disabilities.

ANALYSIS

Age range of students in research studies reviewed

Across the 21 studies:

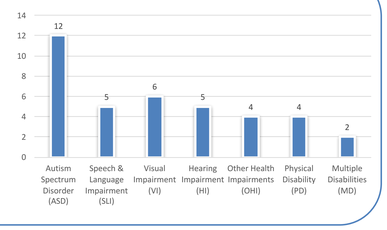
- ages of students ranged from 13-19 years of age
- Both middle and secondary school classrooms were represented
- grades 8-12+ were included
- the majority of studies focused on middle and secondary years (i.e. grade 8-10)
- the ages of inclusive research dropped as student's increased in age throughout their senior high school years



Additional disabilities of students in research studies reviewed

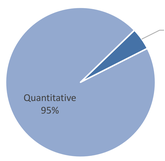
For studies to be included in this review, classrooms needed to include a student with an intellectual disability. Students could also, however, be negotiating additional disabilities. Of these students:

- the most frequent secondary disability included is Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- other disabilities include Speech & Language, visual, hearing or health impairments, a physical disability or a combination of multiple disabilities.



Research methodologies used in research studies reviewed

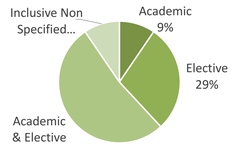
- Reviewed studies were also organized by methodology as either qualitative and/or quantitative
- Quantitative methodologies dominated the research with 20 out of 21 studies falling into this category. These research designs included single subject and descriptive statistical analysis.
- The lone qualitative study used grounded theory methodology.



ANALYSIS

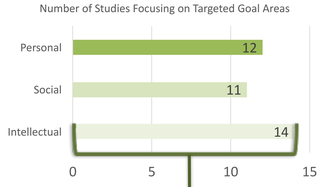
Contexts that students were included in for research studies reviewed

- Inclusive classrooms are, "places to support the education of students with disabilities alongside their typically developing peers in a neighbourhood public school (IDEA, 2004)."
- In this review, inclusive contexts included academic and/or elective classrooms.
- The review analysis found that these contexts are relatively balanced when researching inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities.



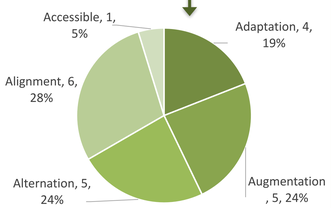
Targeted goal areas for students with intellectual disabilities in research studies reviewed

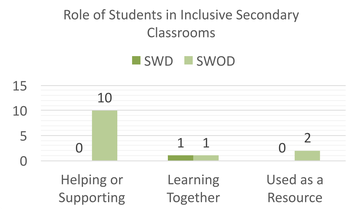
- Physical presence is not enough when considering if a context inclusive (Wehmeyer et al., 2000).
- In this review, attention was paid to the intentional goal setting aimed at engaging students within their inclusive contexts (Dymond & Russel, 2004).
- Alquaraini & Gut (2012) suggest three targets goal areas to support successful inclusion; *personal*, *social* & *intellectual.*
- The studies reviewed were balanced within these 3 domain areas, with a slight increase in focus on intellectual goal areas.



Curricular models used for intellectual goal areas in research studies reviewed

- In reviewing the 21 articles, five curricular models were used to set intellectual goals for students with disabilities in inclusive curricular classrooms.
- Knowlton (1998) describes three models to develop intellectual goals: *adaptation*, *augmentation* and *alteration.*
- Courtade & Browder (2001) identify a fourth model referred to as curricular *alignment.*
- A fifth model, observed in one study (i.e. Fisher & Frey, 2001) used a combination of models which created further access to the curriculum, and in this review is labelled as curriculum *accessibility.*





- In reviewing all studies, both Knowlton and Courtade & Browder's models were relied on to set intellectual goals.
- The one study (i.e. Fisher & Frey, 2001), that used an accessible curriculum model, however, revealed a unique factor of a student's intellectual experience.
- Fisher & Frey's (2001), study utilized both students with, and without disabilities, as equal participants in the development of learning goals.
- Additionally, the peers' role was not limited to a support or resource to the intellectual contribution of students with disabilities.

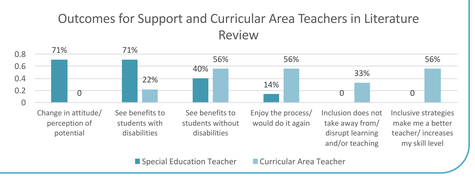
Findings of the research studies reviewed

Finding #1: Inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities in secondary curricular classrooms relies on:

- The belief that all students can be a meaningful members of a secondary classroom regardless of ability (i.e. presuming competence, Biklen & Burke, 2006)
- students being both enrolled in curricular classes, but also present during instructional time
- students being engaged purposefully in curriculum by targeting (and balancing) key areas including personal, social and/or or intellectual goals
- students having proximity to, and participation with, peers in the curricular classes that they are being included in

Finding #2: Both curricular area and support teachers reported that:

- their beliefs about the potential of students with intellectual disabilities had shifted
- there are benefits to both students with and without disabilities, when students when intellectual disabilities are included in secondary curricular classrooms

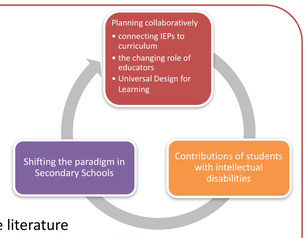


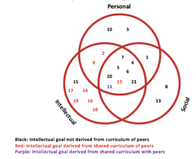
SYNTHESIS

In addition to the themes uncovered in this review that support inclusive education in secondary schools for students with intellectual disabilities, there were also some additional themes noticeably absent. Building on the previous, these additional facets may be why research and practice in this field is so scarce.

Planning Collaboratively

- Collaborating to support the community as a whole is a key ingredient to inclusion's success (Harrower, 1999). In these studies, the frameworks and strategies required to respond to the call for supporting inclusion, however, only focused on individuals, both at the student and educator level. As a result, studies revealed some challenges including: the disconnect between a student IEP and the curriculum, the changing role of educators and the lack of UDL as a planning framework to support all students.



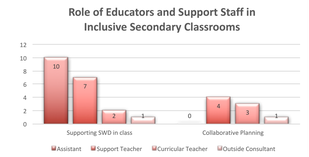


Disconnect of IEPs

- Another element, supported in the literature (Arceneaux & Murdock, 1997; Kunc, 1992; Cafiero, 2001) and confirmed by Fisher & Frey (2001), is a disconnect between a student's IEP goals and the shared curriculum of their peers.
- Although in half of the studies of this review, goals were derived from a common curriculum of peers, but in only 1 of those was the curriculum shared with peers.

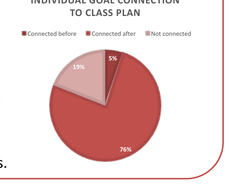
Changing roles of educators

- In most studies there was an over reliance on traditional support models, which left student's education goals often being applied to an already existing class plan (Thousand, Rosenberg, & Villa, 1997) further compartmentalizing educators and support staff to be concerned with and supporting individual students rather than collaborating to support the class as a whole.



UDL as a support framework for ALL students

- Instructional design is an underutilized resource and support in inclusive classrooms. Responsive planning increases the probability that everyone can learn (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose & Jackson, 2002). To be effective, however, this responsivity, must be applied to everyone in a learning community.
- In reviewing the 21 articles, a universal approach was not utilized in 95% of the of studies. This makes it difficult for students to benefit from the advantages of strategic implementation that can come when a plan is designed for all. This reduces the need to retrofit for individuals after the fact. This action, however, depends on the alignment of collaboration as a critical competent to its success.



The contribution of students with intellectual disabilities

- There is evidence of benefits for all students, when students with and without disabilities learn together in classrooms (Halvorson & Sailor, 1990). Despite this research, however, the focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities remains to zoom in on either their effect on the classrooms, teachers and other students of placement, or on the fight for equal equity and citizenship in education.
- Critical disability advocates, however, stress the problematic implications of relying on a social justice rationale as the underlying assumptions seems to be the fear that students with disabilities have a detrimental effect on classrooms.
- Consistent with this implication, the review of the studies aligned their research to exactly these outcomes. Social justice and exposure. Examples of these outcomes included enjoyment, decreased behaviour and increasing tolerance for their peer with a disability. In no study, however, was there mention of the student with an intellectual disability being recognized as having a contribution in a learning capacity.

Individual Goals and Outcomes Achieved by Students without Disabilities									
Personal					Social				
Enjoyment/ feel good/ positive experience	I see value/ contribution/ competence in students with disabilities	Decrease in competing behaviour	Increase in academic engagement & responses (e.g. staying on task, responding to questions etc.)	Students with disabilities did not interfere	Increased interactions/ proximity to student with disabilities	Peer helper/ prompter	Made new friendships	Shared responsibility/ support role	Inclusion benefits everyone

Changing the paradigm in secondary education

- Inclusive education is exceptionally scarce at secondary levels due to its long historical reputation striving for homogeneity (Thousand, Rosenburg, Bishop & Villa, 1997) the institution itself has become the biggest inhibitor where the over reliance on transmissive approach to curriculum dominate the classroom once a student hits high school age (Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz, 2008; Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu & Kurkowski, 2007, Dechler & Schumaker, 2006, Carter et al., 2008; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006).
- A major paradigmatic shift needs to occur in secondary schools, not just for students with intellectual disabilities, but also for every student. We can no longer rely on 19th century teaching practices to teach 21st century learners, and the more schools start adjusting to these values, the more we will the see archaic models of instruction evolve to learning communities of collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem solving, self-regulated learning, and other competency based skills including the valuing diversity.