

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A LESS RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND  
LEARNING SOCIAL SKILLS**

by

**Julianna Carlo**

A Master's Thesis/Project Capstone  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education  
Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
State University of New York at Fredonia  
Fredonia, New York

May 2019

State University of New York at Fredonia  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A LESS RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING SOCIAL SKILLS by Julianna Carlo Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Dahlgren, PhD.  
Master's Capstone Advisor  
EDU 691 Course Instructor  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

5/10/2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Dahlgren, PhD.  
Department Chair  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

5/10/2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean Christine Givner, PhD.  
College of Education  
State University of New York at Fredonia

5/20/2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A LESS RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING SOCIAL SKILLS

### **ABSTRACT**

Students with disabilities (SWD) are often placed in more restrictive environments and there has been an ongoing debate on whether more restrictive environments are beneficial as opposed to inclusive or less restrictive environments in regard to social skills and academics. Research has shown that SWD are more successful in less restrictive environments, but still struggle in their social skill area. The curriculum is designed to incorporate social skills into a third-grade literacy curriculum and incorporates the New York State Literacy Learning Standards in an inclusive room to both SWD as well as general education students. This curriculum is designed for third grade literacy but may be modified for any grade level and may be aligned and modified to fit in any standards.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Personal Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement .....	3
Literature Review.....	5
The Social Effects of Students in a Self-Contained Setting.....	5
Conclusions.....	8
Methodology.....	9
Conceptual Frameworks.....	9
Audience.....	10
Procedure.....	10
Scope and Sequence .....	12
Validity.....	13
Conclusions.....	13
Results .....	15
Unit Outline: Because of Winn-Dixie Book Study.....	15
Conclusions.....	24
Discussions.....	25
Significance.....	25
Limitations.....	27
Future Investigations.....	28
References.....	31

Students with disabilities in a less restrictive environment and learning social skills

### **Introduction**

Students in a self-contained setting often lack an exposure to some social and even academic needs of those in an inclusive setting. When students are separated, even at a young age, from their peers based on ability level, they grasp a sense of inequality or lack of belongingness to those in a general education setting. While students being separated in self-contained settings can be helpful in certain situations such as them being a danger to themselves or others around them, it is not always necessary. Being in the least restrictive environment creates an atmosphere that is beneficial to students socially and academically. In the following chapter, I will discuss the importance of the differences in social skills and academic skills in students in self-contained placements and students in inclusive classroom settings. This chapter will discuss the problem of students with disabilities (SWD) being in a more restrictive environments and the limitations they may face in the area of social skills and interacting with general education students. The purpose of the curriculum is to incorporate social skills into the everyday curriculum for SWD and general education students in a less restrictive environment.

Nationally, over 40% of students classified with the federal special education category of Emotional Disturbance (ED) – i.e., approximately 200,000 students – are taught in self-contained classrooms (SCC; 30.6%) and self-contained schools (SCS; 12.3%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In recent studies, students diagnosed with ED from two different “less restrictive” environments, a self-contained classroom (SCC) or a self-contained school (SCS) were studied in order to see their achievements from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year (Taylor & Moniz-Tadeo, 2012). At their baseline, students in the self-contained classroom had higher Intelligence Quotient (IQ) exam scores and tested higher in

every other aspect. At the end of the study, the students in the self-contained classroom (less restrictive environment) had increased achievement overall than did the students in the self-contained school (more restrictive environment) (Taylor & Moniz-Tadeo).

It is important for students with special needs to have social interaction with general education students. Bunch and Valeo (2004) examined differences in attitudes of elementary and secondary students toward their peers with disabilities in inclusive schools and schools with a traditional special education systems. They found that students in inclusive schools developed friendships with peers with disabilities; however, students enrolled in schools with a continuum of special education classrooms did not. Reed and Florence (2011) attributed this difference to exposure and routine contact. While students with disabilities have more deficits in externalizing and internalizing their emotions compared with general education students, the students with disabilities were in the average range in this inclusive setting. Students with disabilities (SWD) that have the exposure to general education students on a daily and regular basis have more socialization practice.

Students in an inclusive classroom are able to interact socially with their peers and to make themselves more acclimated to the real world, which is important for them to learn to interact with mainstream students. “A regular classroom provides the ideal social climate. For instance, students who have disorders such as Prader-Willie syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and Down syndrome can develop excellent social skills through social imitation. These students truly benefit by observing and imitating their peers in a regular classroom” (Reynolds, Zupanick & Dombeck, 2015). SWD can truly benefit from being integrated in a mainstream or inclusive classroom both socially and academically, but the assistance of being taught social skills can enhance this learning.

**Personal Statement**

Since beginning in this field, I have noted the differences between the placements in which I have taught. While I do understand that, if students are disruptive or hindering their own learning or others' learning, they may need to be placed in a self-contained setting, all students should be given the opportunity to succeed in an inclusive education classroom. During a student teaching placement in a fifth-grade self-contained classroom where I worked, the students were almost isolated in the corner of the fifth-grade hallway and only really interacted with the general education students during specials or lunch. This made those social interactions extremely difficult for them and never gave them the opportunity to learn in a setting with the general education students. I was then placed in an inclusive classroom, where SWD were working side by side with the general education students. This gave them the opportunity to learn in an inclusive setting, gain more social skills and have the opportunity to be immersed in a regular classroom setting. They were much more socially adaptable and welcomed than were the students in the self-contained classroom.

Currently, my job as a self-contained teacher in a self-contained, specialized school shows me that sometimes a more restrictive setting is necessary. The students in the placement are severely emotionally disturbed and were a harm to their classmates or teachers at their previous placements by either disrupting their learning or physically harming others. Even though these students are in a self-contained setting, it is my belief that students need to still be exposed to the general population by taking them on field trips in order to interact with general education students as often as possible. Eventually, the goal is to get students behaviorally acclimated and to allow them to understand the ways to act appropriately enough to bring them into an inclusive setting.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this curriculum project is to gain enough evidence and truly understand the importance of creating inclusion in the classroom. Students learn by doing, and there is no better way for students who lack these life and social skills than to be immersed in an environment with students who have those skills and learn from them. Throughout the curriculum, students will be taught both the curriculum and NYS Standards along with social skills that are used in everyday life. This curriculum project is important to me due to my field of work and personally getting to know students across the broad spectrum of special education. Every student deserves the opportunity to learn in the environment best suited for them, but I think many times students may be wrongly placed and just need the proper resources and tools to learn in an inclusive setting. In the following chapter, I will review the relative literature reviewed and used in relation to the curriculum.

### **Literature Review**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the problem of whether students in a self-contained placement lack the social skills that general education students or students in an inclusive setting may gain. This chapter is intended to review the literature on this topic and to see the kind of research that has been done in order to create a curriculum that will help teach social skills to students with disabilities (SWD).

#### **The Social Effects of Students in a Self-Contained Setting**

Most of the studies that I reviewed have multiple factors in common. Some of the common aspects included the surveys taken. The surveys were given to older participants and parents in order to see what they believe they or their children experience. Another common factor was the sample size. The sample size usually did not exceed 50 participants at a time.

Some differences in the studies included the findings for the most part. In some studies, the tests and surveys showed that students in an inclusive setting were better socially, while others showed that there really was no difference made based on the placement of the student. In a two-year study conducted by Fisher and Meyer (2011), for example, the researchers found that "...the participation in these inclusive programs was at least as good as, if not better than, self-contained placements for the development and social competence as measure by these two assessments" (p. 171). The placement of an inclusive setting gives students the opportunity to learn from a wider array of students. This can benefit SWD immensely. The focus groups also differed from each other. Some studies contained students at the preschool level, some were elementary, some were middle school and others were high school. There was also the variation of parents and teachers included in the studies.

Although some studies differed in their findings, most showed that SWD in the least restrictive environment developed better socially than those in a more restrictive environment. According to Holahan and Costenbader (2000), students in a least restrictive environment (inclusive setting) made gains on “valid and reliable” measures of development and social competence (p. 171). The participation “in these inclusive programs was at least as good as, if not somewhat better than, self-contained placements for the development of traditional domains of children’s development and social competence as measured by these two assessments” (p. 171). The study took place over the course of three years. According to Krull, Wilbert and Hennemann (2014), “In the majority of classes and schools, students with classroom learning difficulties (CLD) and/or classroom behavior problems (CBP) felt less accepted by their peers and teachers, and their academic self-concept was more negative” (185). In the article, students with CLD and CBP feel as though they are not at the same level both socially and academically, which can impact their future as a student and member of society. Students feeling as though they are left out or inferior to their peers could be preventable. By incorporating social skills into the curriculum, the students are given an opportunity to learn about social skills with their peers who do not have a disability.

SWD, specifically students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), benefit from the inclusive setting and the ability to learn and practice social skills. In Lauderdale-Littin, Howell, & Blacher’s study (2013), the researchers conducted a study based on students with ASD and the behavior problems that were exhibited as well as social skill levels. The author compared students in a non-public school setting (more restrictive) to those in a public-school setting and found that students’ behaviors were better as well as their social skills in a public school, or least restrictive environment. The author stated that, “...it was determined that

students in a non-public school setting exhibited significantly higher levels of total behavior problems as compared to their peers in a public school” (p. 476). This study in itself shows how necessary social skills are and the ways that it can impact students’ behaviors as well. Being in a less-restrictive environment can help students practice their social skills.

SWD do not always succeed in more restrictive settings, and this may have something to do with the content or lack of social interactions. According to Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley (2005), “...findings suggest that over the course of an academic year students with significant EBD made very little progress and, in some areas, fell further behind in the academic, social, and behavioral domains” (p. 371). This shows the way that some restrictive environments do not benefit students in either academic or social settings. This is an example of the reasons that the curriculum that incorporates social skills to SWD should be implemented, so they do have a chance to learn and practice these skills. In the study that Panacek and Dunlap (2003) conducted, it was shown that students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders who were segregated had little to no interaction with their peers (both general and special education). They commented: “In aggregate, the picture presented by these findings is one in which children in the E/BD Group have very limited opportunities to establish supportive relationships with school friends who are unencumbered by the challenges and boundaries associated with special education” (p. 344). The impact that social skills lessons could have on SWD is tremendous and could help them establish these necessary relationships to help better their futures. The studies that show the lack of social progress made in SWD is the evidence needed to show that incorporating social skills and integrating students could benefit them immensely.

## **Conclusions**

This research is used to show the impact that learning environments have on SWDs' social skills and development. This research is important because it shows the ways that least restrictive and most restrictive environments have such an impact on students socially and developmentally. This can help future teachers with placements of SWD and help better their learning environments and get them into the placement that will help them succeed the most. The findings of this study mostly show that students in an inclusive setting or the least restrictive environments help them achieve socially. This boosts their social skills and development and gives the SWD a chance to work with and to talk to general education students, which can ultimately encourage their social growth and development.

The goal of this curriculum project is to teach social skills to SWD in a classroom setting while being integrated with their peers and both SWD and students with no disabilities. By combining the studies and the social skills curriculum could ultimately get the students who lack these skills the proper tools to be successful in the real world, or even in just an integrated classroom as opposed to a self-contained classroom. In the following chapter, I will explain how the curriculum was created, the standards used in the curriculum, the learning outcomes as well as research studies pertaining to SWD and their social skills based on their setting.

### **Method**

My curriculum project was used to build an inclusive environment for students with disabilities (SWD) while incorporating social skills. In inclusive and self-contained classrooms, students are just taught academics, for the most part. This is where SWD are often excluded. In order to create an inclusive environment, the curriculum I produced contained a variety of social skills incorporated throughout that both SWD and general education students will practice together in the inclusive setting. The lessons are engaging and students will be learning the subjects (I based my focus on literacy), while learning to work together, make eye contact and use other important social skills used in the daily life. Creating a curriculum that focuses on both academics and social skills helps teachers keep up with the main subjects that they have to teach, but also gives students with and without disabilities a chance to work closely and work on social skills that will help them succeed throughout their lifetime. The following chapter will describe the curriculum project and research to incorporate social skills in the every day curriculum.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

My curriculum project work is framed by the pedagogical philosophy of Constructivism. According to Hein (1991), Constructivism “refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves ---each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning – as he or she learns” (p. 16). Students who learn to construct their own knowledge use their social skills and their content knowledge to help lead their own learning. Social skills discuss the real world and prepare students to go out into the world to associate with people with and without disabilities. While learning about academics, students also focus on the social skills they need to learn to adapt to interacting with all populations. In the curriculum, the focus is on both social skills and academics for students in both general and special education within an inclusive setting. By

creating a curriculum that coincides with both social skills and academics, students with and without disabilities are able to use their knowledge and social skills to learn. This curriculum focuses on Constructivism and the ways that students will use their social skills and abilities to work together to gather information for their own learning. The curriculum is very student-led and -oriented, which creates the ability for the students to work on their socialization and skills that most SWD do not get to practice in a self-contained setting.

### **Audience**

My curriculum project is aimed towards third-grade inclusive classrooms. Karakaya and Tufan (2018) commented: “The least restrictive learning environment principle allows students with special needs to share classroom environments with their typically developing peers and strengthen peer relationships” (p. 123). The curriculum is created in order to increase students’ social skills and to create an inclusive-friendly atmosphere for students in this setting. The audience is an inclusive setting so that students with and without disabilities are able to learn and adapt to social skills with each other and practice these skills throughout their lifetime. I am unsure of the specific district or school in which this curriculum will be implemented due to the fact that I teach in a self-contained classroom; however, in order to have an impact on both populations, it is to be implemented in an inclusive setting.

### **Procedure**

To make this curriculum work, I talked to both self-contained and inclusive classroom teachers about students’ strengths and weaknesses when it comes to social skills in students with and without disabilities. I reviewed frameworks for the third grade speaking and listening standards, incorporating the book *Because of Winn Dixie* by Katie DiCamillo (2000). I also researched different strategies and lessons on using and teaching social skills. I also used my past

experience at a summer camp I once worked at for children diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum, using skill streaming and activities used when I was teaching social skills for students diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum. The background knowledge of the standards and social skill strategies helped me to build a comprehensive and efficient curriculum incorporating social skills in every day lessons in an inclusive classroom.

The curriculum is as follows:

I: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly:

- The students will discuss the book “Because of Winn Dixie” as the teacher reads it aloud and students follow along. The teacher will pause at the end of each chapter, and have students discuss what happened in the story thus far. The students will need to incorporate proper eye contact when discussing with each other during this standard.

II: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.C – Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others:

- The students will ask questions based on the reading to each other, using the social skills of asking a question appropriately and engaging in appropriate conversation after the chapters. The students will have to have a conversation about their question and lead an appropriate discussion between the students.

III: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D – Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion:

- Using this standard, the students will explain what is happening in the story, how they can connect it to their life or another story and then discuss with their partner(s). The

students will use the social skill of Presenting Your Point of View, learning how to do this appropriately.

IV: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4 – Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace:

- Using this standard, the students will be able to sum up what is happening in the story, and present with their group at the end of the novel study about the story by putting the story in sequence with relevant information and details. The students will use the skill of Offering Help to a Classmate, which will teach them the appropriate way to help a classmate and accept help from a classmate.

### **Scope and Sequence**

The curriculum covers Speaking and Listening Third Grade NYS Literacy Learning Standards and will last as long as the lessons may take. This will take up to two weeks total, depending on the timeframe given and the students' abilities. I will be working with an inclusive classroom with students of all abilities in third grade and will have students learning about multiple topics covered on a daily/weekly basis while incorporating the daily social skills necessary. The curriculum will be built off of the New York State Learning Standards and the social skills will be worked into the standards/lessons. The standards that are going to be incorporated in this curriculum include CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.C – Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others, CCSS.ELA –

LITERACY.SL.3.1.D – Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion and  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4 – Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience  
with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable  
pace.

### **Validity**

This curriculum could be implemented in any school setting, it does not matter if the students are in a general education, inclusive or self-contained setting. It also does not matter the classification of the disabilities; the students will be able to learn and understand the social skills that are incorporated in the lesson and can be adjusted accordingly. The lessons will be easy to differentiate instruction depending on the students' needs and the social skills can be taught at multiple levels. In order to implement this curriculum in classrooms outside of NYS, the teachers may have to put their specific state standards in place instead of the NYS standards.

### **Conclusions**

The use of social skills in the ELA standards could benefit students with and without special needs. The implementation is used in order to help prepare students to interact with others while teaching to the required standards in New York State. Throughout the different articles, it has been found that learning social skills and communication can help students to learn academically and to achieve in their future lives. By implementing the social skills in this lesson, students are learning both academics and social skills necessary for them to be successful. Most studies have concluded that SWD benefit from an inclusive classroom, which helps them to interact and work on their social skills with general education students.

According to DiGennaro (2011), "...mainstreaming with peers with typical development has had a positive effect and that teachers are able to foster a positive learning environment

despite the ratings of participant behavior” (p. 486). By incorporating the use of social skills into lessons with both general education and special education students, the SWD gain confidence and are able to be a part of a positive learning environment. In this curriculum, students receive opportunities to create friendships, build social skills and learn from the NYS Literacy Standards. In the next chapter, I will present the results of my curriculum on teaching social skills to SWD in a less restrictive environment.

## Results

The following chapter contains the lessons and standards as well as the social skills that are being used in each plan of my curriculum project for building an inclusive environment for students with disabilities (SWDs). While reviewing each standard used in the unit, there will be brief descriptions of the social skills and standards that are included in the paper. In this chapter, each standard and lesson has aligned with a social skill that children with exceptionalities as well as children in a general education setting can use in their everyday lives.

### **Unit Outline: Because of Winn Dixie Book Study**

Throughout the book *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2000), there will be points where we as a class stop and discuss the story elements, characters, make predictions, connections and summarize. Through the process of the book study, students will be incorporating social skills into each lesson/standard. The social studies skills that will be taught include making appropriate eye contact, asking a question appropriately and engaging in appropriate conversation, presenting their points of view as well as offering help to a classmate.

In the lessons from the book study, students first learn about the social skills, and then are given the opportunity to practice the social skills in the lesson. When the students are able to connect something that they have learned (the social skill) to their lives (working with someone), it becomes more engrained. So, rather than teaching just the social skill or just the book study, students have the opportunity to learn both simultaneously and create that connection between the two.

### **Social Skill 1 & CCS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 – Making Eye Contact & collaborative**

**discussions:** The teacher discusses the importance of eye contact and the ways that making eye contact helps the other person involved in the conversation aware that one is listening to them.

The teacher goes over how to use proper eye contact by using the teacher aide, another teacher, or a student (who already uses appropriate eye contact) in order to have a conversation with and look at each other when talking. The teacher demonstrates both appropriate and inappropriate eye contact so that students have an example of both appropriate and inappropriate eye contact.

While teaching eye contact, the teacher will also show the student the eye contact cue cards. The cue card will be used to differentiate the instruction for the students. This will contain an image of people making eye contact, along with the appropriate steps needed. This way, students who are unable to read can see what it looks like, and those that can read are able to remember the steps by reading through them. These cards may be used in every day lessons or just remain on their desks for future reference.

Once the students understand this skill, they have the opportunity to use the skill during book discussions, which incorporate CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 – “Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.”

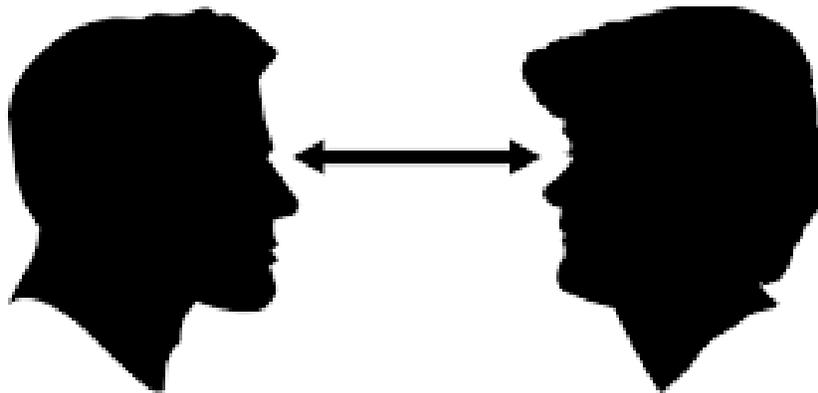
1. TSWBAT: Collaborate one-on-one and in groups on the text *Because of Winn-Dixie*
2. TSWBAT: Differentiate between both appropriate and inappropriate eye contact based on the lesson on eye contact
3. TSWBAT: Build on discussions and respond to discussion questions based on grade level text

*Materials Needed:* Book (*Because of Winn-Dixie*), eye contact cue cards (for those with modifications)

*Vocabulary:* eye contact, appropriate, inappropriate

This lesson on eye contact is the first social skill because it can be detrimental to other social skills. Children should understand the importance of appropriate eye contact in order to establish relationships with others.

### Making Eye Contact



Step 1: Figure out who the speaker is

Step 2: If the speaker is speaking to you directly, look into their eyes

Step 3: If the speaker is addressing a group, look at the speaker (not around the room)

Step 4: Once the speaker is finished, you make look away

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT:** Make sure that you are not staring intensely at them and making the speaker uncomfortable. If the speaker stops the conversation, eye contact also stops.

**Social Skill 2 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.C – Asking questions appropriately, asking questions to check for understanding.:** The teacher discusses the importance of asking questions appropriately, specifically teaching the students when it is appropriate to ask a question. The teacher goes over ways to use proper eye contact (bringing in the previous social skill), note when the speaker is finished talking (once they make a closing remark or pause for 10-15 seconds) and the types of questions that are appropriate to ask. This will be demonstrated by using the teacher aide, another teacher, or a student (who already understands how to ask a question appropriately) to have a conversation with and ask questions about the topic. The teacher demonstrates both appropriate and inappropriate ways to ask questions, so that students have an example of both appropriate and inappropriate ways to ask questions.

While teaching how to ask a question, the teacher will also show the asking a question cue card. The cue card will be used to differentiate the instruction for the students (see Appendix for Cue Card template). This will contain an image of people asking a question (raising their hand, and/or a question mark) along with the appropriate steps needed. This way, students who are unable to read can see what it looks like, and those that can read are able to remember the steps by reading through them. These cards may be used in every day lessons or just remain on their desks for future reference.

Once the students understand this skill, they have the opportunity to use the skill during book discussions, which incorporate CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 –“ Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others”

1. TSWBAT: Ask questions related to the book *Because of Winn-Dixie*

2. TSWBAT: Ask a question to clarify directions
3. TSWBAT: Ask questions in response to their peers responses or questions
4. TSWBAT: Build on discussions and respond to discussion questions based on grade level text

*Materials Needed:* Book (*Because of Winn-Dixie*), cue cards (for those with modifications)

*Vocabulary:* question, appropriate, inappropriate

### Asking a Question



Step 1: Wait for the speaker to be done talking

Step 2: Make sure the question relates to what the topic is

Step 3: Decide if it is an appropriate time to ask a question

Step 4: Listen to the speaker's response

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT:** Make sure that you are asking questions that are on topic. Do not ask someone a question about something random, make sure it has to do with the topic.

**Social Skill 3 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D** – Presenting your point of view is the social skill and the standard is explaining their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

The teacher discusses the importance of presenting one's point of view appropriately, specifically teaching the students when and how it is appropriate to present their point of view. The teacher goes over ways to use proper eye contact (bringing in the previous social skill), asking questions about someone else's point of view (social skill 2), note when one has the attention of the audience, and what is appropriate and inappropriate to say when presenting their point of view. This will be demonstrated by using the teacher aide, another teacher, or a student (who already understands how to present their point of view appropriately) to have a conversation with and address their point of view. The teacher demonstrates both appropriate and inappropriate ways to present their point of view, so that students have an example of both appropriate and inappropriate ways to do this.

While teaching the ways in which to present their points of view, the teacher will also show the asking a present their point of view cue card. The cue card will be used to differentiate the instruction for the students (see Appendix for Cue Card template). This will contain an image of people talking, along with the appropriate steps needed. This way, students who are unable to read can see what it looks like, and those that can read are able to remember the steps by reading through them. These cards may be used in every day lessons or just remain on their desks for future reference.

Once the students understand this skill, they have the opportunity to use the skill during book discussions, which incorporate CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D –“ Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.”

1. TSWBAT: Discuss what is happening in the book *Because of Winn-Dixie*
2. TSWBAT: Explain how they feel and what their point of view is during more controversial parts of the story (such as when Otis explains his past, when Opal meets the different characters etc.)
3. TSWBAT: Respond to their peer's point of view and bounce ideas off of each other
4. TSWBAT: Build on discussions and respond to discussion based on what is happening throughout the text

*Materials Needed:* Book (*Because of Winn-Dixie*), cue cards (for those with modifications)

*Vocabulary:* point of view, appropriate, inappropriate

### Presenting Your Point of View

Step 1: Get your audiences attention.

Step 2: Present your idea.

Step 3: Look at the person(s) you are speaking to.

- Speak clearly.
- Make your point succinctly.

Step 4: Look at the audience and ask yourself,

- “Are they listening?”
- “Do they look interested?”

Step 5: Present other ideas to support your point of view.

Step 6: Make a closing remark

Step 7: Listen to how the other person(s) responds.

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT:** Make sure that you are presenting on something that is on topic. Make eye contact with your audience and help them understand your point of view



**Social Skill 3 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4** – The social skill learned is offering help to someone. The standard is to report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace

The teacher discusses the importance of offering help appropriately, specifically teaching the students when it is appropriate to offer help to someone along with ways to offer help appropriately. The teacher goes over ways to notice when someone looks as though they may need help with something, whether it is physically helping with a task or helping with a group project. This will be demonstrated by using the teacher aide, another teacher, or a student (who already understands how to offer help to someone appropriately) to offer help with a task. The teacher demonstrates both appropriate and inappropriate ways to offer help to someone so that students have an example of both appropriate and inappropriate ways to offer help to someone.

While teaching ways in which to offer help to someone, the teacher will also show the offering help to someone question cue cards. The cue card will be used to differentiate the instruction for the students (see Appendix for Cue Card template). This will contain an image of people asking a question (raising their hand, and/or a question mark) along with the appropriate steps needed. This way, students who are unable to read can see what it looks like, and those that can read are able to remember the steps by reading through them. These cards may be used in every day lessons or just remain on their desks for future reference.

Once the students understand this skill, they have the opportunity to use the skill during book discussions, which incorporate CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4 –“ Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace”

1. TSWBAT: Present on the text *Because of Winn-Dixie* as a group project
2. TSWBAT: Work together to create and present on the story
3. TSWBAT: Offer help to their classmates when creating the project
4. TSWBAT: Build on discussions and respond to discussion questions based on grade level text

*Materials Needed:* Book (*Because of Winn-Dixie*), cue cards (for those with modifications), poster board, paper, pencils

*Vocabulary:* offer help, appropriate, inappropriate

### Offering Help to Someone



Step 1: Decide if the person needs or wants help

Step 2: Think of how you can help

Step 3: Decide what to say

Step 4: Choose a good time

Step 5: Ask in a friendly way

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT:** Make sure that you are offering help nicely. Do not interrupt someone when offering help, make sure they want your help first.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this curriculum project was to create a unit that helps students learn both social skills as well as the New York State (NYS) English Language Arts Learning Standards. The completed curriculum addresses the problem that students with disabilities (SWD) do not have the same number of tools that general education students have when it comes to being social. These students get pulled out of classrooms or are secluded completely from general education students. By incorporating the social skills into a curriculum where SWD and general education students are integrated, they are all learning the same social skills necessary along with practicing these skills with each other. This curriculum intends to promote inclusivity in classrooms and the importance of social skills in students of all abilities. The author works with SWD at a more restrictive environment, which has built on her passion to help integrate students and improve their social skills. The author hopes that by implementing the curriculum, SWD will become more included and learn more about social skills in their everyday lives. SWD are able to work on the social skills in a safe environment with the guidance and examples from teachers and other students.

This includes creating a more inclusive environment and teaching student's ways to work with and interact with students of all abilities. The curriculum is intended to be used with the NYS learning standards but can easily be adjusted according to wherever the curriculum is being taught. The teacher who implements the curriculum just has to adjust the learning standards to their state's standards or school's curriculum. The social skills are interchangeable and provide a baseline of the top social skills needed to be successful in any environment. In the following chapter, I will discuss the significance and limitations of the curriculum project of incorporating social skills in a literacy unit for SWD.

### **Discussion**

This curriculum project was developed by gathering information on students with disabilities' (SWDs') placements and how this impacts their learning and development of social skills. This curriculum looked at more restrictive environments such as self-contained placements and specialized schools versus least restrictive environments such as integrated classrooms and integrated schools in order to find where SWD succeeded more when it came to the development of their necessary social skills. The outcomes of these studies show that students learn better socially, when they are working with general education students. This is due to their ability to practice their social interactions as well as learn the same material in the same room as general education students. Through these outcomes, amongst numerous other studies I read through, I believe that there needs to be a curriculum that incorporates social skills to integrate SWD within general education settings, while teaching them ways to build social skills and to increase their interactions together. This, on top of an inclusive, less restrictive environment, helps to build on the strengths of students and help them build the new skills needed to help them achieve both socially and academically. In this final chapter of my thesis, I will reflect on the implications and weaknesses of the research encountered and my work on building the curriculum that incorporates social skills with the NYS ELA Literacy Standards.

### **Significance**

This curriculum project helped to build a curriculum that could help SWD work with general education students, while teaching them social skills that would otherwise be taught in a more restrictive environment. The curriculum was intended to build on prior knowledge as well as introduce necessary social skills to SWD while also teaching the necessary New York State (NYS) Literacy Learning Standards. Furthermore, this curriculum project dug into the benefits of

integrating SWD with general education students by teaching these social skills in less restrictive environments. This goal conforms to the findings of Reynolds, Zupanek and Dombeck (2015), who noted that, "...a regular classroom provides the ideal social climate. For instance, students who have disorders such as Prader-Willie syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and Down syndrome can develop excellent social skills through social imitation. These students truly benefit by observing and imitating their peers in a regular classroom" (p. 1). By creating the learning environment of an inclusive classroom and giving SWD and general education students the opportunity to work and learn social skills together, SWD can gain the necessary social skills.

This curriculum project gives teachers a quick resource to help them teach SWD the steps of learning necessary social skills. While teaching social skills is important, it is understood that time is an issue, especially for those grades three and above with getting students prepared for testing and getting through a curriculum while hitting the standards. Having access to this curriculum teaches both the social skills and NYS Learning Standards needed to make both students and teachers successful. The curriculum gives a clear outline of the social skills that should be addressed and also has the resources to go over what each social skill and standard entails, giving descriptions of both. The lessons within this curriculum give clear and broad statements of the content and skills that the students will be taught, the methods with which to teach them and the social skills that correlate with both. Each social skill comes with a cue card that students may keep on their desks, teachers may project onto the board or use in additional lessons as reminders for their students. This is important for those students that need the extra support, which for the most part, include SWD. This helps to differentiate the instruction for those SWD from general education students without separating them into a more restrictive environment entirely.

The curriculum uses the research found that shows the impact of a less restrictive environment on SWD and takes it a step further. This curriculum is used to help teach SWD and general education students to use proper social skills while they are alongside one another in order to give them the needed practice. Karakaya, E. G. and Tufan, M (2018) stated that “...scores obtained by special needs students from social independence and social cooperation sub scales of social skills scale did not differ significantly from the scores obtained by their peers with normal developmental patterns” (p. 131). This shows that when students are in an inclusion setting, their social development and skills are not far off from their peers with normal developmental patterns, which backs up the fact that including them rather than putting SWD in a restrictive environment, we can help them work on these skills. This curriculum builds upon skills that students already know and uses the base of prior knowledge of already taught social skills to work on the other. The curriculum is used to enrich both the students’ social skills and literacy skills. The social skill portion of the curriculum has the ability to be worked into almost any other subject that the class is working on; in addition, the cue cards are used to help carry these skills over to other subjects.

### **Limitations**

Although the curriculum developed for this project is well thought out and here to help teachers integrate students more and create a more inclusive curriculum, there are some limitations in the curriculum project. There are limitations in the field of research where there weren’t many studies for teaching social skills in integrated classrooms as there are in more restrictive environments. In my review of the studies and research, a lot of studies discussed the impacts that being in restrictive vs. non-restrictive environments has on SWD both academically and socially, but none covered the results when social skills are taught. Finding research on this

could have improved the overall curriculum that incorporates social skills into the everyday curriculum. The limitations of research also give a lack of understanding on the ways that teaching social skills in the curriculum is beneficial to the interactions of SWD with students in general education.

The other, and most restrictive, limitation is that not all instructors are used to or equipped to teach social skills in their integrated classrooms. Many times, teachers are not trained on teaching social skills or even teaching SWD to the extent of special education teachers, which may limit their understanding of the importance of teaching social skills. This can limit their strategies and plans in teaching the skills necessary. The teachers may also not truly understand how to role-play the social skills accurately or how to teach the step-by-step instruction of the social skills. In order to truly understand the teaching of social skills, teachers should be trained appropriately and attend professional development seminars on this topic, which may not be in the allotted time or budget for certain districts. This limitation can hinder the learning experience of the social skills for SWD. In conclusion, this curriculum is limited to those teachers that understand the ways to teach social skills properly that may have some background knowledge in teaching SWD the necessary social skills in their everyday lives.

### **Future Investigations**

If I were given the opportunity to implement this curriculum and to attempt to approach this curriculum project, I would include illustrations, video recording and copies of necessary classroom supplies and materials. These illustrations, videos and materials would help give examples and further explain the ways to implement this curriculum and research. The videos, images, and materials would be necessary in the implementation and continuation of this research due to the extensiveness of the curriculum. This would help teachers of this curriculum

to understand the meaning of social skills and to give examples of the ways in which to carry out the lesson of these skills to both general education students and SWD. By videotaping the skills being used, the students will be able to see what the social skill looks like accurately and in a more natural state, rather than stopping to talk about each step. The skills shown will be videotaped in a natural environment, giving students the ability to see the skill being modeled. Then, the students will get an opportunity to practice right after the video recording.

### **Conclusions**

This curriculum project set out to incorporate social skills into a curriculum that implements the NYS Literacy Learning Standards for both SWD and general education students. While there were limitations on the constructive research and the implementation without the proper training and skills of teaching social skills, the project was successful in providing teachers (both special education and general education) with the necessary tools and curriculum in order to teach social skills to SWD and general education students in a less restrictive environment (inclusive classroom), while teaching to the NYS Literacy Learning Standards. Therefore, reading through the curriculum, teachers will understand the methods with which to go about incorporating social skills into their everyday lessons from which both SWD and general education students can learn. Teachers of both general and special education can build on their knowledge and their students' knowledge while teaching them the proper social skills needed to have appropriate interactions with both SWD and general education students. This curriculum can be carried over and implemented throughout various standards as well as subject areas and can be easily incorporated into the everyday curriculum. This curriculum gives students a chance to succeed and learn in a less restrictive environment and to be exposed to the

necessary social skills in order to help them to be successful in both school and the real world while providing them with the educational tools to be successful students.

**REFERENCES**

- Causton-Theoharis, J., Theoharis, G., Orsati, F., & Cosier, M. (2011). Does self-contained special education deliver on its promises? A critical inquiry into research and practice. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 24(2), 61-78. Web: [http://eds.b.ebscohost.com . dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid&sid=49768780-22d1-40ee-8dbc-6ad8cce51ca2%40sessionmgr101](http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/dbsearch/fredonia.edu:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid&sid=49768780-22d1-40ee-8dbc-6ad8cce51ca2%40sessionmgr101).
- Dessemontet, R. S., Bless, G., & Morin, D. (2012). Effects of inclusion on the academic achievement and adaptive behaviour of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(6), 579-587. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2788.2011.01497.x.
- DiCamillo, Kate. (2000). *Because of Winn-Dixie*. Cambridge, MA:Candlewick Press. (2005) English Language Arts Standards. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>
- DiGennaro Reed, F. D., McIntyre, L. L., Dusek, J., & Quintero, N. (2011). Preliminary assessment of friendship, problem behavior, and social adjustment in children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 23(6), 477-489. doi:10.1007/s10882-011-9236-2.s.
- Fisher, M., & Meyer, L. H. (2002). Development and social competence after two years for students enrolled in inclusive and self-contained educational programs. *Research & Practice For Persons With Severe Disabilities*, 27(3), 165. [http://dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2048 /login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=999234&site=ehost-live](http://dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=999234&site=ehost-live).
- Hein, G. E. (2016, October 7). Constructivist learning theory. Retrieved from [https://www.exploratorium.edu/ education/ifi/constructivist-learning](https://www.exploratorium.edu/education/ifi/constructivist-learning).

- Holahan, A., & Costenbader, V. (2000). A comparison of developmental gains for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive and self-contained classrooms. *Topics In Early Childhood Special Education, 20*(4), 224-235. doi:10.1177/027112140002000403.
- ies National Center for Education Statistics (2006). The condition of education 2006. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006071.pdf>.
- Karakaya, E. G. & Tufan, M. (2018). Social skills, problem behaviors and classroom management in inclusive preschool settings. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 6*(5), 123. doi:10.11114/jets.v6i5.3076.
- Krull, J. J., Wilbert, J., & Hennemann, T. (2014). The social and emotional situation of first graders with classroom behavior problems and classroom learning difficulties in inclusive classes. *Learning Disabilities -- A Contemporary Journal, 12*(2), 169-190.
- Kurth, J. J., Born, K., & Love, H. (2016). Ecobehavioral characteristics of self- contained high school classrooms for students with severe cognitive disability. *Research & Practice For Persons With Severe Disabilities, 41*(4), 227-243. doi:10.1177/1540796916661492.
- Lauderdale-Littin, S., Howell, E., & Blacher, J. (2013). Educational placement for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in public and nonpublic school settings: The impact of social skills and behavior problems. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 48*(4), 469-478. <http://dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2048/loginurl=https://search-proquest-com.dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2443/docview/1503664856?accountid=28748>.
- Lane, K. L., Wehby, J. H., Little, M. A., & Cooley, C. (2005). Students educated in self-contained classrooms and self-contained schools: Part II--how do they progress over time?. *Behavioral Disorders, 30*(4), 363-374. Retrieved from <http://dbsearch.fredonia>.

edu:2048/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.dbsearch.fredonia.edu:2443/  
docview/219677006?accountid=28748.

Mattison, R. E. (2011). Comparison of students classified ED in self-contained classrooms and a self-contained school. *Education & Treatment Of Children, 34*(1), 15-33.

doi:10.1353/etc.2011.0003.

Panacek, L. J., & Dunlap, G. (2003). The social lives of children with emotional and behavioral disorders in self-contained classrooms: a descriptive analysis. *Exceptional Children, 69*(3), 333-348. doi:10.1177/001440290306900305.

Panerai, S., Zingale, M., Trubia, G., Finocchiaro, M., Zuccarello, R., Ferri, R., & Elia, M. (2009). Special education versus inclusive education: The role of the TEACCH Program. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 39*(6), 874-882. doi:10.1007/s10803-009-0696-5.

Reed, F. D., McIntyre, L. L., Dusek, J., & Quintero, N. (2011). Preliminary assessment of friendship, problem behavior, and social adjustment in children with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 23*(6), 477-489. doi:10.1007/s10882-011-9236-2.

Reynolds T., Zupanick C.E., Dombeck M(2015) The choice of educational settings: The pros and cons of mainstreaming children with intellectual disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/the-choice-of-educational-settings-the-pros-and-cons-of-mainstreaming-children-with-intellectual-disabilities/>.

Taylor, A. G., & Moniz-Tadeo, B. (2012). The impact of an invitational environment on preschoolers with special needs. *Journal Of Invitational Theory And Practice, 18*19-

25.<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=sunyfredonia&v=2.1&id=GAL>  
[E%7CA322563622&it=r&asid=5337d6250605b32daa964a9b7d0966c2.](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=sunyfredonia&v=2.1&id=GAL)