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Facilitators and Barriers to Incorporating Students with Disabilities in the General
Education Classroom at the Secondary School Level: A Study of Teacher Perceptions

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

David L. Burgin

December 2003

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Keywords: Special Education, IEP, Modification, Secondary, Inclusion

ABSTRACT

Facilitators and Barriers to Incorporating Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classroom at the Secondary School Level: A Study of Teacher Perceptions

by

David L. Burgin

The history of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom is driven by parents and advocates of children with disabilities. The push has been to educate all children in the least restrictive environment (LRE), changing the role of general education teacher from a subject matter specialist to include the responsibility of educating students with a wide range of special needs. While most agree that educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom alongside their non-disabled peers is better than excluding them from academic and social opportunities, general educators have been a noticeably absent voice in regards to these changes. The purpose of this qualitative study was to give general educators the opportunity to provide this missing voice.

In order to collect data for this phenomenological study, open-ended interviews were conducted with 22 teachers in Northeast Tennessee. The subjects were purposefully sampled to gain maximum variation in terms of school setting, years of experience, and subject matter taught. Using constant comparative analysis, incidents were classified into teacher perceptions regarding incorporating students with disabilities in their classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. Within each of these categories, sub-categories emerged.

The data collected in this study supported the notion that general educators were excluded from the decision-making process in regards to special education, and that they viewed the rules and regulations as mandates handed to them by superiors as opposed to joint decisions made in the best interest of their students. Respondents also voiced their opinions regarding the efficacy of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, as well as facilitators and barriers to success with the practice.

This study is important to parents, teachers, and administrators who are interested in a better understanding of the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom from a general education teacher's perspective. It also serves to provide the missing voice of the general educator in regards to this topic.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wonderful family. To my parents, I truly appreciate the work ethic you helped to instill in me. You always pushed me to be the best I could be, and I thank you for your contributions to my life. I am proud to be your son. To my brothers, thank you for setting a good example and paving the way for your little brother. To my in-laws, thank you for being some of my biggest supporters and for allowing me to be your son, grandson, uncle, nephew, and brother. To my wife and lovely daughter, words cannot express how much I appreciate the two of you. You are my biggest fans and I could not have made it without your undying support and unconditional love. I love you both dearly and thank God every day for how He has richly blessed my life.

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No study of significance could be completed solely by one person. I would like to take an opportunity to acknowledge those who have contributed to this project and whom I owe a great deal of gratitude.

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I am grateful to the general education teachers who allowed me to interview them for this study. I appreciate you sacrificing your time and helping us better understand the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades, special education in the United States has been moving towards the full inclusion of high school students with various disabilities into general education classes (Snyder, 1999). Advocates suggest that incorporating students with disabilities in general education classes leads to improved socialization and academic opportunities for these students as well as more collaboration between general education and special education teachers (Snyder). It is not only the special-needs students who benefit but also their non-disabled peers who gain “knowledge and acceptance” from interacting with students who differ in aptitude, achievement, and/or conduct (O’Shea, 1999, p. 179). The opportunity to introduce special needs students into the general education classroom has been initially brought about through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which mandated that each student be offered a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This legislation was reauthorized several times until it reached its current form, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997). Initially, school usually interpreted the law to mean they should incorporate students with mild disabilities into classes where the students could keep up with their non-disabled peers. Today, however, the interpretation of inclusion has developed to the idea that even students with moderate to severe disabilities should be incorporated in the general education setting (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Gone are the days of all special education students being placed in a self-contained classroom next to

the boiler room where they will not “bother” anyone. Instead, many students with disabilities ranging from mild to severe are being served in general education classrooms where they intermingle with the general education population and take part in the general curriculum with modifications as defined by their IEPs (Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000). Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, and Sumell (1995) released a study finding that, “most students with disabilities receive some or all of their instruction in general education classrooms” (p. 335). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), in 1985 only 25% of the students with disabilities were served in general education classes 80% of the time. By 1999, the number of students with disabilities served in general education classes 80 % of the time or more had increased to over 47 %. The mere presence of special education students in general education classrooms is not enough. To comply with IDEA (1997), as well as serve the special education student with the least restrictive environment, teachers must meet the needs of students at all levels (Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000). To accomplish this task, teachers are being challenged to look at curricula and reform methodology to effectively support children with special needs.

Statement of the Problem

Concerned parents, their advocates, and social workers have driven the inclusion movement (Cronis & Ellis, 2000). While motivated parents and advocates are generally seen as an asset to educational reform, general education teachers have been somewhat excluded from this process. Most general education teachers support special education reform, but are concerned about their ability to implement such reforms (Van Ruesen et

al., 2000). D'Alanzo, Giordano, and Vanleeuwen (1997) reported that very little research has been done on general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and the research that has been done, "comes from the statements of a vocal few" (p. 5). In a study published by Snyder (1999) regarding general education teachers' attitudes toward special education, 84% of the high school teachers who responded felt they were "not confident in working with students with special needs" (p. 179). Seventy-seven percent reported that they had "no formal training in working with students with special needs" (p. 179). Van Reusen et al. suggested that general education teachers might feel reluctant because they see themselves as content specialists who are not trained as special education instructors. Furthermore, many teachers are pressured by high-stakes tests that make them feel as though they cannot afford to take the time to adapt lessons for students with lower capabilities. However, under the "umbrella of inclusion" (p.7), students with a wide range of needs are being placed in general classrooms. According to the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), all students must participate in accountability assessments to determine educational progress. This means that the six million special education students who had previously been held out of such high-stakes tests are now to be included and the data of their results a part of their educational progress as well as the progress of the school (Albrecht & Joles, 2003). This results in increased pressure on general education teachers to adjust and modify without ever consulting them. Not only does this create a situation that is potentially harmful for the student, it also causes legal concern for the teacher and the school district (Van Ruesen et al.).

Adding to this dilemma for general education teachers is the declining special education teacher population. Cronis and Ellis (2000) pointed out that the supply of

qualified special education teachers has never met the demand. This problem is being exacerbated by the rising number of students being served. While universities are attempting to train special education teacher personnel, they are not keeping up with current attrition rates. Judy and D'Amico (1997) reported that special education teachers represented one of the top 25 fastest growing occupations in the United States. Some critics of special education reform claim the reforms are ineffective, while supporters suggest that it is difficult to be effective without human resources to implement the reforms. This affects general education teachers, because special education teachers are often overworked and unable to offer full support with IEP modifications (Villa & Thousand, 2000). While most agree that educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom alongside their non-disabled peers is better than excluding them from academic and social opportunities, general educators have been a noticeably absent voice in regards to these changes. The purpose of this qualitative study was to give general educators the opportunity to provide this missing voice.

Significance of the Study

A qualitative research design was used to gather information regarding the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom from a general educator's perspective. Interviews with general education teachers from East Tennessee representing a wide spectrum in terms of school setting, experience, and subject matter were conducted in order to collect data.

The first, and most important, type of significance is that of the well being of the student. Heflin and Bullock (1999) pointed out that the failure to implement the

modifications presented in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) negates the intended effect in a way that no administrative mandate can rectify. There is a process in place for designing an educational plan for each special education student that is deemed appropriate by a team of experts and concerned stakeholders. This team consists of the student, parents, advocates, teachers, administrators, and special education experts.

While the process may not be perfect, and the results may not include every appropriate modification, not implementing this plan goes against not only the law but also the best interest of the student.

The second level of significance of this study is a legal one. The potential lawsuits resulting from inappropriate implementation of special education programs as determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) regarding least restrictive environment represent a growing concern for school administrators and teachers (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). When a child with special needs is placed in a general education teacher's class, the general education teacher must sign the IEP agreeing that she understands and will implement the modifications. It is my belief that teachers may initially consider the modifications but soon file the IEPs away and get caught up in the daily routines of managing their classes. The legal significance of this is, and should be, a tremendous burden to administrators, central office staff, and teachers. An advocate suspecting that modifications are not taking place would then have an "open-and-shut" case should it ever come to a due process hearing.

A third level of significance is that many general educators have felt left out of the changes that have taken place in regards to special education students being included in general education classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). A respondent in a study

conducted by Heflin and Bullock (1999) described the push for full inclusion as “an administrative bulldozer” (p. 108) and that it had a “top-down flow” (p. 108). This is significant because if teachers feel they are left out, they are more resistant to change (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994). The absence of teacher perceptions regarding inclusion creates a gap that can only be filled by a qualitative study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

Limitations

The participants for the interviews were purposefully sampled in order to gain maximum variation across suspected lines of differentiation. The responses in the interviews represented the participants’ perceptions and were not intended to represent all general educators, nor are they an adequate reflection of the special education programs within the sites chosen. It is also possible that participants may have responded with what they think are the acceptable practices within their school systems instead of what was actually taking place. While methods were used to minimize this occurrence, it should be noted that what people say they perceive and what they actually think may differ, particularly if their views fall outside the predominant paradigm. In order to address this, I conducted a phenomenological study where my experiences as a general education classroom teacher, while unique to me, helped to build empathy with the subjects being interviewed. Unlike a quantitative study where the researcher detaches him/herself from the subjects, a phenomenological study requires that the researcher has shared experiences with the subjects (Creswell, 1998). My experiences as a classroom teacher were shared with participants so I was seen more as a co-investigator rather than an evaluator (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). I also used pseudonyms to protect the identity of

the subjects being interviewed and to assure them that my purpose is not to evaluate their school or their particular teaching practices but to help provide the missing voice of general educators when it comes to incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Definitions of Terms

Within the scope of this study, unless otherwise clarified in reference to a specific work, the following terms and acronyms will be used as follows:

General Education Teacher. The IDEA (1997) differentiated between a special education teacher and general education teacher in that the former teaches classes comprised entirely of special education students while the latter does not. Crockett and Kauffman (1998) defined the general education class as, “regular classes” where general education and special education students are served within the same environment (p. 74). The general education teacher is the one who helps facilitate this environment. General education teachers usually lack training in special education and are more likely to be trained in a specific field of studies (Kupper & Gutierrez, 2000).

Children with Disabilities. A child with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 1997, p. 9).

Inclusion. Because “inclusion” is not defined in statutes or regulations, there is confusion over the use of the term (Bartlett, Weisenstein, & Etscheidt, 2002). The use of the term “inclusion” may be used to mean different things in

various school settings. Even more complicating, different professionals in the same school setting may use the term to mean different things (Baker & Zigmond, 1995). Ferguson (2000) defined inclusion as, “the involvement of students with disabilities in general education curricula, assessment practices, and classrooms” (p. 5). To some, this means that students with disabilities are to be placed in general education classrooms as long as they can be given modifications to keep up with their peers. To others, inclusion means that support is to be brought to the child so that they will receive benefit from being in the general education classroom (as opposed to keeping up with peers). Proponents of full inclusion believe that practices and supports are already in place to accommodate students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Bartlett et al., 2002). This study defines the term as the incorporation of students with disabilities in a general education class with modifications as defined by the IEP (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Mainstreaming. “An effort to return students from special education classrooms to general education classrooms” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 6). Rogers (1993) defined mainstreaming as the “selective placement” of students with disabilities in the general education classroom contingent on the student’s ability to keep up with the rest of the class (p. 4).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular

classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 1997, p. 30).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance to this section and that includes: i) a statement of the child's present levels of educational performance...ii) a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short term objectives...iii) a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on the behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child...iv) an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class...v) a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of State or district wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in such assessment...vi) the projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications in clause (iii) and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of those services and modifications (IDEA, 1997, p. 55).

Regular Education Initiative (REI). "The nationwide effort to mainstream disabled students into regular education classrooms" (Peltier, 1993, p. 54).

Kavale and Forness (2000) identified that the term REI is used by advocates who push for the merging of general and special education into one consolidated system. Rather than segregating special needs students out of general education classes, REI supporters believe that given the correct support and training, quality teachers can teach all students within the same classroom.

Research Questions

The central focus of this qualitative study was to explore general education teacher perceptions regarding the incorporation of students with

disabilities in the general education classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. An unstructured interview technique was used to elicit responses without leading the participant in a particular way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While an unstructured interview does not consist of a set of predetermined questions, participants were asked to focus on their experiences with special education students being included in general education courses, as opposed to their universal classroom experiences. In order to achieve maximum variation in regards to responses, participants were purposely sampled from groups of teachers who vary in terms of school setting (small, medium, and large schools), teaching experience (new teachers, experienced teachers, and veteran teachers), and subject matter taught. The intention of selecting participants from these varied settings was not to evaluate these settings in regards to the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom but rather to obtain the widest range of possible responses given the scope of this study. Participants from each of these groups were interviewed based on the following research questions:

1. What are participant's perceptions regarding the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in general education classes?
2. What are participant's perceptions regarding the efficacy of this practice?
3. What factors are facilitators to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education class?

4. What factors are barriers to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education class?

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study will be presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 included an introduction to the topic, statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definitions used, research questions, and an overview. Chapter 2 consists of a review of current literature involving the history of the inclusion movement in the United States and current research regarding facilitators and barriers to successful inclusion. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methods and procedures that were used in the study. In Chapter 4, data collected through interviews were summarized, analyzed, and interpreted. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the study as well as the recommendations for practice and for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The overall purpose of this study was to examine general education teacher perceptions regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. The purpose of the literature review presented in Chapter 2 is to examine current literature regarding the history of special education in the United States of America and current research on facilitators and barriers to successful inclusion. This is relevant to the overall purpose of this study because gaining an understanding as to how the federal and state courts, legislatures, as well as various advocacy groups have shaped special education policies in the US is key to understanding the phenomenon of special education students being included in the general education classrooms. It is also relevant to note the absence of both general educators and special educators in the shaping of these policies.

Literature is replete with works discussing the history of special education in the United States, as well as its impact upon educators and students (e.g. Gartner & Lipsky, 1998; Horn & Tynan, 1999; Huefner, 2000; Jarrow, 1999; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Rather than having a clear-cut universal policy, special education history is one of complicated court rulings, legal battles fought by advocacy groups, and vague statutory language (Palmaffy, 2001). The cornerstone to IDEA is placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment as determined by the IEP. By definition, the IEP is determined on a student

by student basis. While it is true that each child is different, the task of universally incorporating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment has resulted in many challenges for school officials, parents, students, and the Courts (Pivik, McComas, & LaFlamme, 2002).

Following a brief overview of the changing demands of special education, the review of literature pertinent to this study was concerned primarily with evolution of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The presentation of this history will be organized into nine main components:

1. Exclusion of Special Education Students
2. Terminology Timeline
3. Early Court Decisions
4. Legislative Mandates
5. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997
6. More Recent Court Decisions
7. Barriers
8. Facilitators
9. General Educator's Perceptions Regarding Inclusive Practices

Exclusion of Special Education Students

Much of the history of special education students being included in the general education curriculum is contemporary, with some states not requiring special education students to be served in the least restrictive environment as recently as 1969 (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Prior to the 1950s, the federal role in providing for the education of students with disabilities was limited to grants that helped establish residential asylums for the severely disabled, with little or no interference regarding what the states were doing to serve all students with disabilities (Horn & Tynan, 1999). Martin, Martin, and Terman (1996) pointed out that prior to the 1970s, “millions of

children with disabilities were either refused enrollment or inadequately served by public schools” (p. 25). Huefner (2000) found that prior to 1974, 1.75 million students did not receive public educational services at all, and an additional 3 million students with disabilities did not receive the appropriate educational services. The United States Department of Education (2000) reported that in 1975, over half of the students with disabilities in the United States did not receive appropriate educational services that would facilitate equal opportunity for those students. To better understand how so many children could be neglected by the system for so long, it is important to briefly consider the history of education, and particularly the history of the education of students with disabilities, in the United States.

By 1918, every state had compulsory education laws in place. Many times, however, those laws did nothing to prevent state and local governments from excluding students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). The attempt to educate students with disabilities was viewed by some to be a “waste of resources” (Palmaffy, 2001, p. 3). In 1893, the Massachusetts State Supreme Court ruled that a school could expel a child if the administration determined the child could not benefit from instruction due to a mental disability. The ruling justice added that students should be able to take care of themselves in order to attend Massachusetts’ schools (*Watson v. City of Cambridge*). In 1919, the Wisconsin State Supreme Court affirmed the decision of a public school to expel a student because he drooled, had facial contortions, and nauseated the other teachers and students (*Beattie v. Board of Education*). Winzer (1993) cited an Ohio statute in the 1930s that mandated compulsory attendance, but gave systems the right to exclude certain students. In 1958, The Illinois State Supreme Court ruled the compulsory

education laws of the state did not require the state to educate students with disabilities (*Department of Welfare v. Haas*). A 1969 statute in North Carolina made it a crime for parents of a child expelled due to his or her disability to demand the reinstatement of the child to public education (Weber, 1992).

While the exclusion of students with disabilities certainly did take place in the United States as recently as the 1960s, most states began to require schools to educate students with disabilities by 1970 (Yell et al., 1998). This does not necessarily mean that students with disabilities were educated in general education classes. In fact, segregated classes with smaller teacher-to-student ratios, specially trained teachers, and individualized instruction were the norm in the early 1970s (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Rather than providing disabled students with an appropriate education, however, such segregated classrooms often “rarely amounted to much more than warehousing” (Palmaffy, 2001, p. 4). Children with a physical disability but no mental disability were often placed in segregated classes for students with mental retardation out of convenience (Horn & Tynan, 2001). Until the 1970s, the term “special education” in the United States was predominantly synonymous with either the exclusion of students with disabilities by not allowing them in school, or the exclusion of students with disabilities by placing them in segregated classrooms far removed from the general education population (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998).

Terminology Timeline

The terminology used in special education has evolved over time to reflect social, political, and advocacy agendas (Vergason & Anderegg, 1997). To some, the social changes in terminology appear trivial, but in reality, the changes in terminology reflect a more humanistic way to view children. The prevalent word used to discuss children with disabilities prior to the early 1970s was “handicapped” (p. 37). Between the 1970s and 1990, most professionals began using the word disability, although it was generally seen as interchangeable with the term handicapped. Today, however, an important distinction is made by professionals when using these terms:

Disability was the physical and/or learning condition which produced the possibility of limitations, while handicap referred to the limitations imposed by the lack of accommodations within the environment (p. 37).

This change was reflected politically by the change in the title of federal special education law from Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. Rather than focusing on the debilitating condition, today’s terminology is more likely to focus upon the child. For example, rather than referring to a child as a “mongoloid,” one would appropriately use the terminology “child with Down syndrome” (Vergason & Anderegg, p. 36).

Rogers (1993) identified that a similar evolution of terminology exists regarding the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. While some teachers may regard the terms “mainstreaming,” “inclusion,” “full inclusion,” and “regular education initiative” to be the same, the distinctions between these terms when used by advocates may be profound (Douvanis & Husley, 2002). Mainstreaming refers to the practice of incorporating a special education student

in one or more general education classes with the understanding that the student must “earn” his or her opportunity as demonstrated by the ability to “keep up” with the other students (Rogers, 1993, p.2). Sapon-Shevin (1996) wrote that “mainstreaming” involved finding the right “match” of student and class (p. 36). Inclusion refers to incorporating a special education student in general education classes by way of bringing support services to the student (rather than pulling the student out) and the child need only show benefit rather than the ability to keep up with his or her peers. Full-inclusionists believe that techniques and supports are presently available to accommodate all students in general education classes and that the role of the special education teacher is that of trainer to the general education teacher as opposed to a resource for the student (Rogers, 1993). The regular education initiative (REI) is a movement to merge special education with general education in terms of funding and control. Rather than having a “general” education system and a “special” one, REI advocates would like to see a more unified system of education where all students are served in one classroom regardless of their individual differences (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Bartlett et al. (2002) stated that while many people still use these terms interchangeably, such use is “clearly inappropriate” (p. 110). With current legislation, students with disabilities are not “mainstreamed” into general education classrooms, but rather “included” with appropriate modifications (Vergason & Anderegg, 1997). In fact, Rogers (1993) envisioned being able to identify a true inclusive classroom only by its “virtual invisibility” (p. 5). Rather than being able to identify special needs students either by special classrooms or by being grouped with students of like challenges, a truly inclusive setting would be one where the teacher designs instructional opportunities to “benefit all students – even though the various

students may derive different benefits” (p. 5). While not all share Roger’s vision (e. g. Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Katsiyannis et al. 2001), it is clear that the intent behind the terminology used to describe the expectations of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom is closely tied to the language used.

Early Court Decisions

In the 1950s and 1960s, two movements converged to address the issue of educating children with disabilities: the civil rights movement in the wake of the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954; hereafter *Brown*) and the equal opportunity movement fueled by parental advocacy groups (Palmaffy, 2001). The *Brown* decision, as well as the cases to follow, helped to empower parents of disabled students to emerge from the background of educational policies in the United States (Yell et al., 1998).

The focus of the *Brown* (1954) case was the ending of the segregation of black children from attending the same schools as white children. In its decision on that case, the US Supreme Court ruled that separate facilities were inherently unequal. In practice, the separate facilities attended by the black children had shorter school years, inferior facilities, and poorly trained teachers than schools for white children (Kelman, 2001). Advocates for students with disabilities argued that those same conditions plagued the educational opportunities for their children (Martin et al., 1996). Fundamental to the *Brown* case was the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law for all citizens. The Supreme Court ruled that

if states provide education to some citizens, they must do so for all. Furthermore, to segregate on the basis of unalterable characteristics was declared unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board, 1954*). This decision sparked the civil rights movement in the 1960s, requiring desegregation to take place in public schools in regard to racial classification. Segregated educational facilities were no longer acceptable. Therefore, public schools began to embark on the process of desegregating the schools and providing equal opportunities for students of all races. Special education advocates seized the opportunity to push for similar reforms considering the education of students with disabilities (Kelman, 2001). Using the *Brown* decision as their catalyst, advocates began to argue that special needs students were being segregated from the general education population and should be educated in a less restrictive environment (Yell et al., 1998).

Over the next few decades, as local schools endeavored to comply with this new mandate, a large number of the newly integrated black children were labeled as mentally deficient and placed in separate classrooms. While school officials claimed it was to help remediate the deficiencies of the past system, many believed the intent was to continue with the segregation practices of the past (Palmaffy, 2001). Two Supreme Court cases helped to rectify and clarify the situation of schools excluding students from the general education classroom: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v Pennsylvania* (1972; hereafter *PARC*) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972; hereafter *Mills*).

The *PARC* case centered around a Pennsylvania law that allowed children who had not attained the mental age of five years to be excluded from attending the first grade (Martin et al., 1996). Yell et al. (1998) identified the four significant points made by the

plaintiffs in the case. The first, that children with mental disabilities were able to receive a benefit from educational programs. Secondly, that the education of children did not just entail the academic experiences but also life experiences such as taking care of themselves and proper socialization. The third point addressed by the plaintiffs was that because the state of Pennsylvania undertook the responsibility to its citizens, all citizens must be included. Finally, the plaintiffs argued the earlier that students with disabilities were given training, the more success they would have in future endeavors. The result of the *PARC* (1972) case was a consent agreement establishing the state's responsibility to offer appropriate educational opportunities to all citizens from age 6 to age 21 (Martin et al., 1996; Palmaffy, 2001; Yell et al., 1998).

The *Mills* case, also filed in 1972, helped to broaden this finding to include not only students with mental disabilities but also those who had behavioral problems, hyperactivity, and emotional disabilities (Palmaffy, 2001). The school system officials argued that they did not have the resources to provide for students with these types of disabilities. The Supreme Court, however, rejected this argument, indicating that a lack of resources was not a defense for denying due process (*Mills*, 1972). Zettel and Ballard (1982) noted that not only did the outcome of the *Mills* case signify schools would have to provide services to all students with disabilities, it also helped identify the procedural safeguards for identifying, placing, and excluding students with disabilities. Yell et al. (1998) identified those safeguards as:

The right to a hearing with representation, a record, and an impartial hearing officer; the right to appeal; the right to have access to all records; and the written notice of all stages in the process (p. 223).

The effect of the *Mills* decision, as well as the *PARC* decision, produced a number of similar cases in 28 other states, with the Courts upholding the precedents set by these landmark cases (Martin et al., 1996). Many states responded by passing statutes requiring the education of all disabled students and providing the procedural safeguards outlined in the *Mills* case (Palmaffy, 2001). With the exception of specific money allocated for training teachers or providing grant money for specific programs, the federal government allowed states to address the needs of educating students with disabilities. In the wake of the *PARC* (1972) and the *Mills* (1972) cases, however, pressure was increased for the United States Congress to adapt a more unified standard for the country (United States Department of Education, 2000).

Legislative Mandates

The gradual involvement by the United States Congress in public education occurred over a long period of time. Prior to the 1950s, most felt that the 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution reserved the right of education to the states. The evolution of federal legislation began in 1958 with the National Defense Act, which provided grants to improve the teaching of math and science in elementary schools. Soon after this law was passed, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a law providing money to help train teachers of mentally retarded students (Martin et al., 1996). While this statute did not provide funds directly supporting students with disabilities, it paved the way for federal law to do so (Yell et al., 1998). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the first major piece of federal legislation that financially supported particular groups of students (Martin et al., 1996). Included in this

legislation was money in the form of grants for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

Despite the move toward federal funding for students with disabilities in the late 1960s, advocates continued to push for a single entity that would manage federal programs for students with disabilities and provide more categorical funding for particular disabilities (Martin et al., 1996). Until this time, the federal statutes dealing with special needs students had been included with broader educational bills. The first statute to deal exclusively with students with disabilities was the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1970 (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). This law codified various disabilities and provided a more comprehensive system of distributing grant money for particular groups of students (Martin et al., 1996). While not as comprehensive as advocates would have preferred, EHA helped to provide the basic structure for subsequent laws (Yell et al., 1998).

In 1973, Congress increased the federal role in dealing with students with disabilities with the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). As part of a labor statute, Senator Hubert Humphrey proclaimed Section 504 as a “civil rights declaration” for people with disabilities (*Congressional Record*, 1977, p. 12216). At the center of Section 504 was the mandate that any educational entity that received federal dollars could not discriminate on the basis of disability (Jarrow, 1999). While the bill did provide protections against the discrimination toward people with disabilities, it failed to provide funding or monitoring and thus went ignored by many schools in its inception (Martin et al., 1996). Although the bill contains some of the same language used in Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, barring discrimination due to

race and national origin, and Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, banning discrimination based on gender, many were left confused as to what protections were offered by the statute and what recourse someone who was victimized might take (Yell et al., 1998). Advocates of special education reform continued to push for a bill that would not only protect students from discrimination but also provide them with a more appropriate educational setting (Jarrow, 1999).

In 1975, Congress provided funds, as well as a clear mandate, by passing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (henceforth EAHCA). Although educational funding was still seen as a state issue, the increased federal role was justified as an effort to eradicate the discrimination that had been taking place in public schools against children with disabilities (Palmaffy, 2001). Within the statute, Congress stipulated that, “more than half of the handicapped children in the United States do not receive appropriate educational services which would enable them to have full equality of opportunity” (EAHCA, 1975, p. 3). The United States Department of Education (1995) identified the four purposes of EAHCA as follows:

To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs; to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians are protected; to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (p. 1).

In order to pursue these goals, Congress increased the federal role in supervising public schools and expanded the financial commitment from a relatively small amount to a multibillion-dollar program of grants to the states (Palmaffy, 2001). Martin et al. (1996) explained that with EAHCA, Congress was authorized to appropriate up to 40% of the

average per-pupil expenditure of non-disabled students towards the education of students with disabilities. In exchange for such appropriations, states were then obligated to submit plans describing the procedures used to provide a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

Yell et al. (1998) outlined five key components of EAHCA. First, in order to identify students with disabilities, non-discriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures were implemented. Second, students who were identified as having special needs were to be educated in the least restrictive environment. Third, students and parents were guaranteed procedural due process over any introductions or changes to a child's placement. Fourth, the educational services offered must be without any extra tuition charged to the parents or guardians. And fifth, the educational services must be appropriate for each student's individual need.

The evolution of EAHCA has been one of wording and changes in the scope of the statute, while the core elements still remain intact. In 1980, Congress added funds for pre-school children identified as disabled. Six years later, the statute was amended to include the right for parents to be reimbursed for legal fees if they should prevail in court. In 1990, EAHCA got a facelift as the name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (henceforth IDEA) and new categories of disabilities were added to the law, including autism and brain trauma. While each of these changes was seen as victories by advocates, the essential purpose of the law has not been altered much from its original form in 1975 until its present form in IDEA, 1997 (Palmaffy, 2001).

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act Amendments of 1997

Martin et al. (1996) stated that the statute in its present form contains 10 key elements: identification of students who qualified for special services; the funding formulas; the goal of educating all students in the least restrictive environment; expanding services to include early intervention with infants, toddlers, and preschool students; ensuring due process for parents and students in identification, placement, and modification decisions; improving results through better documentation procedures; providing each qualified student with an individualized education plan (IEP); personnel considerations; transition practices; and improved research guidelines for identifying and implementing best practices.

Identification of students with disabilities was one of the basic purposes of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Not only was it incumbent on local educational institutions to serve students who qualify for modifications but also to find these students. Rather than just serving the students who have parents or guardians who request modifications, IDEA put mechanisms in place to properly identify all students who need assistance, not just those who ask for help (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Schools are required to evaluate students who may be qualified for services and then provide these students with an appropriate education regardless of the current abilities to provide needed services. Schools face a zero-reject principle when it comes to providing an appropriate education for students from ages 3 to 21 (Katsiyannis et al., 2001, Martin et al., 1996).

Martin et al. (1996) pointed out that the “child-find” principle was reinforced through the funding procedures because school systems received federal dollars based on

the number of students with disabilities served by each system, as opposed to the number of students within the system (p. 30). This helps to ensure that schools will properly identify students with disabilities and that the federal dollars sent to school systems will be tied to the categorical disability as opposed to a block grant in which school systems could pick and choose how money is spent. Katsiyannis et al. (2001) identified that in order to qualify for federal funds, states must submit a plan that outlines the methods proposed to identify and evaluate students with disabilities and programs that will be used to ensure that students who qualify for services actually receive services as well as a comprehensive plan for the programs provided. States must also include a wide-ranging staff development plan to ensure that best practices based on current research are being used to serve students who qualify. If the plan meets federal requirements as outlined by IDEA, the state receives federal dollars to distribute to local educational agencies (LEAs) for program use. Congress was originally authorized to appropriate up to 40% of the average per pupil expenditure of non-disabled students towards the education of students with disabilities, although the funding has usually amounted to no more than 8% to 10% (Yell et al., 1996). Rather than these federal dollars replacing state dollars, they are to supplement state dollars to help fully fund special services. This concept is known as the “nonsupplanting requirement” of IDEA and it ensures that states do not use IDEA funds to forgo their obligation to provide public educational services but rather to enhance these services for students with disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 2001, p. 329).

Under IDEA, students should be served in the least restrictive environment (US Department of Education, 2000). Gone are the days of exclusion, when students with special needs were alienated from the remaining student population by placing them in

secluded rooms (Van Reusen et al., 2000). Katsiyannis et al. (2001) suggested that the least restrictive requirement of IDEA meant that schools must offer a full continuum of services ranging from consultation for students fully included in general education classes, resource rooms, to “special classes, special schools, and hospitals and institutions” (p. 330). What constitutes the appropriate least restrictive environment has been left to be defined through local education agencies (LEA), advocates, and recent court decisions (Martin et al., 1996).

The expansion of IDEA protections to infants, toddlers, and preschool children is one of the most important amendments to the original 1975 statute (US Department of Education, 2000). With the amendments originally added in 1986, Congress officially recognized the importance of early intervention for children with special needs (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Martin et al. (1996) outlined the qualifications for a child under the age of three to receive federal support under IDEA as follows: the child must be “experiencing developmental delay in cognitive, physical, communication, social/emotional, or adaptive development,” have been “diagnosed with a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay,” or “be at risk of having developmental delays if early intervention is not provided” (p. 37). While these services must be provided, the entire burden does not fall upon the schools, but rather many agencies perhaps better suited to provide needed interventions.

Parental involvement and due process guarantees are also key elements to IDEA (Katsiyannis et al., 2001, Van Reusen et al., 2000). In order for children with disabilities to best be served, parents and guardians need to become educated in the provisions of IDEA as well as the protections afforded to them by the statute. The US Department of

Education (2000) indicated that Congress bolstered this effort to include parents by establishing Parent Training Information centers in each state. Protections provided by IDEA for parents include notice of proposed actions, attendance at meetings concerning changes in the child's IEP, and the right to appeal decisions to an impartial hearing officer (Martin et al., 1996). While some feel the due process provisions of IDEA promote an adversarial relationship between parents and school officials, Yell et al. (1998) pointed out that the 1997 amendments to IDEA provide for more non-adversarial solutions to disputes including voluntary mediation and more involvement by the parents throughout the process. Parental support is seen as crucial to the success of students with disabilities, and the IDEA scatters parental requirements throughout the law in order to secure this support as much as possible (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Bartlett et. al. (2002), noted that parental involvement is crucial because parents can "provide critical information about the child that cannot be easily obtained elsewhere, such as health history, interests, behavior outside of formal school settings, and special abilities" (p. 82).

Since the passage of IDEA in 1975, access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities has risen dramatically (Katsiyannis et al., 2001; US Department of Education, 2000). With the improvement for more students to be identified and served the IDEA amendments passed in 1997 have turned the attention not only to identification and service, but also to results. Since 1997, Individualized Education Plans (IEP) have been required to include measurable goals and results that lead to progress in reaching these goals. Students with disabilities have also been included in state and local assessments (Yell et al., 1998).

One of the cornerstones to the IDEA is the proper development of the IEP (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). According to the IDEA (1997), the team of people involved in developing an IEP for a student with disabilities should include the parents, at least one regular education teacher (if the student is to be placed in general education classes), at least one special education teacher, a representative of the LEA who is knowledgeable of the resources available, a member who can interpret implications of evaluation results (this can be one of the previous members), an advocate (at the request of the parents), and when appropriate, the child. The key components of the IEP include the student's educational needs and the services to be provided for the student (Bateman and Linden, 1998). Also included in the IEP are annual goals and appropriate educational provisions to meet these goals. While the IDEA does not specifically detail what is appropriate for each disability, the general standard for judging the appropriateness of an IEP modification is:

...whether the child's educational program is 1) related to the child's learning capacity, 2) specifically designed for the child's unique needs and not merely what is offered to others, and 3) reasonably calculated to confer educational benefit (Martin et al., 1996, p. 34)

The decision makers on whether a child's IEP meets this standard include the members of the child's IEP team and occasionally the court decisions (Katsiyannis et al., 2001; Yell et al., 1998). The US Department of Education (2000) identified that one of the main purposes of the IEP is to address how the student will access the general education curriculum.

With increases in the number of students being identified with special needs and being served through modifications, there is a dramatic increase in the demand for special education personnel. The US Department of Education (2000) reported that in 1976,

there were 331,453 special education teachers and related service personnel. In 2000, the number of special education teachers and support personnel had risen to more than 800,000 (p. 12). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2003), the demand for special education teachers will rise by more than 36% by 2010. Despite this strain on available special education teachers, the IDEA does not allow a lack of training as justification from moving a student from a general education class to a more restrictive environment. Therefore, LEAs and states agencies are to provide all teachers with necessary training to deliver appropriate services for all students (Martin et al., 1996).

The IDEA amendments in 1990 included formal provisions for transition services. Rather than just being concerned with what was happening to a student while he or she attended school, the IDEA was broadened to include what would happen after the student left the school system (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Kupper and Gutierrez (2000) pointed out that these transition services include strategies designed to promote successful transition from school to post-school activities. Some of these strategies include “post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” (p. 14). These plans begin when the child is fourteen and must be updated annually. Starting at age 16, the transition plans also must include needed transition services (US Department of Education, 2000). While the responsibility for providing these services does not rest solely with the public school, the coordination of inter-related agencies to help ensure a successful transition from school to post-school life is the responsibility of IEP team members (Katsiyannis et al., 2001).

Throughout the history of the IDEA (and formally EAHCA), Congress has included funds for research towards the best practices in educating children with special needs. The 1986 amendments included monies to found the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), which is aimed at following special education students over time to better understand transition needs. In 1990, the IDEA amendments included funds to conduct research and circulate the results with the intention to improve the outcome for students with special needs. In 1997, the IDEA was amended to approve a full appraisal of activities carried out to assist the students served (Us Department of Education, 2000). In the ceremony celebrating the signing of the 1997 Amendments, President Bill Clinton pushed for continued research as he stated, “We do not intend to rest until we have conquered the ignorance and prejudice against disabilities that disable us all” (“Remarks of President Clinton,” 1997, p. 24). Currently, the IDEA is undergoing reauthorization focusing on assessment and accountability issues (Elliot, 2003).

More Recent Court Decisions

The mandate, handed down by Congress with EAHCA and subsequent IDEA amendments, was certainly seen as a step in the right direction by special education advocates. However, the law is written in vague language and has left quite a bit to court interpretation (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Although education cases generally have declined in the 1980s and 1990s, special education cases have increased “dramatically” (Newcomer & Zirkel, 1999, p. 469). Weishaar (1997) stated that between 1978 and 1994, special education cases were the fifth most litigated topic. The IDEA is clear that all children must be provided with a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive

environment. The interpretation of what “appropriate” means and to what extent the schools must go to include a child with special needs in a general education classroom is vague. These decisions have been left up to the courts (Palmaffy, 2001). Martin et al.(1996), explained that these difficulties exist due to the diversity within the special education population, and the variety of methods used. Examining each of the over 800 federal court cases involving special education students and the IDEA since 1990 is beyond the scope of this study; however, it is prudent to look at cases involving what constitutes a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) as well as what related services must be provided by schools to include students with special needs in the general education classroom.

The first IDEA case concerning an interpretation of FAPE to go before the Supreme Court was *Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982). The essential question before the Court was to define what “appropriate” means for this case (Palmaffy, 2001). Amy Rowley was a deaf student whose modifications had included a speech therapist, tutoring, and a hearing aid. Her parents felt that this was not enough support to help Amy overcome her disability and sued the school district for a full time sign-language interpreter. The federal courts at both the district and appellate levels agreed with the parents and defined the standard of an appropriate education as one that would help a student achieve the same academic success of other students with the same “intellectual caliber” (*Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley*, 1980, p. 534). The Supreme Court reversed this decision, stating that such a standard would involve the impossible task of determining each student’s intellectual caliber, and that the range of disabilities is so wide that no single standard can apply. The court did

outline a two-part test for determining what constitutes an appropriate education. First, a school district must comply with the procedural mandates of the IDEA when evaluating a child's special needs. Second, the district must formulate an IEP that is, "reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits" (*Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley*, 1982, p. 207). In this particular case, the Supreme Court found that the school district had evaluated Amy Rowley properly and had constructed her IEP in a reasonable manner (Palmaffy, 2001). With the *Rowley* (1982) decision, the Supreme Court set the precedent of deferring judgments that involve educational theory and methodology to educators who possess specialized knowledge and expertise, rather than placing such decisions in the hands of Court Justices who lack such proficiency (Newcomer & Zirkel, 1999). The IDEA does require an IEP, but this does not mean that every conceivable modification that could possibly benefit the child must be implemented (Bartlett et al., 2002; Katsiyannis et al., 2001; Martin et al., 1996; Osborne, 1992). According to Newcomer and Zirkel (1999), the *Rowley* (1982) case put the Supreme Court in a difficult situation. Had the Court affirmed the District and Appellate Courts decisions, parents and advocates would have been given full control over what educational services are needed, and the school systems would simply have to come up with the money to pay for it. On the other hand, the *Rowley* (1982) decision was seen as a setback to the special education advocates who now felt that school systems were given the go-ahead to provide minimal services. The bottom line according to Chief Justice William Rehnquist who wrote the majority opinion in the *Rowley* (1982) decision, was that in passing the IDEA, Congress did not extend an "invitation to the courts to substitute their own notions of sound educational policy" for those of educators (p. 206).

The Supreme Court has been very hesitant to directly define what “appropriate” means and have deferred to local educational administrators, parents, and advocates. Lower courts have followed this precedent and have entered into the role of defining the “appropriateness” of a particular placement very cautiously (Bartlett et al., 2002).

Rather than clearing up questions in special education law, the *Rowley* (1982) decision set off a flurry of similar cases in the District Courts concerning questions over what constitutes an appropriate education. In most of these cases, the Courts used the *Rowley* (1982) decision to deny services to special education students that could be potentially beneficial but not compulsory according to the law (Palmaffy, 2001; Osborne, 1992). For example, in *Gregory K. v Longview School District* (1987), the Ninth Circuit Court held that even if tutoring preferred by the parents is more beneficial than the school district’s proposed placement, this does not necessarily mean the school district’s placement is inappropriate. In *Kerkam v. McKenzie* (1988), the District of Columbia’s Circuit Court ruled that even if loving parents might be able to construct a more comprehensive program than that of a child’s IEP team, it does not mean that they are entitled to such a program. On the other hand, in *Florence County School District Four v. Carter* (1993), The Supreme Court ruled that the IEP developed for a ninth grader with severe learning disabilities was not reasonably calculated to confer educational benefit. The Supreme Court held that the parents were entitled to tuition reimbursement for privately obtained educational services when the school district fails to provide FAPE and the costs of such services are reasonable.

Another question left to the courts by the IDEA is the extent to which a school must go for the inclusion of a student with special needs in a general education classroom

(Palmaffy, 2001). The least restrictive environment is defined in the IDEA (1997) as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (p. 30).

The statute is unambiguous in the goal of including special education students with the general student population; however, it is not clear as to what steps a school must go to in order to achieve this goal (Palmaffy, 2001).

The various federal districts have adopted standards of judicial review in determining what constitutes Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and whether or not a school system has complied with the inclusion requirement of the IDEA (Yell, 1998). The Fifth Circuit Court created a two-part test with its decision in *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989). In this case, Daniel, a sixth grade student with Down Syndrome, was being denied an inclusive education because the school stated that he could not perform at the same academic level as his classmates and thus would receive no benefit (Martin et al., 1996). Palmaffy (2001) added that because of Daniel's lack of communication skills and the attention required by the teacher, his presence was also determined to be negative for the other students. The parents sued the school system claiming the least restrictive environment was a general education classroom, not a self-contained class as determined by the other members of the IEP team. The case eventually went before the Fifth Circuit Court which created a two-part inquiry to settle matters of this type. The first part was to determine if a child could be given

supplementary services in order to make placement in a general education class a success.

In order to make this determination, the school district must ask the following questions:

- Has the school taken steps to provide supplementary aids and services to modify the regular education program to suit the needs of the disabled child?
- Once modifications are made, can the child receive an educational benefit from regular education?
- Will any detriment to the child result from placement in the regular classroom?
- What effect will the disabled child's presence have on the regular classroom environment and, thus, on the education the other students are receiving (Martin, et al., 1996, p. 35)?

The second part of the test handed down in *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989) is that if school authorities do remove a child from a general education class, they must show that the child has been mainstreamed to the maximum level possible (Yell, 1998). In the *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989) decision, the Court stated that the IDEA regulations did not amount to an "all-or-nothing educational system in which children with disabilities attend either regular or special education. Rather, the Act and its regulations require schools to offer a continuum of services" (p. 1098). While the Court ruled against Daniel in this case, advocates saw this as ruling in favor of inclusion in general because it forced school districts to make serious efforts to include all students in the general education population (Palmaffy, 2001).

The Ninth Circuit Court established its own test in *Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education v. Rachel H.* (1994). In this case, the Court's standard for appropriate placement is based on four factors: the benefits to the special needs child in the regular classroom, the non-academic benefits of interaction with peers, the effect of the disabled child on the teacher and other students, and the cost of mainstreaming (Martin et al., 1996; Weishaar, 1997).

In 1997, the Fourth Circuit Court adopted a slightly different standard with the ruling in *Hartmann v. Loudoun County*. In this case, the court stated that while the LRE mandate of the IDEA was preferable, it was not inflexible. According to the Court, three situations exist where a school district might not mainstream a child. The first was if the child will receive no educational benefit from inclusion. The second situation was if the benefits of a non-inclusive setting outweigh the benefits of inclusion. The third condition where mainstreaming may not be required is if the child is a disruptive force (Yell, 1998).

In *Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills* (1997), the Sixth Circuit Court upheld a school's determination that the least restrictive environment for a 14-year old girl with moderate to severe mental retardation was in a special education class emphasizing life skills as opposed to a general education class. The rationale given by the school and affirmed by the Court is that the appropriate education for this student is to prepare her to function as an independent woman in society. Although socialization with her non-disabled peers was seen as important, in the Court's opinion, this did not outweigh the benefit the student was receiving in a more restrictive environment.

Because no one-size-fits-all standard exists concerning compliance with the IDEA, the Courts have exercised judicial review on a case-by-case basis (Palmaffy, 2001). The complexities of working with students covered by the IDEA are intensified by the wide range of students covered, different perceptions of best practices, and the countervailing interests of students enrolled in the general education curriculum (Katsiyannis et al., 2001).

Barriers

Given the complexities inherent in dealing with individuals with disabilities and their unique challenges, there is no universal approach that can be applied to make every situation successful (Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000). However, research has been done on general barriers and facilitators to successful inclusion (e.g. O'Shea, 1999; Pivik, McComas, & LeFlamme, 2002; Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000). Pivik et al. summarized the barriers to successful inclusion as environmental barriers, intentional attitudinal barriers, and unintentional attitudinal barriers.

Environmental barriers to the incorporation of students with disabilities in a general education class include architectural and access problems that prevent or inhibit students with disabilities from attending or participating with the general education population (Pivik et al., 2002). According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States, as defined in section 7(6), shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

In general, public schools have addressed environmental barriers to providing all students with equal access to educational opportunities by modifying existing architecture and ensuring all new construction meets with federal guidelines (Pivik et al., 2002).

While changing the physical environment to a school to provide equal access to all students takes time and is expensive, a more challenging endeavor is to change the intentional and unintentional attitudes that some people have against students with disabilities. In a study conducted by Pivik et al. (2002), students with disabilities

identified the most common intentional attitudinal barrier was “emotional bullying” by their non-disabled peers (p. 102). Most teachers see this as a classroom management issue and would take actions against any form of bullying whether it involves students with disabilities or not.

Because they are not overt, the unintentional attitudinal barriers to students with disabilities being successfully included in the general educational setting may be the most resistant to change and the most discouraging to students with disabilities (Pivik et al., 2002). Students often congregate with those they feel most comfortable with and while not intentionally excluding those with disabilities, non-disabled students are likely to conduct themselves in a way that leads to *de facto* segregation from their peers with disabilities (O’Shea, 1999). Sadly, this unintentional attitudinal prejudice by people against students with disabilities is not limited to their classmates. In a study conducted by Giangreco et al. (1993), many general education teachers identified that their initial reaction to having students with disabilities in their classrooms was negative. While most of these attitudes changed as positive experiences during the year ensued, students with disabilities often face initial resistance from even their own teachers who from either a lack of experience and/or training, have built in prejudices about students with disabilities.

Facilitators

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) identified six factors that contribute to the success of inclusive education: visionary leadership,

collaboration, refocused use of assessment, support for staff and students, parental involvement, and effective instructional practices.

In order for inclusion to be successful, all stakeholders must be involved in the process and take responsibility for the outcome (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). D'Alanzo et al. (1997) found that “support and positive attitudes may be critical to the success of inclusion” (p. 12). Key to garnering this support is giving those all involved a voice in the inclusion process. According to IDEA (1997) section 614, the IEP team consists of the student, parents, special education teachers, a representative of the local education agency, advocates, and at least one general education teacher. By nature of the law, all stakeholders are at least required to be present, but to make each an active participant takes leadership. This leadership may come from a variety of sources, but it is clear that someone needs to direct the placement of students with disabilities in general education classes in such a way that all who are impacted by decisions made by the IEP team need to play a role in making these decisions (Lipsky & Gartner). Bartlett et al. (2002) explained that when a child with disabilities is to be included in the general educational classroom, not only is the attendance of a general education teacher required, their active participation in the process is crucial. However, Viadya and Zaslavsky (2000) identified that sometimes a general education teacher's role in an IEP team meeting amounts to signing off on whatever the rest of the team has decided and not really taking part in making decisions or fully accepting the responsibility of the decisions. This is not as much as a problem with the law but with the lack of visionary leadership on these IEP teams.

Along with visionary leadership, successful inclusion is fostered with collaboration between general education teachers, special education teachers, and the IEP team (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). In order for this to happen, all parties must be given time to meet and plan (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). In a study conducted by Klingner, Ahwee, Pilonieta, and Menendez (2003), when general education teachers were asked to identify the barriers to successful inclusion, the most common response was a lack of time to collaborate with their peers. O'Shea (1999) identified common planning times with special education teachers and general education teachers as one of the keys to making inclusion work. One of the recommendations offered by Bartlett et al. (2002) to help make the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom a success is to afford common planning time for general educators along with special educators.

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) identified a refocused use of assessment as another key to the success of inclusion. Lipsky and Gartner (1998) stated that schools must move toward more authentic assessments when evaluating students as opposed to traditional accountability tests. This seems to contradict current accountability movements and may help to explain the general reluctance that some educational professionals have with current mandates in the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: A Technical Assistance Resource, 2003). Many general education teachers feel compelled by high-stakes assessments to teach the test as opposed to applying authentic curriculum-based assessments (Klingner et al., 2003).

Support for staff and students is imperative for the success of inclusion (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). Pivik et al. (2002) stated that sensitivity and awareness training could be used to ameliorate negative attitudes among students and adults alike. O'Shea (1999) outlined the importance of in-service training for staff members to first increase awareness of disabilities and then move on toward acceptance and techniques that can be used to deal with the challenges inclusion presents. Sapon-Shevin (1996) wrote, "The kinds of creative, multi-level instruction and assessment necessitated by full inclusion make it imperative that teachers be given adequate time to think and plan together" (p. 36). Vaidya and Zaslavsky (2000) noted that while on-going training is important, a philosophical change in the preparation of pre-service teachers is needed where prospective teachers receive "opportunities to develop adequate knowledge, teaching skills, and positive attitudes concerning special education students" (p. 146). In the study conducted by D'Alanzo et al. (1997), when general education teachers were asked to identify barriers to inclusion the most common response was the lack of training and on-going support. The success of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education class "depends on ongoing and consistent planning and preparation" (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998, p. 46). In order to provide this kind of support, schools must allocate resources to meet these goals.

Parental involvement is another factor that contributes to the success of inclusive practices (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). O'Shea (1999) stated:

The necessary shifts in instructional practice require support beyond the classroom and schoolhouse walls. Frequent meetings with families are essential. When the teacher is modifying assessment and instructional activities, parental input on the student's strengths, interests, and preferences is invaluable. The presence of family members in school

should be part of inclusive efforts, whether or not their participation is specified by the special education mandate (p. 179).

When highlighting successful inclusion programs, O'Shea and O'Shea (1998) identified that the family had to be involved to prevent student failure.

O'Shea (1999) stated that perhaps the most important element to finding success with inclusion is improved methods for dealing with diversity in the classroom. While there is not one method that works universally for dealing with the challenges inclusion brings, there are some research based practices that when applied, help to bring about success (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). Zigmond and Baker (1996) defined successful inclusion as consisting of two dependant strategies: compensation and remediation. Compensation occurs when teachers "adapt learning environments" to make up for individual deficiencies (p. 28). Remediation occurs when teachers "direct or focused instruction in skills and strategies that would enable them (students with disabilities) to cope with the mainstreamed curriculum" (p. 28). It is not uncommon for general education teachers to modify and adapt classroom assignments to tap into their student's particular strengths and address their weaknesses so that all students have the opportunity to achieve success. Viadya and Zaslavsky (2000) stated that the teacher's tasks in an inclusive situation are nearly identical. While the goals stated in a student's IEP may be a bit different from the general education student's goals, the process of modifying assignments to play to the student's strengths and compensate for weaknesses is the same.

General Educator's Perceptions Regarding Inclusive Practices

Snyder (1999) wrote, "The inclusion movement has primarily been a special education movement" (p. 174). The changes that have taken place regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom have occurred primarily without consulting one of the groups most affected: the general education teacher. General educators are certainly impacted as a result of these changes, yet have remained relatively silent (or have not been consulted) regarding their perceptions and recommendations concerning the practice of incorporating students with special needs in general education classes (D'Alanzo et al., 1997).

Several phenomena have converged to make incorporating students with disabilities in general education classrooms an exigent task. First, a greater number of students with disabilities are being included in more and more classes. When PL 94-142 was passed in 1975, many students with disabilities were integrated in classes like physical education and vocational classes where they could keep up without making major modifications. Today, with legislative changes, court decisions, and paradigm shifts, most students with disabilities have real access to the general education curriculum (Schumaker, et al. 2002). While there is still debate over the efficacy of inclusion, the fact is that it is more prevalent today than 20 years ago and this adds to the challenges faced by general education teachers (Snyder, 1999).

Many of the students who are now included in the general education setting are missing the needed skills for success. Regardless of whether these deficiencies are the result of past teaching mistakes, a lack of teacher training, or real differences between the potential of individual students, general educators often do not feel equipped to handle

the responsibility of dealing with such diverse needs (Shumaker et al., 2002). In a study conducted by Schumm et al. (1995), secondary general education teachers indicated that they feel their job is content specific and that the job of remediation is up to the special education or resource teachers. In this same study, general education teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of in-service activities regarding the inclusion of special education students.

Adding to the challenges faced by general education teachers regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in general education classes are the increased curriculum standards and nation-wide accountability requirements (Shumaker et al., 2002). Many teachers, both special educators and general educators alike, are concerned about the ramifications of including the scores of special education students in reports based on statewide accountability tests (Albrecht & Joles, 2003). Many teachers have been moving toward using authentic assessments to determine student achievement as opposed to traditional pencil and paper tests. At the same time, advocates pushing for increased accountability in public schools have pushed for high-stakes tests. While the debate continues on the most appropriate action to measure what is taking place in classrooms, teachers fear the inclusion of students who have traditionally not been required to participate in standardized assessments will reflect poorly on their performance and will fail to take into account the gains that have really been accomplished (Gartner & Lipsky, 1998).

While few disagree on the challenges faced by general education teachers regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in their classes, there seems to be no consensus on the attitudes and perceptions general educators hold regarding this

practice. In a study conducted by Zigmond and Baker (1996), secondary general education teachers were observed compensating for student disabilities but not remediating for deficiencies. In that study, the researchers found that if modifications were being made, they were made for the whole class rather than the individual student as mandated by the IEP. While students with disabilities were given individual attention, they were not given individual instruction. The teachers examined in this study reported that they lacked the training, time, and/or ability to modify assignments for individual students and that while the goals of inclusion were sound, the results were that the curriculum for all students was modified and diminished. In a separate study conducted by King and Young (2003), much different results were discovered. Teachers in this study reported that they were “committed to inclusion” (p.6), and that the practiced benefited not only the special education students but also the general education students. This variance of findings with similar qualitative studies is not inconsistent with the diversity of how terminology is used from one school to the next, and the disparity in commitment schools have toward inclusive practices. It does suggest, however, that more studies should be done to give general educators a voice into what is taking place in their classrooms.

Summary

Although advocates, parents, politicians, and judges mold educational policies concerning students with disabilities, noticeably absent are the special education and general education teachers, who are greatly impacted and have a clear stake in forming these policies (Kavale & Forness, 2000). This absence of teacher perceptions on

inclusion practices presents a gap in current literature and warrants further consideration (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Hirth & Valesky, 1989; Pizzuro, 2001). The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions regarding their beliefs about incorporating students with disabilities in their classrooms, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the methods and procedures that were used to investigate general education teacher perceptions regarding their beliefs about inclusion, the efficacy of inclusion, and facilitators and barriers to successful inclusion.

Design of Study

Patton (1990) defined phenomenological research as that which, “seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon” for a person or group (p. 482). Rather than observe occurrences from the outside looking in, a phenomenological study seeks to uncover meanings from within the participant’s point of view (Creswell, 1998). Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) pointed out that unlike quantitative research where the inquirer was attempting to detach him or herself from that which was being studied for fear of tainting the study with bias, phenomenological studies called for the inquirer to become part of the study to better understand how subjects understand the phenomenon as they experience it. One way to discover a person’s perspective concerning a particular phenomenon is through in-depth interviewing (Patton).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the greatest advantage of in-depth interviewing was that the respondent was allowed to re-enact the past, understand the present, and forecast the future. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) defined in-depth interviewing

as personal encounters with the intention of discovering the perceptions of subject's life experiences. Rather than following a rigid interview guide, the inquirer is a tool used to uncover the subject's view of an experience in his or her own words. Lincoln and Guba (1985) categorized interviews three ways: the structure of the interview, the degree of overtness of the interview, and the quality of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

A structured interview is one in which the issues are defined by the inquirer prior to the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An unstructured interview is appropriate when, "the problem of interest is expected to arise from the respondent's reaction to the broad issues raised by the inquirer" (p. 268). For this study, the broad issue is the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom. Rather than categorizing expected experiences beforehand, an unstructured format was used to allow themes to emerge. An interview guide (See Appendix A) was developed to elicit responses focusing on the topic at hand, while still allowing the participants to tell their stories in an unobtrusive manner (McCracken, 1988).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that for the purposes of research, all interviews must be overt. Data collected from participants who do not know they are being interviewed is inherently suspect and violates ethical behavior. A researcher who needs this type of information would best be served by another method of data collection. The interviews in this study were overt. Subjects were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B) explaining the interview purpose prior to the interview taking place.

The quality of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is another category of interviews made by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In one instance, the relationship is a hostile interview, where the inquirer and the subject are adversaries. In a limited survey interview, there is no relationship between the inquirer and the subject except to record answers. In a rapport interview, the inquirer is “a human being in a role” (p. 269). The asymmetrical-trust interview involves the inquirer taking the role of the expert while the subject is a subordinate. In a depth interview, the inquirer and subject are peers. Finally, a phenomenal interview is one in which both the inquirer and the subject are “caring companions committed to an empathetic search” (p. 269). For the purposes of this study, I approached the interviews as somewhere between depth and phenomenal in nature.

Selection of Participants

My goal in selecting participants was not to find a representative sample, but rather a purposeful sample seeking maximum variation based on personal experience. Patton (1990) defined maximum variation sampling as heterogeneity, or intentionally selecting subjects who are suspected to be dissimilar. The goal was to create a matrix to select a sample whereby each subject is as different from the others as possible. Gall et al. (1996) suggested the strategy of maximum variation sampling serves two purposes: first, it helps to document the range of variation between subjects who serve in different settings, and second, it helps to identify “themes, patterns, and outcomes” that are prevalent across lines of variation (p. 233). The qualifications that were used to select participants were based on my own theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1990)

defined theoretical sensitivity as “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (p. 42). Teachers from all backgrounds may have similar perceptions of the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in general education classes, the efficacy of this practice, and the facilitators and barriers to successful to this practice; but rather than sampling teachers who are all similar in terms of setting, experience, and subject, a purposeful sample was used to select a wider variety of teachers. The intent in the selection was not to analyze which subjects found inclusion most successful, but rather to select a sample of teachers who cross suspected lines of differentiation. These lines of differentiation defined by my own experiences were the size of the school setting, the experience of the teacher, and the subject matter taught.

The first qualification for selecting participants was the size of the school setting. While research was not uncovered suggesting the size of the school and the relation to the effectiveness of special education students being included in the general education classroom, it stands to reason that larger schools will have a greater resource pool and more options available for special education students. Smaller schools, on the other hand, might produce an environment where all students and teachers know each other, and thus could contribute to the efficacy of inclusion. Because of these suspected variances, I selected five schools in four different school systems to draw interview subjects. Two of these schools were larger schools (1,300 students or more), one was a medium school (800 to 1299 students enrolled), and two were smaller school settings (fewer than 799 students enrolled).

Another criterion for selecting participants was the number of years of experience they have been in teaching in a high school. Again, no research was uncovered suggesting that there is a relationship between the number of years of experience and the perceptions of inclusion, but it is my suspicion that a teacher with one to three years experience may view the phenomenon differently than a teacher with 3 to 23 years experience. Likewise, the newer teachers and the more experienced teachers may perceive the situation differently from a teacher with more than twenty years experience. Because of this suspicion, I selected participants who ranged from 1 year of experience to 35-years of experience.

Another possible variation in teacher perceptions regarding inclusion was the subject matter taught. My suspicion was that teachers of the more content-driven subjects might have a different view of inclusion from those who teach subjects that are more open to interpretation. Based on my personal experience, I categorized the content taught in math and science as being less flexible than English literature, social studies, and foreign language. With even more flexibility are the courses in fine arts, physical education, and vocational training. This was not to suggest that all teachers of math and science are rigid in methodology, but that the subject matter is more concrete and less open to interpretation and thus modification. Subjects that are more liberal and open to interpretation may include more flexibility regarding perceptions of the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom.

Based on the traits described above, I selected participants from different sites representing the small, medium, and large school settings. These participants represented

a wide range of subjects taught from the more concrete to the more flexible. Participants were also selected based on their years of experience.

Development of Interview Schedule

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), four items must be addressed before implementation of a study: making initial contact, negotiating for permission from the parties involved, building rapport with participants, and determining and using subjects. Initial permission to conduct the study was requested of building principals (See Appendix C). Once subjects were identified, arrangements were made to briefly explain the purpose of the study, sign consent forms, and conduct the interviews. It was key to establish and maintain rapport with the participants due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topics discussed. Participants were given written and verbal assurances that the interviews were conducted and reported with complete confidentiality.

Data Collection and Treatment

Interviews were tape-recorded and the transcripts typed verbatim. For each interview, a reflection log was kept to attempt to record the non-verbal cues and verbal inflections, which cannot be recorded with written transcripts. Transcripts from the interviews were coded using QSR NUD.IST 4. Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), incidents were classified into teacher perceptions regarding incorporating students with disabilities in their classroom, the efficacy of this practice, facilitators to successful inclusion, and barriers to this practice. Within each of these

categories, sub-categories emerged. The categories were then examined holistically to avoid repetition and to develop emerging themes.

Ethical Considerations

The topic of the interviews would not be expected to cause any psychological, physical, or emotional damage to the participants; however, there still are ethical considerations to be made. A response by a participant might suggest that his or her classroom management techniques do not always comply with federal or state laws concerning the treatment of special education students included in the general education curriculum. The purpose of this study was not to seek out those who fail to meet federal or state guidelines for purposes of incriminating them, but rather to examine the phenomenon of inclusion from the perspective of general education teachers, even if they were not meeting the legal requirements outlined in the student's IEP. Rather than causing harm to the education profession, my hope was that themes might emerge from this study to enable educators and administrators to be more successful in serving the needs of all students.

All participants were professional teachers who signed informed consent forms prior to interviews. Because multiple participants were selected from different sites encompassing different school systems, it is reasonable that confidentiality will be protected. No descriptive terms were used other than gender, courses taught, and the size school where the participant was employed. No sites were disclosed other than a general location of upper East Tennessee. Pseudonyms were used to help protect the identity of the interview participants.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

In order to be meaningful, the data collected through a qualitative research must be trustworthy (Gall et al., 1996). In order to establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four constructs that must be present: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

To establish credibility, a researcher needs to address the believability of the findings (Creswell, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the use of triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking as tools to help establish credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba, triangulation refers to using multiple sources in order to obtain data. Peer debriefing involves using a “disinterested peer” to examine data to see if he or she comes to the same conclusions as the researcher (p. 308). This helps to keep the researcher honest, exposes new angles or thoughts about the research, and serves as a catharsis for the researcher. Member checking entails engaging the participants in a discussion of themes, interpretations, and conclusions made by the researcher. For the purposes of this study, all three of these techniques were used to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Patton (1990) defined transferability as how applicable a study is to similar situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated the use of thick description in order to provide a database where transferability judgments were possible. Gall et al. (1996) addressed transferability through purposeful sampling and use of rich description. While the applicability of the findings of this study to other situations would be up to those who wish to make such a determination, the use of purposeful sampling and thick description augment this possibility.

Dependability addresses the stability of the findings. This involves making sure the findings are not one-time events but rather are representative of the phenomena that occur regularly (Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of an inquiry audit to examine the process by which data are analyzed, the use of thick description, and triangulation to establish dependability. All three of these techniques were used in this study.

Confirmability is an attempt to make sure the researcher's bias is not interfering with the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 1998). While it is virtually impossible for a researcher to shed all opinions about outcomes of a particular study, it is important that the data, rather than the researcher's bias, drive the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed confirmability through the use of an audit trail, which an independent auditor would examine the raw data and induce findings. Because of my experience with special education students in my general education classes, I have developed opinions concerning the phenomenon of inclusion. With phenomenological research, the inquirer has in-depth knowledge of the subject and is seen as a participant in the phenomenon rather than as an outsider (Patton, 1990). While my experience with the phenomenon is an asset in this sense, I used an independent auditor (see Appendix E) who examined the data and confirmed the emerging themes and findings of the research.

Summary

Chapter 3 contained an overview of the research methodology for this study. This inquest involved interviewing general education teachers at five different secondary school locations in order to better understand their perceptions of inclusion in their

classrooms. The teachers chosen for this study were purposely selected in an effort to achieve maximum variation in terms of school size, years of experience, and subjects taught. The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the practice of inclusion in these schools but rather to better understand the practice through the perspective of a general education teacher. Transcripts from the interviews were coded and analyzed using constant comparative method. Data were organized into four categories: beliefs about inclusion, the efficacy of inclusion, facilitators to successful inclusion, and barriers to successful inclusion. Within each category, subcategories emerged and themes were developed. The information was examined holistically to better understand the phenomenon of inclusion in the general education classroom.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to examine general education teacher perceptions regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. Snyder (1999) concluded that reforms regarding students with disabilities who have been included in the general curriculum have taken place for the most part without the consultation or involvement of general educators. This study was intended to provide general educators with the opportunity to provide this missing voice.

As designed, this study involved collecting data by open-ended interviews with 22 general educators from five high school settings. Participants were purposely sampled in an effort to gain maximum variation in terms of school setting, years of experience, and subject matter taught. The intent in the selection was not to analyze which participants find inclusion most successful, but rather to select a sample of teachers who cross the suspected lines of differentiation. Written permission was obtained from principals before the research participants were contacted regarding their possible interest in participating in the study. Research participants signed informed consent documents indicating their willingness to contribute to the study and right to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Transcripts from the interviews were coded using QSR NUD.IST 4 and categorized initially into teacher perceptions regarding incorporating students with disabilities in their classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to

this practice. As themes emerged, subcategories were created to analyze the data in a meaningful way.

Introduction to Participants

Pseudonyms were given to give each of the 22 participants in this study in order to ensure confidentiality. The participants of this study were all teachers in secondary schools located within a 50-mile radius of Johnson City, Tennessee. Table 1 is a summary of information regarding participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information Concerning Research Participants

Name	Gender	School Size	Subject	Years of Experience
Anderson	Female	Medium	English	24
Bowling	Male	Medium	Science	22
Carson	Female	Medium	Math	32
Deal	Female	Medium	Art/Photography	20
Erwin	Female	Medium	Science	2
Franklin	Female	Medium	Computer	5
Gregg	Female	Small	Math	7
Harris	Male	Small	Math	5
Ingle	Female	Small	English	13
Jenkins	Male	Small	Science	4
King	Female	Small	English	9
Lawrence	Female	Large	Math	23
May	Female	Large	English	15
Norris	Female	Large	Spanish	20
Olan	Male	Large	Math	35
Peters	Female	Large	Science	21
Quarrels	Female	Large	Math	12
Roberts	Male	Small	English	8
Smith	Male	Small	Social Studies	25
Turner	Male	Medium	Social Studies	13
Utley	Male	Medium	Social Studies	11
Vetoe	Male	Small	Social Studies	1

Ms. Anderson is a female English teacher in a medium school setting. She had 24 years of teaching experience ranging from sixth graders to seniors. At the time of the interview, Ms. Anderson was teaching ninth grade basic English. She indicated that most of her students were not going to college, and the focus of the class was to “prepare for the Gateway test” and teach basic rules of grammar. Approximately 20% of Ms. Anderson’s students had IEPs with disabilities ranging from “mild to severe.”

Mr. Bowling is a male science teacher in a medium school setting. At the time of the interview, Mr. Bowling was teaching biology, biology for technology, physical science and life science to grades 9 through 12. He had 22 years of teaching experience. The students Mr. Bowling taught ranged from a “second grade reading level to college level.” Mr. Bowling stated that at least half of his life science students had IEPs.

Ms. Carson is a female math teacher in a medium school setting. She had 32 years of teaching experience ranging from 7th grade to 12th grade math. At the time of the interview, Ms. Carson was teaching Algebra I and vocational math courses, which she had been doing since 1983. She reported that her teaching style included some demonstration but mostly consisted of hands-on practice. About half of her vocational math students had IEPs, while her Algebra classes had one or two students with IEPs.

Ms. Deal is a female Art/Photography teacher in a medium school setting. She had taught for 20 years in the same school. At the time of the interview, her students ranged from 9th grade to 12th grade. She stated that she had 2 or 3 students with disabilities in each class, but that her instruction techniques were already so individualized that it was “hard to remember which ones have IEPs.”

Ms. Erwin is a female science teacher in a medium school setting. She had taught chemistry for two years. At the time of the interview, Ms. Erwin stated that she had only a few students with disabilities in her two years of experience as most of the students with IEPs, “go the physical science route” as opposed to chemistry. When asked about her teaching style, she reported that she used lecture as well as group lab experiments.

Ms. Franklin is a female computer teacher in a medium school setting. She had taught the same subject for her five-year career. She reported that approximately 75% of her students were planning to go to college and that she has three to five students with IEPs in any given class. Because much of the instruction in Ms. Franklin’s class is self-paced and individualized, she indicated that she “rarely thinks about student’s IEPs until it comes to grade time” at which point she may “make adjustments as needed.” She stated that she often abbreviated assignments for students who were having trouble whether they had an IEP or not.

Ms. Gregg is a female math teacher in a small school setting. She had taught basic math to the “lowest ability-level students” for seven years. She described her teaching methods as “guided practice” which allowed her to teach to each student at their level “whether they have a disability or not.” Ms. Gregg stated that she had 8 to 10 students with IEPs in each class.

Mr. Harris is a male math teacher in a small school setting. At the time of the interview, he was teaching Geometry and Foundations II and Statistics to students in grades 9 through 12. He had 5 years of teaching experience. He stated that he had a “few” students with IEPs in his classes.

Ms. Ingle is a female English teacher in a small school setting. At the time of the interview she was teaching 11th and 12th grade English. She had 13 years of teaching experience. She reported that she only had two or three students with IEPs in her classes. She also reported that she was used by the Special Education Department as a mentor to other teachers on how to make modifications for students with disabilities in general education classes.

Mr. Jenkins is a male science teacher in a small school setting. He had 4 years teaching experience. At the time of the interview, he was teaching ecology to students from grades 10 to 12. He stated that approximately 15% of his students were planning to go to college and that approximately 50% of his students had IEPs. He reported using hands-on teaching techniques and demonstrations, as “it is hard to lecture to people that have a hard time reading.”

Ms. King is a female English teacher in a small school setting. She had taught ninth grade English for nine years. At the time of the interview, she stated that much of her class time is used as preparation for the Gateway English test. Ms. King reported that about half of her basic classes had IEPs, but they all “need special one-on-one attention.” She commented with excitement that “all but three of my most basic class passed the Gateway” English standardized test. In her more advanced classes, she stated she had a few students with disabilities.

Ms. Lawrence is a math teacher in a large school setting. At the time of the interview, she was teaching in a special at-risk program for 23 ninth graders, “who were identified with lower reading scores from eighth grade, so they can have a small learning community.” She had taught for 23 years, six of which were spent in an alternative

school setting. This was her first year teaching in the smaller “at-risk” classroom setting. She reported that 5 of the 23 students had IEPs, but “they all need special attention.” She considered her classroom to be an “inclusive setting” where it would be very difficult to differentiate between those who have IEP modifications and those who do not.

Ms. May is a female English teacher in a large school setting. She had 15 years teaching experience. She was teamed up with Ms. Lawrence for the small “at risk” setting where she taught the English portion. Ms. Lawrence also has her masters degree in special education although she has strictly taught English for the last nine years. She stated that the “school-within-a-school” setting was beneficial for the “at-risk” students because it allowed the teachers to work together and follow the students in a smaller environment.

Ms. Norris is a female Spanish teacher in a large school setting. At the time of the interview, she was teaching Spanish I and Spanish II to students from 10th grade to 12th grade. She had 20 years of experience, 10 of which were at a junior high setting while the remaining 10 were at her current position. She reported that she had 2 or 3 students with IEPs in each of her classes.

Mr. Olan is a male math teacher in a large school setting. At the time of the interview, he was teaching geometry and informal geometry to 10th grade students. Mr. Olan had 35 years experience teaching and has taught students from grades 7 to 12th grade. He reported that he had 2 or 3 students with IEPs in each of his classes.

Ms. Peters is a female science teacher in a large school setting with 21 years of teaching experience. She began teaching in 1971, “took some time off to raise the kids,” and has been back in the classroom since 1988. At the time of the interview, she was

teaching biology and advanced placement biology. She reported that she had no students with IEPs in her advanced placement classes but had 6 students with IEPs in her 2 regular biology classes.

Ms. Quarrels is a female math teacher in a large school setting. At the time of the interview, she had 12 years teaching experience and was teaching honors geometry and Foundations II. She reported that she uses a “traditional approach mixed in with cooperative learning activities” to teach her classes. She had 9 students with IEPs.

Mr. Roberts is a male English teacher in a small school setting. At the time of the interview, he was teaching 10th grade English and had 12 students with IEPs. He has 8 years of experience, 6 in his current setting. Mr. Roberts reported that he uses discussion, lecture, video, and group work as teaching methods.

Mr. Smith is a male social studies teacher in a small school setting. He has 25 years of experience and was teaching sociology to 11th and 12th graders and ancient history to 10th graders. He had 4 students with IEPs at the time of the interview, although most years he usually had “around 10 or so.” Mr. Smith commented that he uses a traditional approach to education with lecture and small group activities as his primary teaching methods.

Mr. Turner is a male social studies teacher in a medium school setting. At the time of the interview, he was teaching US Government and advanced placement government to 12th graders. He reported to have 5 or 6 IEP students this term, while he had 8 IEP students the previous term. He described his teaching techniques as “a little bit of everything” with a mix of lecture, video, small group projects, and discussions. He had been teaching for 13 years.

Mr. Utley is a male social studies teacher in a medium school setting. At the time of the interview, he was teaching US History to 11th graders and economics and government to 12th graders. He had 11 years of experience. He reported that he had an average of “two or three” IEP students in each class.

Mr. Vetoe is a male social studies teacher in a small school setting. He was in his first year teaching US History to 11th graders and ancient history to 10th graders. He reported having 8 students with IEPs. He commented that he has a traditional approach to teaching history with lecture, video, and discussion as his main teaching tools. He also reported that along with multiple-choice assessments, he used essays often to develop students writing skills in the context of a history class.

Perceptions

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) defined in-depth interviewing as personal encounters with the intention of discovering the perceptions of subject’s life experiences. Creswell (1998) differentiated phenomenological research from other research methods as one that seeks to define experiences from the participant’s point of view. The data collected by the interviews from this study should be considered only to represent the views of the subjects included in this study. The research questions addressed by the interviews conducted for this study were designed to discover the life experiences the subjects had with the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in their general education classes. Although respondents may have had perceptions regarding the overall practice of inclusion on a large scale, the primary focus of our conversations centered on their experiences within their classrooms. Subjects were purposefully sampled in an effort to

gain maximum variation in terms of school size, years of experience, and subject taught. Despite these general differences, five themes emerged regarding the interviewees' perceptions of the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. While there were a few outlying responses and opinions, it is interesting to note the similarity of perceptions given the diversity of the interview subjects. First, respondents indicated that they were typically unaware of special education terminology. Second, respondents expressed that they were excluded from the special education process. Third, respondents perceived special education as a top-down mandate. Fourth, respondents viewed IEPs as loose guidelines, rather than rigid, inflexible documents. Fifth, respondents indicated that they believed too many students were categorized as having a disability.

General Educators Were Typically Unaware of Special Education Terminology

Rogers (1993) defined mainstreaming as the “selective placement” of students with disabilities in general education classrooms contingent on the student’s ability to keep up with the rest of the class (p. 4). The term “inclusion” is much more difficult to characterize because it has never been defined by federal statutes or regulations (Bartlett et al., 2002). To some, inclusion means the commitment to educate students with disabilities in the classrooms they would otherwise attend if it were not for the disability. This involves bringing support to the student and offering him or her a continuum of services ranging from self-contained classes, to occasional pull-out, to mere consultation (Ferguson, 2000). The term “full inclusion” suggests that supports are already in place to accommodate students with disabilities in the general education classroom full time

(Bartlett et al., 2002). While the debate between mainstreaming, partial inclusion, and full inclusion continues among special education experts (Bartlett et al. 2002; Douvanis & Husley, 2002; Villa & Thousand, 2003), many general educators seem unaware that there is a difference, let alone a debate (Kavale & Forness, 2002). The interview subjects in this study supported this finding, with the exception of Ms. May, who has a master's degree in special education and supported the notion of full inclusion. Despite the school setting, number of years of experience, and subject matter taught, the most typical response when asked to define the difference between mainstreaming, inclusion, and full inclusion was "I don't know," or "I didn't know there was a difference." Ms. Ingle responded:

I don't know. I guess "mainstreaming" is sort of a 90's word, while "inclusion" is for this decade. Probably next year we will get a new term, but I see them all the same. It means a child with disabilities is going to be in your class, and "here is what we are going to do with them," I guess.

Ms. Norris had a similar response, when she laughed:

There's a difference? I always thought it was just the "buzz-word" of the day. You know, first it was mainstreaming; now it's inclusion, or "full-inclusion" as you said, next it will be something else. I think it is just the word, or term of the day, probably made up by some special ed. expert to sell a book.

Even teachers who had recently completed their college degrees were unable to distinguish between the terms. Ms. Erwin, who had finished college two years prior, said:

If I remember correctly, mainstreaming is the idea that special education students should be involved with the general education population in terms of things like PE and lunch. Inclusion is more for the academic classes. I don't know if we ever talked about full inclusion, but we might have, it seems like a long time ago.

Mr. Veto, who had just graduated with his master's degree in education one year earlier, responded:

I think that those terms are “ed-speak” for all the same basic idea. It means that there is a student who has been classified with some disability is going to be included in a general education class, you know, with an IEP and support from special education.

Mr. Bowling also identified these terms as being identical:

You know, I have been teaching a long time, many of those years with special ed. students included in my classroom. The terminology swings back in forth like a pendulum. It all means about the same thing.

Throughout the interviews, respondents consistently used special education terminology interchangeably, even though special education experts use the terminology to have a specific meaning.

General Educators Were Excluded from Special Education Process

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was that respondents expressed that they are excluded from the special education process. No one interviewed stated that they were a vital part of the IEP meetings or even a necessary participant, with the exception of Ms. Lawrence and Ms. May, who both teach in an at-risk program in the same school. Ms Lawrence stated that, although she played a role in her student's IEP meetings, general educators and the parents of general education students were generally excluded from the process:

I think the parents of general ed. students and the general ed. teachers are the missing ingredients in special education. Those two groups are unaware of what goes on behind the closed doors. If they were aware, I bet you would see some changes.

I followed up and asked Ms. Lawrence to explain what she meant by “behind closed doors.” She responded:

I mean what really goes on in an IEP meeting. Most teachers have never attended one, and if they do, they just wait their time to sign the paper. I don’t think they have seen the negotiations or have been brought on board with the goals of special education. I know the general education parents have never been to a meeting.

I asked her what the goals of special education were, and she said:

There is a push for inclusion of all special education students, doing away with the self-contained resource rooms and pull-out programs. I bet most general education teachers are not even aware that is going on, and if they were, I bet most would be resistant.

I asked her if she was resistant, and she followed up with:

You know, I teach at-risk kids, but I still see myself as a math teacher. Yes, I want to teach all students where they are and help them overcome their various situations, but bottom line, I am a math teacher. I’m not sure I would be on board, or even be able to handle all disabilities.

I asked Ms. Norris to discuss her role in the IEP meetings she had attended, and she said, “I was a rubber stamp to agree with whatever they had already decided.” Later concerning her role in the IEP process she added, “I’m just not necessarily an important part of the equation” and “I’m more of an afterthought.” I asked her how she felt about being excluded from this process, and she stated, “It is frustrating in the sense that I am expected to put the plan into place, but I was not really part of developing (the plan).” I asked her what her input had been into changes in special education laws in her 20-year teaching career. She laughed:

I read about it in the paper, or I am told by the administration what modifications have occurred. As to how much input I have had? I would have to say none. I am told what has happened rather than asked to incorporate my expertise into making changes.

When Ms. Quarrels was asked to comment on how she saw her role in the special education process, she stated:

Unfortunately, there is a disconnect that takes place. I don't know if it is because we (general education teachers) are uninterested or if that our input is not wanted, or needed, but I definitely feel uninvolved in the process. I just wait for the special education assistants to bring the modification sheets by, and here we go again.

Mr. Olan recounted a similar experience:

Sometimes, I have been told, "We need at least one regular education teacher," you know, so I guess my presence there was just as a political figure. I would say about 75% of the time I am just a rubber stamp.

Occasionally, general education teachers were invited to IEP meetings for students they do not even have in their general education classes. I asked Ms. Ingle if she had participated in IEP meetings in her 13-year teaching career:

Yes, but it was usually because they wanted a general educator's signature. I usually come into the meeting, sign the paper, and leave. I feel like it is just fulfilling an obligation on the special education department's part. The last meeting I was called to, was not even for one of my students. They just needed a signature.

Mr. Smith was also invited to IEP meetings for a student who was not in his class:

The last IEP meeting I went to was not even for one of my students. They just had to have a signature. But, to be honest, that is usually my input at any IEP meeting. Sign it, file it, move on...

I asked him what he meant by "file it," and he responded, "I put it in a file and generally forget about it." Mr. Jenkins had the following to say when I asked him about his role in

IEP meetings:

It is kind of like driving through McDonalds to get a cheeseburger. You just go in and you're supposed to say, "Yes, I agree to this," and, "We agree to do that" and we hear, "This is what you are going to do," and everybody agrees and you go on. If you disagree, you will agree before the meeting is over...

I asked Mr. Jenkins what he meant that he would “agree before the meeting is over.” He laughed, “Because the meeting isn’t over until you agree. So you sign off and move on.” Ms. Peters admitted, “I am not really even sure what all the paperwork from an IEP meeting means. I just sign it and go teach.” Ms. May, who personally took an active role in attending and monitoring her student’s IEPs, agreed, “The general education teacher normally does not take an active role, or even understand all that is involved, with IEPs.”

Given the common response that general educators were excluded from the special education process, I wanted to follow-up by asking respondents why this was the case. The responses given were very similar given the diversity of the subjects. Mr. Harris and Mr. Jenkins both had identical responses when asked why general education teachers were excluded from the process: “The decisions have already been made.” In a follow-up interview, Ms. Carson suggested that general educators were excluded from the special education process because “the meeting takes place before the meeting.” When I asked her to clarify, she nearly echoed Mr. Harris and Mr. Jenkins when she said, “The decisions were made by the parents and the special ed. department before I step into the room.” Mr. Utley noted that general educators were excluded because, “I doubt many modifications would be made if it were up to us.” Mr. Smith explained, “I don’t have time to get into the files of every student with disabilities.” Ms. Peters expressed that the exclusion of general educators from the special education process was due to a lack of expertise:

I am not sure I would feel qualified to set an appropriate course for a disabled student. The meetings are typically held before I know the student and their limitations, so I am not so sure my input would be that helpful. I also do not understand a lot of disabilities.

Ms. Quarrels agreed with this notion when she said, “I don’t really feel qualified to say too much.”

General Educators Typically Viewed Special Education as a Top-Down Mandate

Closely related to teachers being excluded from the special education process is the view that special education rules and regulations are handed down by a superior.

When asked about her perceptions of special education rules and regulations, Ms. Ingle stated:

I think it is handed to us. It is more “here is what you have to do,” than a team effort. Even special education teachers complain “Oh no, they have handed us more rules!” or “Now we have even more paperwork!” That all trickles down to every teacher. If the special ed. teachers are given more rules, we are given more rules.

I asked Ms. Ingle who she thought “handed the rules” to the special education teachers, and she responded, “I guess someone at the state, and I think it is federal as well.” Mr. Olan identified the author of special education regulations as, “some bureaucrat in some office, totally disconnected to what is going on in the real world.” Ms. Peters taught from 1971 until 1976. She took a sabbatical from teaching for 12 years to raise her children, and then returned to the classroom in 1988. I asked her what changes she had seen in terms of special education laws given those two eras. She responded:

I’ll be honest with you, I don’t remember if I had any special education kids back in the 70’s. My guess is that I probably didn’t. My guess is that those children were in self-contained classes. What appears to me, in the 15 years or so since I have been back in the field, is that there seems to be a great deal of rules and regulations. There seems to be a great deal of mandates of what can and can’t be done. There seems to be a lot of litigation from people who feel their students are not being served properly. I also think it has put teachers, in some cases, having to teach students for which they have not been trained. They have mandated the

mainstreaming of kids, but some teachers are still not able to do that yet. Some are not willing. I am willing, but certainly not qualified.

I asked her who made these changes and who “They” are, and she said, “Someone from the state department in conjunction with lawyers and the federal government.” I asked Ms. Deal who made the decisions regarding special education. She laughed, “Somebody higher up than me.” Ms. Lawrence recounted an incident when a student with severe disabilities was to be incorporated in her general education math class:

We were told that she would be in our classroom. We did not meet to make the initial decision; we were told she would be included. It was like, “Here is what is going to happen, so be prepared!”

I asked her who “told” her this was going to be the case, and she said, “The special education department and the administration, with the parents and lawyers right behind them.” According to Ms. Lawrence, despite the teachers of this child expressing that they felt it was an inappropriate placement, the decision was handed to them:

And, you know, her other teachers were concerned too and we did meet with the parents quite often. These parents were very much their daughter's advocates, which they should be, and they were very much "you will do this," and our hands were pretty much tied, even though as professionals, we didn't think this was an appropriate placement for her. But, in the end, the parents felt like that it was the appropriate placement and the school administration, or whoever made those decisions, agreed with them and that's what happened. It was handed to us, no debate.

Ms. Anderson stated that she had gotten used to decisions being handed to her in her 24 years of teaching experience. She laughed, “I just take whatever the administration throws at me.” Mr. Veto expressed his view this way:

Well, particularly as a non-tenured teacher, you pretty much have to do what you are told when it comes to special ed. modifications. The administration, advocates, and parents pretty much have a lock on the whole process. I think they are the ones making the decisions, we just get to take it, say “yes, sir,” and move on.

I asked Mr. Vetoe to elaborate on his view of special education decisions being handed to the teachers. He stated:

The school principally cares about special education out of a fear of lawsuits or government punishment. Administrators also tend to treat general educators like children themselves, and make little effort to include them in important decision making on any subject, so special education is not unique in this. On the other side of the coin, most general educators do not have the training or interest in special education, and view it as a burden upon them, limiting their authority over those students who have strong potential despite their problems, and saddling them with problem students in cases of students whose disabilities are so great they cannot truly be taught at the level of their age-group peers. Administrators make no effort to include general educators, and general educators make no effort to be included, in part because they know their positions are not likely to be considered.

The notion that decisions concerning special education students and modifications were handed down from a superior without room for discussion was a common finding throughout the 22 interviews and follow-up questions conducted in this study.

General Educators Viewed the IEP as a Loose Guideline

The general education teachers interviewed commonly thought of the IEP as a loose guideline rather than a rigid, inflexible document. Most teachers expressed that they exercised common sense when making modifications for their special education students. They also generally expressed that the IEP was not to be strictly interpreted. In each of the 22 interviews, I asked respondents what would happen if they had a student with an IEP modification that, in their judgment was not needed. Every respondent expressed that the hypothetical situation I asked about had occurred in their experience. With the exception of Mr. Harris, Mr. Vetoe, and Ms. May, every respondent replied in a

like manner: they would use professional judgment when implementing IEP modifications.

The outlying responses were noteworthy because they represented such different views. Mr. Harris first acknowledged that he had encountered situations where IEP modifications did not match with the student's ability "many times." When asked to focus on one situation where this occurred, he explained, "I had a student who had 'abbreviated assignments' as a modification, even though it was clear to me she could do the work." I asked Mr. Harris to clarify why he thought the modification was inappropriate. He stated, "I would assign every other problem; she would finish them and then goof off. She could do the work, she was just lazy." I asked him how he handled this situation and he responded:

Well, I do what the IEP says, give them less practice, but I don't agree with that. Basically, I just do what I am told. I am not going to lose my job because I pushed a student harder than their IEP says I should, even if it is wrong.

I asked him if this was a common occurrence, and he said, "Yes, it happens all the time." I followed up by asking him how this made him feel, he appeared frustrated and said, "I feel it defeats the purpose of education." Mr. Vetoe agreed, "As a non-tenured teacher, I just do what I am told to do and try to not make any waves."

When I posed the question to Ms. May, my own inexperience with special education was exposed. I asked her if she had a student who had, in her judgment, unnecessary modifications on his or her IEP, would she make the modifications as prescribed or use her professional judgment and common sense on making needed modifications for the student. Ms May looked at me with shock and responded, "I wouldn't do either one!" I asked her to explain her answer. She responded:

I would write the special education teacher and get the parents in for an IEP meeting. I would explain what I observe, and what I see so much of the time is a pattern of learned helplessness, and let's break the pattern! You know, let's go two answers this week, expect three answers in two weeks, and go the whole full-fledged thing in maybe four weeks. But, I would call a meeting, and sometimes that's a headache, but that is really the only way to handle the situation. You can't change the required modifications on your own, and you can't ignore the student's individual needs.

At that point, I realized that I had been posing the question incorrectly. I went back and checked with the previous respondents, by asking if, given the situation, would they call an IEP meeting, and every answer was "No," or "Probably not." When I asked the question in subsequent interviews, I left it as an open-ended scenario as opposed to an "either/or" question. None of the remaining respondents stated that they would call an IEP meeting. When I asked Ms. Quarrels why she would not call a meeting, she responded, "Can we do that? I didn't even know that was an option." Other interview subjects indicated that either they would not have thought of calling an IEP meeting, or they did not realize they had the power to call one.

The most common response to the scenario when a student with disabilities had modifications on his or her IEP that were deemed unnecessary by the teacher was that the IEP was intended to be a loose guideline, not a rigid document. Ms. Ingle stated that when she encountered a situation as described, she used her professional judgment. When a student confronted Ms. Ingle with having "abbreviated assignments" and "modified tests" which had not been used because "I knew she could do it (without the modifications)," Ms Ingle remarked:

That is when the relationship with the student is so important. I sat down with her and said "Why don't you go one step further?" and I really showed her that I believed she could do the work without the

modifications, and she was successful. Now, other times I have had to back off, but that time it worked.

Mr. Olan recounted an experience he had with a student who had mild to moderate disabilities and had “modified assignments, abbreviated tests, pull-out, extended time...the whole works” as modifications but yet showed he was able to complete the work without modifications. I asked Mr. Olan if he modified for that student, and he responded, “I didn’t have to. He was so far ahead of the ‘regular’ students; it didn’t make sense to make any modifications. He made a legitimate ‘A’ in the class!” Ms. Erwin recalled a student who had “oral testing” on her IEP, but “her mother said ‘no one’s ever tried that’ and the student didn’t feel much like doing that, so I didn’t implement that modification.” Ms. Gregg stated that she did not adhere to the IEP modifications if the student showed he or she was capable of completing work, because “I generally know what a student can do. I’m not going to let them get by on less than they can do.” Ms. King explained that she rarely modified assignments or tests but might take a student’s IEP into consideration when grading:

I just think if a student is capable of completing work without modifications, I am not going to hold them back. What does it say to a student’s confidence if I tell them I only expect half of the work from them? It tells them I think they are not capable of the work. I tell them, “Let’s not modify your assignments, you’ll do the same work as everybody, and if your grade falls short, we may change it.” Otherwise I show them that I don’t think they are capable. Sometimes all they need is confidence.

Later, Ms. King added:

I hold everyone to the same standard, because if I modified for the whole class, someone at the high level might get lazy. My goal is to bring the special ed. students up to where the other ones are, and take the whole class higher than they already are. If I expected less, I would get less, and that would be sad.

I asked Ms. King if she ever worried about not making the modifications written in a student's IEP, and she responded, "No, because if they need it, I will go back and do it."

Ms. Norris said she might make modifications on an IEP, but "only after I see what they can do." I asked her to explain, and she said:

I want to see if the modifications are needed or not before I implement them, so I first try with no modifications. If they can do it, then I hold them accountable like everyone else. If they need assistance, I give them support, but you have to see what they can do first.

I later asked Ms. Norris if she had ever modified a test. She responded, "No, I feel like my tests are good measurements of how a student is doing, and I don't want to take a half-measurement." I asked her what she did with the IEPs that called for modified tests. She stated, "I put them in a drawer and refer to them as needed." Ms. Carson admitted that she does not "pay too much attention to an IEP." When I asked her to explain, she said:

I don't think they are going to tell me too much on a piece of paper (an IEP) that I can't figure out using a little common sense. Teaching is just using your common sense. I mean, your common sense, if you've got some, tells you the right thing to do in any particular situation.

Ms. Franklin admitted she did not know where her student's IEPs were but used progress reports sent out by the special education teachers and to keep up with her students with disabilities. Mr. Bowling said he looked at all the IEPs for students with disabilities in each class, and then made "group modifications." He explained:

I have a hard time implementing to the individual because each IEP may be a little bit different from the other ones. Now, what I aim to do is look at all of the modifications, and then, I guess it's me being lazy as a teacher, but I implement them for the whole class. The students that I have that are not special ed. are usually just one or two points away, so I just modify for everyone. I look at the IEPs as a guide, a suggestion on how I can reach these kids. I abbreviate my assignments, because that's

one modification that is almost always checked. I modify my grading scale. I basically do what I can to help all of my students.

Later, Mr. Bowling explained how he understood the purpose of IEPs:

I think basically the purpose of an IEP is to reassure the kid that people are trying to help them. I think it reassures parents that we are straight-forward with them in how we are going to attempt to help their children. I also think it gives the teacher some insight as to what they need to do to try and reach these kids. I don't think the IEP, to be honest with you, should be a chiseled in stone document because I think teachers are professional enough, at least I think I am, to look at an IEP and then look at the individual and see if they match up. I think we then can make adjustments as necessary.

Mr. Jenkins also stated that rather than modifying on an individual basis, he modifies for the whole class:

I might have 40% with IEPs. Some of them say they can use a textbook on their tests. If that is the case, I let everyone use a textbook. I am not going to single a kid out by saying, "Okay, it's time for the test; all of you special ed. kids get your books out." So I let them all do it. I use the IEPs of the class to dictate how I teach them and test them.

Ms. Lawrence said that an IEP made her more aware of making modifications, but that with an at-risk class, "I pretty much already do anything that would be checked on an IEP." She laughed, "I guess I don't pay too much attention to them (IEPs). I just use my common sense." Mr. Utley recalled an experience he had with a student whose IEP called for copies of the notes:

I had one of my really advanced students take notes from class and I photocopied them for this student. Eventually what happened is that the student with disabilities would try to sleep during my lectures while she was taking notes for him. After about the third time I found the copies of the notes that had been made for him on the floor, I said, "That's it! You are on your own." From that day on, he was responsible for taking and keeping up with his own notes.

I asked Mr. Utley if it concerned him to not fulfill part of that student's IEP, and he said, "No, because he showed me he could do it when I held his feet to the fire." Mr. Roberts summarized the view this way:

I guess I modify if my attention is brought to it, but I see the IEP as a summary checklist. It is usually so non-specific that it is not very helpful. Most IEP sheets have about the same six modifications checked, so they are not that helpful. What is helpful is to get to know the kids and what they can and can not do.

General Educators Stated that Too Many Students Were Identified

Although less prevalent a response as the previous four, the perception that too many students were identified as needing special education services was another theme that emerged from the interviews. When asked about changes in special education the interview subjects had seen in their teaching careers, several respondents commented that there were many more students identified as needing services. Mr. Harris conceded that, "maybe some of the increase in the numbers of kids who are labeled 'special ed.' could be due to better diagnostic tests." He still stated that, "I see a lot of students who are given a special education label for reasons other than learning disabilities." When I asked him to explain, he said:

I know there are some legitimate behavioral problems, but some of these students just need someone to be firm with them. All of these kids with behavioral disorders? I don't buy it. In many cases, it is just discipline that needs to be addressed and not a chemical imbalance of the child.

Ms. Ingle expressed fear that some students were labeled as special education by the parents for alternative reasons:

I have actually heard a parent tell me, "Well, my child has to be special ed. or we can't get the check." Now what's the check? It is a government check that they can supposedly get because their child made certain scores

on a test. They actually want, even encourage their child to be included as a special ed. student!

Ms. Franklin stated that some students desire to be labeled as a special education student to lower expectations:

There are a lot of students who have an IEP who don't need one. It may be, and I don't know, this is my own opinion, but maybe they just didn't want to do well in reading, or on a test. It could be that they just don't want to do the work, and they see an easier way.

Ms. Harris noted that she knew of students who were classified as special education students so they could stay eligible for athletic teams:

Now you won't hear about this, but I know that there are some students who are labeled special ed. and given IEPs so they can make the grades needed to be a part of different sports teams. Now I won't say which ones, but it happens at this school. It happens at every school. Coaches or parents will actually get a kid labeled special ed. so there will be an easier grading scale.

Mr. Smith concurred that too many students were labeled as special education students:

Back when I started teaching 25 years ago, there were only a handful of students identified as special ed. Now it seems the number is growing. I don't think that is because we are having more incidents of disabilities, I think it is because we have more and more people who feel entitled for someone to compensate for their weaknesses. I'm sorry, but some, not all, of my special ed. students are just kids who lacked discipline and focus when they were younger and mom and dad are now having to compensate by getting extra assistance.

Ms. May agreed that early intervention is a key to lowering the numbers of children who are in need of special education services:

I feel very strongly that the intervention and the experiences have to come earlier in elementary school. I also believe too many kids are labeled special education...I have very strong feelings. I believe that all children have different needs. I have my own set of disabilities. Everybody has their own set of disabilities. If we simply took all people as individuals and treated them that way, and taught them according to their strengths and their weaknesses, we would be better off. Many come from special ed. certified to not being special ed. certified because of stringent,

rigorous, very compassionate programs. We need to see the special ed. numbers come down, not continue upward.

Efficacy

The second research question addressed in this study was the general educator's perceptions on the efficacy of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The purpose with this question was not to evaluate, or make judgments about a particular teacher or particular school's treatment of students with disabilities, but rather to collect information about the effectiveness of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom from the teacher's perspective. Throughout the interviews, I found the teachers neither felt that the practice was completely effective or completely ineffective but rather was successful or not successful on a case-by-case basis. In analyzing the data from the interviews, responses were categorized into two emergent themes: intended results of the practice and unintended consequences from the practice.

Intended Results

Every teacher interviewed agreed that the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom has at least some benefits for the student with disabilities and the general education population. While the conversations and follow-up discussions I had with the teachers tended to focus more on the unintended consequences with this practice than the benefits, teachers agreed that incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom was more effective than excluding these students from access to educational resources. The intended results

uncovered during the interviews conducted for this study can be grouped into individual success stories and the benefits to general education students.

Individual Success. Every teacher interviewed was able to recall several incidents where a student with disabilities found success in the general education classroom. Many of the success stories centered on the student gaining confidence from individual achievements. Ms. Deal recalled an incident when a “low-functioning” student had been incorporated into her art class:

At first I thought to myself, “I don’t know how this is going to work,” because she was so much lower, ability wise than the rest of my class. She had a full-time assistant, and probably had the mental capacity of a first grader. She started out very withdrawn from the rest of the class. When we got her going with some projects, however, she started gaining confidence, and I think, really having fun. She was so proud when we included her pictures and projects in our student art gallery. I think that was one of my best experiences (with a student with disabilities).

Mr. Bowling recounted a similar incident with a student who had moderate disabilities and was included in his physical science class. When Mr. Bowling made a writing assignment requiring his students to write down their observations of a candle, it became apparent that the student was unable to write a basic sentence. Mr. Bowling continued to explain how he intervened and the success that ensued:

I told him "now, Henry (pseudonym for the student), we're in science class," but I said, "We're going to improve in English. It'll be our objective in this class to not only learn some scientific principles but to learn how to write and how to spell and how to put words together and how to express ourselves with the written word," and you know, I think just spending some extra time with Henry and helping him with his spelling, and, most science teachers don't correct spelling on a lab report or something like that, but, I did for Henry. I mean, I taught him English in science class, and he got English in his English class also, but I corrected the papers and I'd do the commas and all of those things, and I think it really helped him to realize that what he learned in English was important in science and what he learned in science was connected in other classes. He needed that connection, and that confidence that he

could do it. Now, Henry is on track to graduate. That's one challenge, and I guess that particular incident got me into the idea that I could help kids with disadvantages.

Ms. King agreed that success comes when her students with disabilities gain confidence.

She recalled an incident when one of her moderately disabled students found success:

I have a young girl in my English class who had previously always been in a special ed. class, you know, the resource room...self-contained. She came into my class scared to death; you could see it on her face. Gradually, however, she started realizing she could keep up with the rest of the class. We just got her Gateway scores (standardized exit exam) and not only did she pass, but she had one of the top scores in the whole class! I was so proud of her! She now says she can't wait until tenth grade English.

Ms. Carson suggested that some of her students with disabilities succeed because the

“IEP gives us some flexibility.” I asked her to explain, and she commented:

You know, all kids do not learn the same way. You can't always test them the same way. I think the IEP students can sometimes be more successful because we are more open to test them where they are. If a kid has trouble with reading and processing information that way, the tests are oral. If they need extended time to work out problems, we can do that. The students that I have with disabilities who are successful are those who might just do things a bit different and benefit from the different options the IEP provides. Instead of trying to cram a square peg in a round hole, the IEP let's us evaluate them as squares (laughs).

According to Ms. May, her success stories are the students who are able to learn to compensate for their disabilities and become less dependent on special services. In a follow-up interview she said:

I have many success stories. The best ones are those who break the cycle of learned helplessness. When they are in my class, they do not like me much because I don't let them get by with less than their best. The purpose of an IEP is to level the playing field, not guarantee a free pass. Many of the students who are classified as special education students come in expecting a free pass. Instead, I guide them in how to be successful at overcoming challenges in front of them. My success stories are the ones who, after they graduate, come back and say “Thanks for making me do it. Thanks for holding my feet to the fire.”

Mr. Olan laughed that the students with disabilities who are successful in his math classes are the “ones that I forget that they are special ed. They learn to compensate and have a strong work ethic.”

Benefits to General Education Students. Another common theme that emerged regarding the intended results of incorporating students with disabilities in general education classrooms was the benefit to the general education population. The teachers interviewed agreed that teaching students with disabilities in their classes adds to the diversity of the classroom. This diversity was generally noted as positive because, as Ms. Peters said, “We all benefit from gaining experiences from people who are not just like us.” Ms. Anderson agreed with this notion:

I think it is a positive thing for the general education population to be in the same classes with handicapped students, you know, students with disabilities. It gives them an appreciation that people are all different and have different challenges, it helps them to be more sensitive to those differences, and it helps them appreciate the blessings they have.

Ms. Ingle also expressed that having students with disabilities in her English class benefited the general education students by adding to their compassion:

I think having special education kids in my classes is positive because it helps add to my general education students’ sensitivity that the world is full of people, and not everybody is the same. They also get to know students who previously may have been in self-contained classes. I have seen many friendships develop as special education students get acclimated to the classroom. It is a neat thing.

Mr. Roberts stated, “Having special ed. students included in your class does add flavor to things,” and “that is generally positive to expose students to new experiences, on both ends.”

Besides broadening general education students' experiences with people who may have different challenges and needs than they do, several teachers noted the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom might bring resources and teaching methods that benefit the entire class. Ms. Deal recalled an incident when she attended a special education conference to help her understand how to better assist a moderately disabled girl who had been incorporated in her art class:

I went to the conference to gain some insight on how I could help her (the girl with disabilities). I came back from the conference with not only some ideas that I could use to help her, but also some "best practices" that could be used to assist all my students.

I asked her what the "best practices" were, and she responded, "different techniques to present material and some authentic evaluation material, things that help me with both students with disabilities and with general ed. kids." Mr. Roberts agreed that having students with disabilities in his English class had prompted him to think about creative ways to present material:

One of the real benefits (of having students with disabilities incorporated in general education classes) is that it makes you think. You have to think about how you say things and present things. It also helps me think of new ways to evaluate students instead of just using pencil and paper tests. I think those benefits spill over to the whole class. It makes me a better, more effective teacher, I think.

Ms. Erwin suggested that having students with disabilities in her chemistry class benefits the general education population because it made her slow down her lecture style and spend more time reviewing concepts. She stated:

I think it benefits everyone to slow down a bit. Some of my students don't have IEPs, but need to go a bit slower. A lot of times, they need more practice anyway. In chemistry, we do a lot of math, so, in the past, when I would have just spent one day doing conversions, I might spend two days. Or, I might give more activities on it instead of just assuming they can do

it from doing one or two problems. I think the additional practice benefits everybody.

Mr. Olan concurred with the notion that having a “diverse” class in terms of “needs and abilities” has benefited all of his students by making him “a better teacher, more sensitive to all of their needs.” Ms. Lawrence noted that not only does it help her to be more sensitive to all of her students needs, many times having students with disabilities grants her access to educational assistants who can help the entire class:

It is a tremendous benefit to have an extra set of hands, and an extra set of eyes, when I have an EA (educational assistant). We have some tremendous EAs who just jump right in and when they see someone needs their help, they just do it. I feel that the entire class definitely benefits from this resource. I know I do!

Ms. King summarized the benefits to the aggregate student population of having students with disabilities incorporated in general education classes:

You know, the world is not segregated, “you people over here and you people over there.” We are all together. I think it is a benefit for students with disabilities to be included in general education classes for their own achievement, and learning how to overcome their disability. I think it is a benefit to the regular, the general education population, in that they learn to deal with diverse situations and people that may be different. And, I think it is a benefit to the teachers. It helps us be more sensitive and to treat our students as individual people rather than just a class of robots.

Unintended Consequences

Throughout the interviews and subsequent follow-up questions, the responses to questions concerning the positive intended results of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom could be categorized as pensive and thoughtful. I observed in a majority of the interviews, when the conversation would turn to the unintended consequences of incorporating students with disabilities, the teachers

interviewed would sit up, lean forward, and speak more rapidly. While it would be dangerous to take this general observation as definitive proof that general education teachers are an excluded voice, and that they are passionate about wanting to address the challenges associated with incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, it was a significant observation that could not be represented by a mere transcription of the words used. The responses that addressed the unintended consequences of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom could be categorized into four sub-headings: the practice resulted in some students with disabilities receiving poor training for the future, the opportunity cost of students with disabilities being incorporated in general education classes was that some miss out on learning much-needed life skills, modifying assignments and tests interfered with the learning process, and the practice might have brought harm to the general education population.

Poor Preparation for the Future. The most common negative connotation uncovered in the 22 interviews and follow-up conversations was that the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom resulted in poor preparation for the future. Ms. Deal, despite noting the positive aspects concerning the practice, also expressed the negative:

They know that they're not going to get into trouble. I've actually heard kids say, "I'm special ed. and they can't touch me." They're very much aware of it. In many cases, they have learned to work the system. Some of the special ed. students believe they can't really get in trouble, and they won't fail. You know the sad part? We taught them this. We created a monster because of the lowered expectations on the IEP.

When I asked her to reconcile this negative comment with the positive comments, she laughed, "I guess every situation is different. I like to see the silver lining, but I can not

ignore the cloud!” Ms. Gregg commented that she rarely abbreviated assignments, even if it was explicitly stated on the IEP. When I confronted her regarding this omission, she responded:

I know it’s probably not legal, but if I expect less from a kid, do you know what I will get? I will get less. How does that help them? What does that teach them about the future?

I asked Ms. Gregg to answer her rhetorical questions, and she said, “It teaches them that you can get by in life by doing less. That is not a lesson we should teach, in my opinion.”

Mr. Harris noted that while there are good intentions behind making modifications for students with disabilities, some students take advantage of the system:

I think we sometimes lower expectations for our IEP students, and some of them begin to realize this and work the system, you know, just like welfare for some people. It becomes a crutch and robs them of the incentive to work hard. That makes it tough on people when they leave high school and try and enter the real world. The real world doesn’t modify.

Mr. Olan suggested an ulterior motive for offering modifications for students with disabilities when he said, “In my general opinion, sometimes the IEP is just a setup in order to have a student pass almost irregardless of their effort.” I asked him to elaborate, and he responded:

Many times, I feel like the grade is taking priority over how much is learned. We seem more interested in helping a student get a passing grade than learning the material. I think we are looking for a way to move students on, get them to graduate. The material is what it is. As long as Johnny (not a specific student) satisfies the goals of his IEP, we don’t really seem to be concerned that he did not learn math. I’m afraid many special education students with IEPs graduate with decent grades, but may have learned very little.

Later, when referring to a specific student with mild to moderate disabilities, Mr. Olan recounted:

I feel like somewhere; parents, teachers, or someone, has made so many exceptions for him (the student with disabilities) it is almost as though he expects the extra mile. He has become dependant on us. My question is, what happens to him when he graduates? When he goes into the workforce, will there always be exceptions? Is he going to be allowed to do half of the work and get the same pay? I don't think so.

Every teacher interviewed expressed that teaching students with disabilities to succeed despite their disabilities was more effective than teaching them that the standards set for them would be something less than their non-disabled peers. Every teacher also agreed that, too many times the IEPs are written in a way that standards are lowered. Ms. Carson stated that lowering standards for students with disabilities fails to teach them an important life-lesson:

I think sometimes that these kids (students with disabilities) have to learn that life is tough. We don't have IEPs in the real world. I think some of these students do not have a real grasp of reality, if they have continuously been in special ed., because some of them think they can fail and just go on anyway.

Mr. Roberts agreed:

I sometimes wonder what the lesson is that we are teaching when we make modifications for the mildly, and even the moderately disabled. I had one student with disabilities, and was informed that if she didn't succeed, we would "have trouble with her advocates." I was told that her advocates "wanted to give her the world!" I thought that was kind of funny; because, the way I see it, nobody really gives you anything in life, you have to earn it. At least I did. That is what I was taught, and that is what we are failing to teach a lot of these kids with IEPs.

Students Miss Out on Needed Skills. Not only did teachers express that students with disabilities included in general education classes often learned inappropriate lessons by teachers making modifications for them, but some students with disabilities also missed out on the opportunity to learn more appropriate skills. Mr. Uteley stated he felt

frustrated when he had a student with disabilities incorporated in his economics class who would be better served by learning life skills:

It bothers me when I have some special ed. students, you know, I mean low functioning, more severely disabled, who need to be learning how to balance their checkbook, how to use a credit card, open a bank account, and things like that, and here I am trying to teach them about elasticity of demand and economic theory. The gains of being included in my class are offset by the missed opportunity to learn skills that will be more useful to that student.

I asked him if it were possible to do both. Mr. Utley responded:

I have a curriculum that I have to teach for my class, to prepare them for college. Most of my students, even some with IEPs, that is appropriate. Those who are never going to college, it is not appropriate. Some should be in a different class preparing for their lives. They miss out on that.

Mr. Roberts stated that the incorporation of students with severe disabilities was evidence that the people who made the decision for that child to be in the class were “out of touch” with what was really needed:

I can think of two specific incidents when severely disabled students were put in my class. Both very similar, both were way below their grade level. Instead of learning life skills, I was supposed to teach them poetry. Does that make any sense to you?

Ms. Lawrence expressed that the incorporation of a girl who was severely disabled in her at-risk math class was not only challenging for her as a teacher but also that she failed to meet the girl’s special needs:

Not only did I fail to teach her math, I was also unable to teach her much of anything. She could have been learning how to buy things at the store, how to have a conversation, how to take care of herself. Instead, we butted heads over math problems. But the parent’s were adamant, so I “taught” her math.

Modifying Assignments and Tests Interferes with Learning Process. Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that some modifications on IEPs were contradictory to the educational process. Teachers interviewed commonly noted that abbreviated assignments and modified testing were frequently checked on their students with disabilities' IEPs. While some teachers like Mr. Harris and Mr. Vetoe indicated they reluctantly abbreviated assignments and modified tests, most respondents stated that they ignored those modifications. Mr. Smith made the following statement:

I try to follow IEPs as much as possible. Some of the modifications, however, are ridiculous so I just ignore them. For example, I have a couple of students now who have "modified tests" checked. When I asked the special ed. teacher what this meant, she told me, for example, give my multiple choice tests with two answer choices instead of four. First of all, I think that doesn't do a very good job evaluating the material. Second of all, can you imagine the time it would take to make up "special" versions of every test? No way. I just put that one in a drawer. I do let the special ed. kids take the test home with them, now that makes sense.

Mr. Olan commented that abbreviating assignments defeated the purpose of giving the student practice problems:

In math, I give homework for practice. Does it make any sense to give someone who already has trouble less practice? You simply cannot leave out part of what you are doing. Concepts build on each other and students learn from reinforcement. I'll be honest; I don't think I have ever abbreviated a homework assignment.

Ms. Quarrels, who also taught math, agreed with this notion:

I feel like, whether it is math, or golf, or basketball, you have got to practice to get better. If you were not very good at making free throws, for whatever reason, would it make sense to practice that less? Math is the same way. I might give a student with disabilities more time, but I don't think I have ever given less practice problems.

Later, Ms. Quarrels continued with this idea, “Math is progression. If you miss the foundation, you cannot continue.” Ms. Peters recounted an incident when she had a student with mild disabilities who had abbreviated assignments as part of his IEP:

To be honest, I don’t give him an abbreviated assignment. I think I have the responsibility to challenge my kids as much as I can. This student that I am talking about, he doesn’t do squat in my class and I think he uses his IEP as an excuse to do less work. So, I do not abbreviate his assignments any more. I do not know how abbreviating assignments is supposed to help him anyway. We assign stuff to help kids learn, why would we want them to learn an abbreviated amount?

Ms. King also stated that she does not abbreviate assignments or modify tests:

Some questions cannot be left out. The students may need to know that information, especially when teaching literature. They need to know what the theme is, what the plot is, characterization, mood, atmosphere, and everything like that. If they miss a part, they will miss it all. So I assign them all the questions, for homework and tests, and then look at their answers. If they get the main point, even if it is not well written, then they will get credit.

The notion that information is cumulative and missing any part of that knowledge would hinder a student’s ability to comprehend the overall concept was a common complaint.

Ms. Norris indicated that she did not modify either tests or assignments for most of her students with disabilities, even if directly stated on their IEPs. When I asked her reasoning, Ms. Norris stated:

First of all, in Spanish, about half of the assignments and tests are oral. It would be virtually impossible to hold a student with disabilities accountable for only part of it. But it goes deeper than that. Learning is a cumulative thing. My tests are designed to measure that. If they are missing part of the material, I need to know that so I can re-teach. I can’t do that if I don’t measure it.

Harm to General Education Students. Another fear commonly expressed by the teachers interviewed concerning the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in

the general education classroom is the impact the practice has on the general education students. Ms. Carson felt that over the years, the practice had contributed to a general deterioration of the quantity and quality of information students were required to learn:

I think the general ed. population has been left out of the picture. I think we've filtered and watered down what we do. I used to teach eighth grade math. The first year I started out in eighth grade, the math book I used then, my high school students could not do it. Kids used to work harder. I think we have watered down our expectations just because everybody is afraid of being sued. I don't think that is right.

I asked her if there might be other factors than just the practice of incorporating students with IEPs in her classes that could have contributed to this phenomenon. She responded, "I am sure it is a whole host of things, but lowering what we expect by these IEPs, I think that has contributed to it, if not led the way." Later in the interview, Ms. Carson expressed more of her feelings on the topic of how the incorporation of students with disabilities might harm the educational opportunities of her general education students:

In all honesty, I think it (the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom), hampers the class a lot of times. If you have a lot of special education students in a class, you have to slow down your pace to accommodate them. This hurts the class as a whole.

Ms. Carson also questioned the amount of money spent on special education as a detriment to the general education population:

I'm afraid we use so much of our resources on special education. I am not saying there is not some benefit, I just think if parents of general education kids knew the amount of time and money spent on special education, they might be upset. I just wonder if it is the best investment. If we invest that much money on special education kids, shouldn't we also invest that much on the others?

Referring to a situation when a student with severe disabilities was incorporated in her math class, Ms. Lawrence stated:

I felt like I had two strikes. I wasn't meeting her (the student with disabilities) needs, and in the meantime, I concentrated so much on her, I wasn't really effective with the rest of the class. She was also a detriment because her behavior was so poor that the rest of the class's behavior became poor.

Ms. Lawrence said that she talked to the student with disabilities parents about the situation. She recalled:

They said they did not care about the other 19 kids in the classroom; all they cared about was their daughter. I understood their perspective, but I told them I had 20 kids I cared about and was not meeting the needs of any of them. They did not respond to that.

Ms. Lawrence went on to discuss her view that the parents of general education students are often not aware of the impact special needs children have on the rest of the class:

I am afraid the parents of general education students don't really have a clue how many resources and how much time is spent with special needs kids. I understand how it happens. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and mom and dad of general ed. student are not squeaking. I am not saying we should dismantle the special ed. program, I am an at-risk teacher with many special needs kids in my class, I am just saying that until general education parents, and teachers for that matter, get a voice, the education of the special needs child will always be one way, the parent of that child's way.

Facilitators

During the course of each interview, subjects were asked to recall a critical incident where the incorporation of a student was particularly successful and an incident where it was less successful in their view. I found that subjects gave much more elaborate descriptions of the unsuccessful incidents than the successful ones. Interview subjects were also much more inclined to identify the barriers to success rather than the facilitators of success. In a follow-up interview, I asked Mr. Utley if he could confirm and perhaps offer an explanation of this phenomenon:

I definitely agree. It is easier to recall situations where things don't seem to work because when you have a special ed. student and it does work, it goes unnoticed. Sometimes, I will have a student with mild, or even moderate disabilities, and I forget about it. They just blend in with the class.

I asked him if this means he might forget to make modifications prescribed on the student's IEP, and Mr. Utley responded:

It is not that I forget, but more that they are just not needed. If a student is doing well and finding success, I would never consciously say "Let's slow down, let's give you more time on that assignment because that is what your IEP says." It is not that I deliberately ignore modifications, but they are easy to forget when things are going well.

Several interviewees offered similar responses. "On any given day," said Ms. Deal, "I probably couldn't tell you which students had IEPs and which ones didn't." When I asked her why this was the case, she laughed, "I guess because I don't have very much trouble, so I don't think about it." Mr. Olan suggested that he sees most of his IEP students just like all of the other students, so unless there is a problem, they just "blend in." Mr. Vetoer concurred that when things go well with a student with disabilities incorporated in his history class, "I really don't think about it much. Well, no more than I think about what might make any student successful: hard work, paying attention, and good focus." When respondents did identify what they thought were the contributing factors to successful situations with students with disabilities incorporated in their general education classes, four themes emerged from the data: confidence and inner-motivation of the student, a rapport the teacher had with the student, parental support, and support from special education teachers.

Confidence and Inner-Motivation of the Student

One of the strongest characteristics that breed success for students with disabilities in the general education classroom as identified by the interview subjects is the confidence and inner-motivation of the student. When I asked Ms. Norris to explain what she believed was the key ingredient for one of her more successful students with disabilities in her Spanish class, she said:

She had an inner-drive, a motivation, and was very focused on reaching her goals. She wasn't interested only in doing what needs to be done for the moment, but also had an eye on the future. In that particular case, I feel it was this inner-drive that helped her to overcome her disabilities.

Mr. Olan recounted a similar experience he had with a student who had mild to moderate disabilities who came early to school three days a week for extra tutoring sessions:

Whether she has the ability or not, I don't know. She does have the drive, that's for sure. It takes a lot for a student to come in 30 minute early, three days a week. But she is always here, trying to get help. Now there is a student with a disability who is not making any excuses or expecting anyone to spoon feed her...and I think she will be successful.

Later in the interview, Mr. Olan continued:

I am not one who just passes a person because he or she is special ed., but there is a strong correlation, especially for the resource students, with their work ethic, doing their homework and participating in class, and the success they will have in the end.

Ms. Ingle explained that she had found the most success with her students with disabilities when they gain the confidence that they can accomplish a level of work on par with their non-disabled peers:

They (students with disabilities) usually come into class with fear. They think, "I can't read Shakespeare," or "I can't write an essay," but that is because they have never done it before. I work with them, a step at a time. When they start having some success, it just builds. They gain confidence, which helps with their motivation, which helps them in their

willingness to try new things. Success breeds success. It all starts with their inner enthusiasm.

When I asked the factor that most contributed to successful experiences for students with disabilities in their classes, Mr. Harris, Ms. King, Ms. Peters, Mr. Smith, Mr. Turner, Mr. Utley, and Mr. Vetoe all gave an identical response, “the motivation of the student.”

Rapport with the Students

Another factor contributing to successful situations for students with disabilities in the general education classroom that was identified was the rapport the teacher has with the student. Of all of the factors that contributed to success that were identified, respondents agreed that the relationship they have with their students was one of the few aspects they had control over. Many spoke with pride as they recalled the relationships that were built with students and how that rapport had contributed to the success the respondents had with their students with disabilities. When I asked Ms. Anderson to identify what had contributed to the success she had with students with disabilities incorporated in her class, she responded:

A rapport, more than anything else, you have to build up a rapport with your students, you know? If you have their trust, they will do what you ask them to do. Some of the ones that drive me crazy are the same ones who come back and hug my neck.

Ms. Ingle explained that building a relationship with the students was one of her primary means for success with her special education students:

One thing that works is trying to provide students with an atmosphere where they are going to feel comfortable. The first thing they (students with disabilities) say to me is often, “I’ve never been in a regular English class before. I can’t do it.” and I have to respond and tell them “yes, you can do it!” I make sure they understand that I believe in them. Sometimes, that is the key to get them going in the right direction.

Ms. Peters agreed that the relationship she tries to build with her students helps to contribute to their success with students with disabilities:

You know, I have a student right now with moderate disabilities, I think she reads on about a sixth grade level, she has a terrible home life, and here I am, trying to teach her the parts of a cell. Sometimes you have to step back, get to know the student and where they are coming from.

I asked Ms. Peters in a follow-up interview if she had excused that particular student from learning what she was teaching that day:

Oh no! She still needs to be responsible, but by pausing, letting her go to the pull-out teacher's room, and letting her know that I care, helps us to establish a relationship where she knows that I realize she is a person and I may not understand all of her obstacles, but I do care and will bend over backwards for her. I think this helps me to have a relationship where we build trust, and she is willing to give more to the class.

Mr. Roberts shared a similar experience of trying to build rapport with his students by recognizing their situations. He shared with me an account of a student with moderate disabilities who put forth tremendous effort once the relationship had been built:

For the first few weeks of class, I had received almost no work from this student. I knew he was special ed. and that was about it. I found out that he bussed tables for (a local restaurant), so I decided to go there for dinner. Sure enough, he was there and we struck up a conversation. I told him some about my background, that I came from a broken home, that I struggled in school, and that I bussed tables too when I was in high school. From that point on, he busted his tail in my class. He ended up making a "B." All it took was me asking him a few questions and identifying with him a little bit.

Mr. Utley said that his role as a football coach helped him establish rapport with some of his students with disabilities:

They see me give it all I have in coaching, and then they are less likely to slack off in the classroom. By building relationships outside of class, I believe that contributes to success in the classroom, for any student, but especially for students with disabilities.

Parental Support

Another aspect identified by interviewees that helped contribute to successful situations concerning students with disabilities incorporated in general education classrooms is parental support and guidance. Ms. Quarrels suggested that parental support does not always ensure success, and that she had students with disabilities who had been successful despite a lack of support at home; but that parental support was often the key difference between success and failure:

Support from home does not guarantee success, but it is a common characteristic with my special education students who are successful. I can recall one situation when I had a student with pretty severe disabilities, yet she had a supportive mom and a supportive dad who were willing to work with me to see their daughter succeed. Parents who are willing to go the extra mile is what I often see in my success students.

When I asked Mr. Harris to identify the most common characteristic of his students with disabilities who have found success in his Math class, he responded, “The parents. I could probably say that for all of my students. Parental involvement is the key.” When Ms. Gregg was discussing a successful incident of a student with moderate disabilities who found achievement in her math class, she recalled:

Her mother wants her to go to college. Her mother pushes her and will not allow her to lower her standards. She has a learning disability in math, yet performs as well as her non-disabled classmates...I feel like the kids in special ed. would do better if they have this kind of support from home, you know, a little more push.

Ms. Norris pointed out that parental involvement needs to be in place from the beginning of a student’s educational career:

In order to be beneficial to a student with disabilities, or any student for that matter, parents need to be there from the beginning. I have had some who just become interested when their child is in the eleventh or twelfth

grade. By then, it is too late. The students with disabilities who find some measure of success in my class generally have parents who have made the journey through the educational process with their child, and have been there to support and encourage their child when things get tough.

In a follow-up interview, Ms. May noted that parental involvement in itself is not enough.

In order to help contribute to the success of a student with disabilities, the involvement of the parent needs to be supportive and not just adversarial:

I have had some parents who were very involved, but had an agenda from day one. I sometimes question if they wanted what was best for their child, or if they just want to pick a fight with the school system. I do agree that parental involvement is key, but sometimes even the parents need to step back and do what is best for their particular child.

I continued by asking Ms. May if she was opposed to parents advocating a course of action on behalf of their child that was different from what the school administrators had prescribed. She responded:

Oh no! I do not mean that parents should simply acquiesce to whatever the special education teachers or school administrators suggest, far from it. I just mean that some parents come into the process with a chip on their shoulder. Usually, their child has a disability that does not seem fair, and they want to make things fair. But life is not fair, and trying to remedy the situation by threatening a lawsuit every time a change of placement is suggested is counter-productive. Occasionally, we all need to step back and do what is best for the child.

After reading the quote back to her, Ms. May clarified her position concerning parental involvement:

In general, I agree that parental involvement with their child who has disabilities is advantageous for everyone. I have experienced many wonderfully supportive parents who desire what is best for their child and constantly work with their child and the child's teachers toward that end. However, just having parents be involved is not enough. It needs to be a collaborative effort where we all work together.

Mr. Turner also supported the idea that positive parental involvement is a factor in most successful situations he had encountered concerning students with disabilities:

In my most recent “best case” scenario, I had a young man with a pretty significant learning disability. I had not been able to attend the IEP meeting due to class, but I had received the modification sheet. The parents scheduled a conference with me to discuss the situation with their son. They wanted to make sure I understood his disability, and also wanted to offer any support they could. They also checked out a textbook and reviewed my syllabus so they would have an idea where we were heading. I believe many of my challenges I have with students who have disabilities would be greatly diminished with this kind of support from home.

Support from Special Education Teachers

Confidence and inner-motivation of the student, rapport that the teacher had with his or her students and parental support were all common responses when interviewees were asked to identify the factors that contributed to the success they had with students with disabilities. In the initial interviews, only Ms. Ingle and Ms. Lawrence identified the support of special education teachers as a facilitator to success. Ms. Ingle said that she ate lunch everyday with the special education teacher, and they would often discuss what was transpiring with the special education students who had been incorporated in her English class:

Now that is not our only topic of conversation, but yes, often we discuss my special ed. students. I think it is important to learn as much as I can about them so that I can better serve them. The IEP is just like a checklist, it really doesn't tell you much about the student. You really need to dig and find out as much information as possible.

Later, Ms. Ingle spoke of other opportunities that she had to plan with the special education department:

Within the first two or three weeks of school, I meet with the special ed. teacher to go over each student that I will have in class. We usually do this in the morning before school, during planning time, or right after school. It really helps me teach them, especially the ones who have more severe disabilities.

I followed up by asking Ms. Ingle if this is something she initiated or a program supported by her school. She responded, “It is something I do. I started about four years ago...it really helps.” While all of the other teachers at Ms. Ingle’s school spoke highly of the special education department, no one else identified using this resource to help with their special education students. In a follow-up interview, I asked Ms. King if she thought meeting with special education teachers would be beneficial. She responded:

I suppose it wouldn’t hurt, and they (the special education department) are always ready if I have a question, but I am not sure how much that would contribute.

Mr. Jenkins, also from the same school, said that time would be an obstacle to such meetings and “I’m not sure how it would really help me; I have so many IEPs.” Ms.

Lawrence, from a large school, praised her school’s special education department when she said:

We get a lot of support from our resource and special services teachers. They do a good job placing students in appropriate classes. They try to get them (students with disabilities) into smaller classes. They do a pretty good job. If they can not get an Educational Assistant in the room, they’ll at least get a couple of peer tutors to help out. I think the support we get from special services is a big part of our success.

As was the case in Ms. Ingle’s school, all of the interviewees made positive comments about their respective special education departments. Each respondent said the special education department in their school was helpful. Ms. Peters added that the workload on the special education department was so great and that they were “willing to help, but have so many students, they often can not help too much.”

Barriers

The teachers who were interviewed seemed much more willing to identify the barriers to success that they had with students with disabilities than they were the facilitators of success. During the course of the interviews, conversation tended to focus more on the challenges inherent with incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom than on what contributed to successful situations. When discussing aspects that contributed to success, I often had to refocus the interview to the question at hand. This was not the case when I asked teachers to identify the barriers to successfully incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The barriers that emerged from the interviews can be grouped into structural barriers and barriers specific to the individual students. The structural barriers that emerged were as follows: a lack of training in special education techniques, class size, insufficient time to individualize instruction, and a lack of accountability. Barriers specific to individual students included inappropriate placement, a lack of support for the student, and a learned helplessness on the part of the student. A theme that emerged when processing the data was that these barriers were outside of the individual teacher's control and not something easily changed. In a follow-up interview, Mr. Roberts concurred, "You deal with what you get, I can only control what happens in my room. I don't control who the students are who take my class and what baggage they carry." Ms. Erwin echoed this sentiment in a follow-up interview when I asked her about her control over barriers to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in her classroom. She responded, "I am not sure what I can do to change the preparation or motivation of my students." Ms. Quarrels

expanded upon this thought to include all of her students not just the ones who have been classified as students in need of special services. In a follow-up interview, she stated:

You know, we get all types of kids. You never really know what their life is like outside of the classroom. You don't know what their parents are like, who they hang out with, or what they have been doing. We take them as they come and hopefully reach a few in the 90 minutes we have them.

Ms. Carson expressed that in her 32 years of teaching she had learned to accept the teaching environment and the students she was given:

As a teacher, you learn that fads come and go, principals change, the building changes, but the kids stay the same. The problems we deal with now are the same problems we have always dealt with. Kids are kids.

The emerging theme concerning the barriers to successfully incorporating students with disabilities expressed by teachers was they had to deal with the situation but did not have control or power to remove the barriers

Lack of Training

One of the structural barriers to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms that was identified in the interviews was a lack of training and experience in dealing with students with disabilities. With the exception of Ms. May who has a master's degree in special education, the remaining 21 subjects interviewed commented that they had either no formal training in special education or that their training consisted of one course in college and an occasional in-service program. Ms. Erwin responded that the one course she was required to have in college amounted to "identification of physical and mental" disorders with no instruction on how to best modify lessons in order to overcome the challenges created by these

disorders. This sentiment was echoed by Ms. Gregg, who said the meager training she was given dealt more with “what the disability is, but not how to deal with it.” Mr. Harris stated that the IEP was difficult to implement because “it tells us what modification to make, but not how to make them. I don’t have training in that.” When I asked Ms. Peters if she had special education training, she responded:

Well, had I not just gone through the highly qualified certification and just looked at my transcript, I would have said “no,” but, back in the sixties, I did have a class on dealing with students with learning disabilities, but that was a long time ago.

Ms. Peters went on to say that she may have had opportunities to receive training; however, she had not sought them out because:

I am a biology teacher, and I am very passionate about doing that well, and that is where my love is. You know, I really want to get good at that, so I spend my time focusing on that and not on special ed. kids. Maybe that is not right, but that is my view of my own self. I am willing to teach all students, including ones with disabilities, but I am certainly not really qualified to teach them all.

When asked about his special education training, Mr. Utley stated:

I teach history and economics. I have no clue how to help these students (with special needs). I am very limited; almost zero knowledge of special needs.

The majority of teachers interviewed agreed that they were specialists when it came to their particular subject matter but did not see themselves as qualified to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The subjects were asked about opportunities for in-service training in special education and the answers were much more diverse. Even within the same school, respondents identified their opportunities differently. Ms. Anderson, Ms. Carson, and Ms. Deal all noted that they had opportunities to attend special education conferences and

had occasional in-service programs. Although they teach in the same school, Mr. Bowling, Ms. Erwin, and Ms. Franklin identified that they were not aware of any opportunities to receive training in special education. A similar phenomenon was noticed with Ms. Ingle and Ms. King who responded that they were aware of opportunities to receive training in special education. However, Ms. Gregg, Mr. Harris, and Mr. Jenkins were not aware of opportunities even though they taught in the same school. Even if respondents were aware of opportunities to receive training, several stated they either did not seek out the training or that the courses offered were not viewed as applicable to their situation. Ms. Anderson responded that the training she had received dealt more with the legal ramifications of not making appropriate modifications rather than how to modify:

You have to be so careful when you are teaching a student that is classified as “special.” You need to meet the modifications or you can get the doors sued off, you know?

When I asked her if she had received training at in-service meetings on how to make modifications or just the consequences of not making appropriate modifications, she stated:

Oh no, they didn’t really tell us what to do, but it was clear that if we did things the wrong way or said them the wrong way, we could personally be sued. Teachers need to know that. So many of them say and write things that could get them in trouble.

Ms. Ingle responded that she had sought out opportunities to learn more about dealing with students with disabilities because:

You can get yourself into trouble. I mean, if it says you need to modify, then you need to do it. You can lose your job over this stuff. I think it is important to get as much training as you can!

When I asked Ms. Ingle to give an example of an in-service activity that had been helpful, she laughed and responded:

I think the administration is mostly interested in covering themselves legally, so that when parents come to them and say “you didn’t do this” or you didn’t do that,” they can point to the hours of in-service they offered. Most of it, to be honest, is not very practical for what we do in a class with 35 students.

She went on to concede, “Most of what I have learned has been through experience and using common sense.” Mr. Harris made the following comment when I asked him about in-service opportunities, “Well, there were some in-service opportunities, but it's usually more of a threat-based in-service more than anything else.” When I asked him to elaborate, he said, “It's more like, if you don't do the modifications, you're fired; instead of here's some stuff you could do with them (students with disabilities).” Mr. Olan stated he had no formal training in his 35 years of teaching but had “picked up a few ideas of things to do” through experience. Mr. Smith remarked that any in-service training he had received in his 25 years of experience concerning how to handle the challenges of special needs children was “useless” in terms of “how to deal with these disabilities.” Ms. Lawrence stated that her lack of training in special education has been a detriment to some of her students:

You know, I work with at-risk students. I’m certified to teach math seventh through twelfth grade, and can also teach college, but I don’t have a special ed. degree. I didn’t feel like I was meeting her (a student with severe disabilities) needs as well as the other students in the classroom.

While several of the interviewees expressed appreciation for their school systems offering opportunities, most of the respondents agreed that training was helpful to raise awareness about disabilities but did little to help them actually make modifications for their students in the classroom.

Class Size

Another structural barrier that emerged from the interviews was the size of the class and the number of students with disabilities who have been included in the class. All of the interviewees who had five or more students with disabilities included in a single general education class stated that the number of IEP students posed a challenge. Ms. Anderson, Mr. Bowling, Ms. Carson, Ms. Franklin, Ms. Gregg, Mr. Jenkins, Ms. King, Ms. Lawrence, Ms. May, Ms. Quarrels, and Mr. Roberts all stated that with the number of IEP students they had, if they had to make modifications for one student, they made them for the whole class. Mr. Bowling commented:

I have a class of 30 students and eight of them have modifications. There is no way to individualize for that many students. So what you do is modify for the whole bunch. If one or two need copies of the notes, they all get copies. If two or three have modified tests, they all get a modified test. I don't see how else you could do it. You can't keep up with it all.

Mr. Roberts stated that because of the number of students he had, it was difficult to keep up with all that need special attention:

In one of my current tenth grade English classes, I have 28 students, six of whom have IEPs. How am I supposed to "individualize" instruction for six specific kids when I have so many in my class? I either forget the modifications, or give everyone a modified assignment. I think it is interesting that all six of my students in that class have the same individualized modifications. Even the process has been streamlined to deal with the numbers.

When I asked him to clarify what he meant, Mr. Roberts pointed out that in order to "individualize" instruction for so many students; the special education department had come up with "identical checklists for each of these six students." He added with a laugh, "That doesn't sound too individualized to me." Ms. Anderson stated that when her numbers get too large, it is easy to neglect those who need the most help:

If my numbers are low, below 20 or so, that gives me more time, and they (students with disabilities) need my time. They generally need individual help. When the numbers get so great it is like the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. You do what you can for the ones that you can, but some of them just slip through the cracks when you are trying to help someone else.

Ms. Deal protested:

It's a numbers thing, and to get the numbers down, you are talking about money. If we have to work one-on-one with inclusive kids, like we should be doing, like the attention they should get, I would need less kids. I think that is my biggest complaint.

Ms. Peters suggested the large class sizes kept her from developing relationships with students necessary to help those with special needs find success:

I don't have time to develop personal relationships with many of my students because classes are too big. I teach about 28 students per class for about 18 weeks. Unfortunately, there will be kids in my class that I know very little about.

Mr. Turner, whose average class size was 30 students, commented:

With that many students in class, it is really easy to forget about my two or three IEP students and make modifications specifically for them. Now I modify their tests and assignments, but my instruction on a daily basis? No I really don't...I don't see how you could.

Ms. Quarrels stated with several IEP students in the same class, it was easy to lose track of who needs what assistance:

When you have a big class with seven or eight students who need modifications, can you realistically keep track of what you need to do for every student on any given day? You don't. You do a lot of backtracking in those courses.

When I asked her to explain what she meant by "backtracking," she said, "I mean you modify after the fact. You go back and let students retake tests or take assignments home to complete." Ms. Quarrels went on to conclude that this would be less likely to happen with a smaller class size and fewer students with IEPs in each class.

Insufficient Time

Somewhat related to the barrier of class size is the lack of time teachers have for their students. In each of the 22 interviews, respondents agreed that there is insufficient time for planning, implementing, and following-up with their students who have disabilities. When I asked Ms. Norris about collaborative planning with special education teachers, she laughed:

Planning? What planning? They have so many students; we just get checklists. I guess in an ideal world, we would all sit down together and plan out a course of action that would best help us fit each individual student's needs. But when would we do that? It is unrealistic to say teachers should hold regular planning meetings on how to deal with individual students. It just won't happen.

Ms. Quarrels expressed one of her concerns in dealing with the students with disabilities incorporated in her classes:

I think my biggest fear is always there is not enough of me to go around. Making sure teachers have resources, you know, tutors in the classroom, an extra teacher in the classroom, I suppose that is all we could do. But there will still be just one of me, and just so many minutes in the hour.

Interviewees pointed out that being able to coordinate meetings with parents, special education teachers, the students, and the general education teachers on a regular basis might be ideal but not practical. I asked Mr. Jenkins how he monitored all of his students with disabilities. He responded:

With about 40% of my students getting modifications, there is really no way to check with the special ed. teacher or their parents for each student. I would end up spending all my time in meetings. We get progress sheets to fill out, but even that paperwork takes time...if you really wanted to comment about each student and their progress.

He concluded that it was easier, “to just check the progress sheets off and move on.” Ms. Lawrence agreed that the time it takes to fill out the paperwork and attend meetings for her special education students is a barrier to success:

It is a hassle just in the paperwork. Some teachers don't have any IEP students. You have constant paperwork. You have an interim that is due every three weeks. At the end of the grade term, you have to turn in a separate sheet of paper for each student to verify that you have done the accommodations and modifications, and what their grades are. Then, usually at least one time a year, you have to deal with IEP changes, and it definitely takes extra time. The more IEP students you have, the more time it takes.

With the exception of Ms. Lawrence and Ms. May, all of the remaining interviewees responded that IEP meetings were rarely scheduled during a time they could attend even if they wanted to be present. Mr. Harris explained:

There is a large amount of conflict trying to have so many people meet at the same time. Usually the IEP meetings are during class, so I can't go. I would say nine times out of ten, that is the case.

Mrs. Peters agreed, “I try to go to the IEP meetings, but they are usually scheduled during class so I can't go.”

The teachers who were interviewed all expressed that modifying lesson plans, implementing the modifications, and adjusting to needed changes all takes time. For the most part, interviewees stated that it was unreasonable to expect they should devote so much of their time for just a few students. Mr. Veto summarized this view when he stated:

Ideally, we can be all things to all student and we can challenge students at their level. However, I think it is a bit naive to count on teachers to take the time to individualize instruction for each student. To do so would require you to forsake the class for the needs of a few. I am not sure that is possible, let alone fair.

Mr. Turner concurred with this response when he said:

I have around thirty students in each class. And they expect me to make individual lesson plans for one or two students? When would I do this? I have my hands full teaching my class as it is. I don't have time to break down each lesson.

Mr. Smith asked, "How am I supposed to teach different lessons and use different methods in the same class?" He concluded, "I barely have time to cover what I need to cover, let alone differentiate my instruction." The amount of time needed to meet and plan with IEP teams and to actually implement individual modifications were identified as barriers to success concerning the incorporation of students with disabilities in general education classes.

Lack of Accountability

Another barrier to successfully incorporating students with disabilities in general education classes that emerged through the interview process was the lack of accountability. Ms. May noted:

We socially promote in elementary school, and then when they get to ninth grade, we give them tests and say, "you absolutely have to pass these tests or you will not graduate from high school." Those two things do not join...and the kids do not understand it either.

She added:

We don't hold kids accountable. We don't hold communities accountable. If you convince children with disabilities they can't do it early on, but it is okay because we will pass them on anyway, then you will convince them that they are not worthy and they don't have to work hard. At some point, that attitude will get you in trouble...usually it is when they take a high stakes test.

I asked her if she felt the high stakes test was the problem or if it was the way students are promoted that causes this problem. She responded:

Maybe it is a bit of both, but I can tell you one thing, and I taught special education for a number of years, by letting children with disabilities skate by, while we just pass them along instead of holding them accountable, we are not doing them any favors.

Mr. Smith echoed this notion:

I feel that some teachers just pass the special needs students to the next level due to not wanting to fight the system. When many of these special needs students enter college or the workforce, there will not be any IEPs or modifications. They will sink or swim. We must teach these kids not to use their IEPs and special education status as a crutch. They need to learn to work hard to overcome their disabilities, and passing them along does not do that. In many cases, however, that is what they are used to because of what happens in younger grades.

Mr. Turner recounted an incident where a student who had been socially promoted was put in a difficult situation because of this practice:

Here I was with 30 seniors in class. They were each reading passages from the *Federalist Papers*. I had a couple of students with disabilities in that class. One of the students had an IEP that said he had difficulty in reading comprehension, but it did not say he could not read. I purposely gave him a short passage to read. When it was his turn, he sat quietly and refused to participate. Later, I asked him what the problem was and he told me he could not read. How does someone get to be a senior before we identify that he can not read? I'll tell you how...teachers just pass him on. They say, "He is a nice kid...I will give him a 'C'." Meanwhile, he has wasted years of his life before he got help. He is now learning to read and getting some help. That should not happen...it should have been caught when he was in second or third grade.

While the interviewees were reluctant to indict elementary and middle school teachers with all of the blame for the challenges they faced when dealing with students with disabilities in their classes, several felt the social promotion of students who had not mastered material was unfair to the student in the long run as well as the teachers who would then be held accountable for student performance. Ms. Carson summarized this sentiment this way:

I have been teaching for a long time. I get students (with disabilities) included in my class who are on a first grade level of understanding in reading and math. Now I am supposed to magically bring them up to a tenth grade level, and I am going to be held accountable for this by their performance on a test? We have to deal with this at a younger age. It is not fair to them, or me for that matter.

Ms. Norris, who teaches Spanish I and Spanish II, expressed her frustration that she will occasionally have a student with disabilities placed in her Spanish II class before they have mastered Spanish I:

It is not fair to that student or to the rest of the class when that happens. Because they met the goal of their IEP in Spanish I, they move on to Spanish II, but they are not ready. So then we have to start all over. It holds them back; it holds the class back...All because we were afraid to hold them accountable.

I followed up by asking Ms. Norris if she had ever given credit to a student in Spanish I who had not mastered the material, and she responded:

I have not, but we have five teachers who teach Spanish I. Some of them do. It is called social promotion. Because they don't want to take the heat, or fill out the paperwork for a special ed. kid failing their class, they push them along. It's not pretty, but that is what happens.

The phenomenon of passing special education students was not limited to elementary school or to Spanish class. Several teachers interviewed indicated either that it was rare for a student with disabilities to not get credit in their course even if they had not mastered the material. During the course of the interviews, I asked teachers if students with disabilities ever failed their classes. In each of the interviews, the teachers said it was very uncommon. Some, like Ms. Deal, Ms. Franklin, Ms. King, Ms. Lawrence, Ms. May, Ms. Norris, Ms. Peters, Ms. Quarrels, and Mr. Smith said it was because they intervened when they saw the student was failing. "I just don't let it get that far," commented Ms. Quarrels. "I try to keep tabs on all my students and get help for

those who need help.” Ms. King also felt the reason students with disabilities rarely failed her class is that she “stay(s) on top of them. I get them the help they need to be successful.” Other teachers, like Ms. Anderson, Mr. Bowling, Ms. Carson, Ms. Gregg, Mr. Harris, Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Turner, and Mr. Utley indicated it was a fear of litigation that justified passing grades for special education students who had not mastered the subject matter. Ms. Carson explained in a follow-up interview:

You always think, “Did I do everything I was supposed to?” Usually there is some doubt, so I guess you give the student the benefit of the doubt. You don’t want failing a student to come back and bite you.

I asked her what she meant by “bite you,” and she said, “You don’t want to go to court over one student.” Mr. Harris and Mr. Jenkins said they had been told not to give their special education students an “F” or the school could be sued. Mr. Jenkins recounted a specific incident where one of his 10th grade ecology students was identified as having a fourth-grade reading level, but admitted to Mr. Jenkins that he was unable to read. I asked him how he dealt with a situation like this, and he responded:

There are things you can do, but usually it doesn't work. Usually when a kid gets in high school, and they still can't read, it's pretty tough on them, not just mine but in everybody's class. We shouldn't let them move on to high school unless they can read. It's not fair.

I followed up with Mr. Jenkins and asked him how this student could reach the 10th grade, be included in general education classes, and still be unable to read. He responded:

This isn't the first time I have had a student who couldn't read. Somewhere down the line, we just pass them on. I don't know if they are afraid of getting sued, afraid of parents, or just don't want to label a kid, but we just pass them on...and you know what? I pretty much do the same thing. You do what you can, but why should I keep a kid from moving on if they have made it this far. Besides, you're not supposed to fail them. I mean, you can if you want to but you have to document all of it, and you

know, it's pretty aggravating and they're just here for the special education diploma anyway.

Later, Mr. Jenkins explained why teachers tend to give passing grades to special education students who really do not pass the class:

If you sit down with a lot of them, and they pushed it, they'd be right and you'd be wrong. If you failed them, then they'd want to meet with you and they'd say, "did you modify this?" and "did you modify that?" and that's when you'd probably find stuff that you didn't do. A good teacher, I guess, would even forget some things.

The pressure teachers feel to pass special education students regardless of their performance is often out of fear of litigation and pressure from parents. Mr. Vetoe recounted an IEP meeting he attended where the message being sent to the teachers was that the student was not to make less than a "B":

Joe (not the student's real name) had to be permitted to retake tests until he got a "B" or better. One highlight of the meeting was when (Joe's) parents proclaimed it was Joe's Constitutional right to get a "B" or better, because if he did not, it proved the faculty was not taking his special needs into account, but rather was discriminating against him. The threat of a lawsuit hung over the entire meeting.

I asked Mr. Vetoe how he handled this situation and he responded:

When he (Joe) earned less than the minimum grade for a "B," he was given tests and time to retake them in class, or permitted to take them home to redo. Knowing that he would eventually get a "B," he rarely made much effort on them, and frequently did not even return them at all. In time, my policy simply was to give him the grade he earned if it was a "B" or better (as it sometimes was), and to simply give him an 86 if his grade was not up to the standards set by his parents. I do not have tenure and do not want to end up in court or lose my job, so I played the game. I suspect that has happened for much of Joe's life.

In every interview and follow-up interview, the respondents identified the promotion of students with disabilities to the next level without corresponding mastery of the subject, or the arbitrary passing grade for those who had not met the goals of the IEP as real

barriers to success in the general education classroom. While not every respondent admitted that they contributed to the practice, every respondent noted that they were affected by the practice.

Inappropriate Placement

When interviewees were asked what the biggest barrier to success for students with disabilities who were incorporated in their classroom was, 17 of the 22 interviewed identified that many of the unsuccessful situations occurred when students were inappropriately placed. The outlying responders who did not identify inappropriate placement as a barrier to success included Ms. Gregg, Ms. King, and Ms. May who taught in a low ability level or at-risk classes. Ms. May commented, “All of my students are at-risk kids. They have all fallen through the class and all benefit from individualized instruction, IEP or no IEP.” The other two respondents who did not identify inappropriate placement as the biggest barrier for success were Ms. Deal and Ms. Franklin who taught vocational subjects, and as Ms. Deal noted, “I individualize instruction for all of my students and deal with kids wherever they are ability wise.” The remaining 16 interviewees all stated that the most common barrier to success for students with disabilities who have been included in their general education classroom is that the students are inappropriately placed. Ms. Anderson recounted an incident where a student with “moderate disabilities” was not successful in her class:

We should have put him in a more basic class. You can't just bump him into regular high school classes and expect him to perform. He couldn't. He just didn't have the basic knowledge and so he turned to acting out and being disruptive simply because he couldn't do the work. He felt frustrated.

Mr. Bowling recounted a similar experience he had with a student who had been moved from a self-contained classroom to his general education life science classroom:

In a special education classroom, his IEP modifications worked perfectly, but in a regular classroom, his IEP didn't work. He couldn't get the one-on-one attention required by his modifications and thus he floundered. We need to work with our students with special needs, but we have to be realistic. He was like a fish out of water in the regular ed. classroom...I don't think he, or the rest of the class benefited much from that move (from the self-contained class).

Ms. Lawrence, who teaches at-risk students, explained a situation from the previous year where a child with severe disabilities was placed in her class:

I struggled; we all struggled. I had a class with 20 students, 15 of which had IEPs, one girl had very special needs and preformed on about a first grade level. She had an assistant who was often pulled for other duties. On those days, I had to devote most all of my attention to the one student to the detriment of all. I had some very needy students who were not getting assistance...I don't always agree that the least-restrictive environment is a mainstreamed class. In this situation, she would have been better served and the class would have been better served if she had been in a self-contained setting.

Ms. Lawrence went on to explain that her primary obstacle in teaching students with disabilities is being able to deal with the diversity in terms of ability level that students enter her class with:

My biggest challenge is being able to meet the needs of everybody in the classroom. Sometimes IEPs are written at such a grade level that you pretty much know the goal is just to get them to graduate. In the meantime, you have to prepare them and the rest of your class to take the Gateway Algebra test, but yet, they are still functioning on a fourth grade level. It is very difficult to bring them up at that point.

Ms. Norris expressed that the biggest barrier to success for students with disabilities in her Spanish class has little to do with modifications made by the teacher or desire on the part of the student but the ability of the student:

Some people's brains are not wired to learn a foreign language, just like some people's minds are not wired to do mechanical things. Everybody has propensity to accomplish certain things, and everybody has things they are not good at. Some people just can't seem to do it, no matter how hard I try and no matter how hard they try. This may sound bad, and might get me in trouble, but I do not think a student who is on a fourth-grade reading level will be successful in a foreign language. In my 20 years, I have not seen it happen. Now I continue to work with kids like that who have been placed in my class, but will they master Spanish? Probably not.

Ms. Carson explained that she had a student with moderate to severe learning disabilities who had been incorporated in her math class but was "unable to do the work." When I asked her to describe how she handled the situation she said, "He checks in and goes to Ms. Walters (pseudonym for special education teacher) for help with TCAP objectives (standardized test needed for graduation)." I asked her if this was consistent with the student's IEP, and she said, "I don't know. But I know he needs to pass the TCAP to graduate, and he is not able to pass my class, so that is what we do." She continued, "He's in the wrong placement. His parents and I have met...they want him in my class so he can go to college. It is simply not going to happen." In several interviews, I encountered teachers who said their biggest barrier to success is that students are placed in class with unrealistic expectations. Ms. Gregg concurred that it was unrealistic for some of her students with disabilities to take Algebra I:

I don't think it is feasible for all of these special ed. kids to take Algebra I. I would change that. Some of these students need life-skills. You know, how to balance a checkbook, how to take care of their everyday life, and how to get a job. I think that is sometimes, at least for those students, more important than Algebra I.

Mr. Turner expressed frustration over students with disabilities who are "far below grade level" in terms of their functioning being placed in his US Government class:

I do not feel that a student who can not read or write should be placed in a senior level class required for graduation. I feel it is a disservice to the

student, the other students, and the teacher when such a situation is forced. Students with special needs should have the help of a special needs teacher. To pretend that placing a special needs student who is operating on a fourth-grade level in a senior level class will somehow “raise the bar” for the special needs student is a joke.

Mr. Turner went on and stated:

Three obvious goals of inclusion are acceptance, learning, and the building of the student’s self-esteem. When a student is placed in my class, who is far below the level of the other students, the student is naturally exposed by the inability to process what is being discussed in class. This fails all three goals! The student withdraws because he feels stupid; no learning takes place, and the student’s self-esteem is lowered.

Mr. Smith shared similar insights:

When I have a problem with a special ed. student, it is almost always because they can not function at the level of the other students. They get frustrated and become disruptive to the whole class. I try to modify assignments and include them with the rest of the students, but many times, they just can’t function. They know it, and the other students know it. If they can not read along, or follow along in a discussion, they either withdraw or become a disruption. I hate to say it, but we need to go back to tracking by ability level.

Ms. Peters recalled a situation she had encountered where a student with severe disabilities was placed in her biology class. Ms. Peters did concede that there were some benefits for her general education students to get to know someone who was different than the norm. However, Ms. Peters expressed that these benefits may have come at a large cost for the student with disabilities:

This student probably had the mental age of a five-year old. Basically, she could not read and could not write, but yet she was in my class. I think I learned some things from her and so did my other students, but at what price? In that situation, I do not believe this student was in an appropriate setting. I don’t think it was a bad experience, but in this particular situation, she could have benefited a lot more from a classroom that was geared more toward her ability level. I feel the exposure is good, but I also think she wasted 18 weeks in my class when she could have been learning life skills instead of being frustrated by the content of the class. I

sometimes worry about where she is going to learn the things she really needs in life.

Mr. Veto offered this suggestion concerning students with severe learning disabilities:

Students with severe learning disabilities should be placed in classes where they can learn at their level. They should be taught to be and do all that is possible for them, with their limitation in mind, rather than trying to force them into the mainstream mold where they will simultaneously fail to fit in and fail to learn skills that lie within their grasp.

Mr. Roberts summarized his feelings regarding placing a student with disabilities who, despite modifications, was unable to operate on grade-level, this way:

I think he was misplaced. Sadly, this happens quite a bit. I guess the goal is socialization or maybe to build his self-esteem, but just the opposite happens. I don't think I ever saw anyone be intentionally cruel to him, but it was obvious to all that he felt out of place. He had a hard time being involved in any discussions, was not very successful in assignments despite the modifications, and became a non-participant in class. I tried to include him in every way, but he was a fish out of water and he knew it. I think he would have been much better in a self-contained class.

Lack of Support for the Student

When interviewees were asked to identify specific incidents where they felt the incorporation of students with disabilities was not successful, one barrier that was common to each answer was a lack of support for the student at home. To be fair, several respondents recounted examples of students who came from difficult home situations, had mild to moderate disabilities, and yet found success in the classroom. In each case deemed a failure, however, the student's difficult home life situations were seen as contributing factors. Mr. Jenkins explained how a difficult home life could contribute to a lack of success:

They need to put more emphasis on families, on what happens after school, you know? We can do everything right, make all the right

modifications, and seem like we are making headway. The student goes home and there is no supervision, no reinforcement of what we are trying to do at school, and everything we have done is gone. There needs to be constant reinforcement.

Ms. Anderson commented that supportive parents “are a key. If they (the parents) don’t care, the student will not care. Then we have lost.” Later, when Ms. Anderson was recounting an incident where a student had not been successful she said, “That’s a good example of where the student’s home life makes a difference. He had no support from anyone but a few of his teachers.” Ms. Ingle made the following comment when explaining why some of her students with disabilities are not successful:

Usually, the students who are not successful are actually in trouble with the law and have parents who are apathetic and don’t care what is going on with them. Eight out of ten of my special ed. students who are unsuccessful come from a lousy background.

I asked Mr. Utley to discuss a critical incident when a student with disabilities was not successful in his class. He responded:

I knew we were in trouble when the initial IEP meeting had to be rescheduled several times because his mother didn’t show. The special education teacher explained that he had a rough home life and that the student was pretty much on his own. I think if you take a kid without disabilities and put him in that situation; it is going to be tough. Add to the equation a learning disability and it compounds the problem. I am sad to say, that student had major difficulties in his classes, when he was there. I think he dropped out after so many absences. He never had much of a chance.

Ms. Peters discussed the importance of getting to know the students and the situations they have to deal with outside of school:

Some of these kids come from backgrounds you could not imagine. I try to be understanding and look at the big picture. If you tell me that I am getting a student with disabilities and no support from home, I can usually expect that things will be difficult. Now there are exceptions, but usually my biggest challenges when in terms of special needs students are bad home situations or trouble with the law.

Learned Helplessness

Another common barrier that emerged from the interviews was learned helplessness on the part of the student. Most teachers responded they were more likely to be flexible with a student who showed they were willing to work. Additionally, most respondents stated that a lack of work ethic was common in incidents where students with disabilities were unsuccessful in the general education classes. Mr. Bowling admitted, “If a student is willing to work, he will be okay. It is not doing the work they are capable of that cause them to fail.” Ms. Carson made a similar comment when she said, “In my 32 years, I have never graded on ‘are you trying?’ If you are trying, you are going to have a decent grade.” Later she added, “the students who fail are those who do not try.” She laughed, “My motto is, ‘What we don’t learn this year we will learn next year!’ That applies to all students, special ed. or not.” Ms. Franklin recounted one incident where a female student with disabilities was not successful in her keyboarding class:

Bottom line, she did not put forth any effort. She used her mild disability and her IEP as an excuse. I have had students with far more severe disabilities who were successful. If you don’t make it in my keyboarding class, it is because you are lazy.

Mr. Jenkins lamented over the number of special education students that he gets in class who lack the desire to learn and to work hard:

It’s frustrating. We see a lot of them (students with disabilities) and they just don’t care. The administration looks at us and says “Well, if you can’t teach them, then you are a horrible teacher.” But you can only do what you can. If they don’t want to learn, there is not much you can do to change it.

Ms. Gregg made the following comment concerning barriers to success for her students with disabilities incorporated into her basic math class:

There seems to be no drive to do anything that is there. I feel like some of our special ed. students could do so much better if they had the support from home and if they had a little more push. I think a lot of the contributing factors to a lack of success for some of these kids is a lack of motivation and confidence.

Several suggested that the IEP process contributed to a student with disabilities becoming lazy. Ms. Erwin commented, "I think some students come in expecting less of themselves because their IEPs demand less." Mr. Olan suggested that generally his IEP students have a lower "work ethic." When I asked him why he thought this was the case, he responded, "They learn to just get by. They know the bar has been lowered, and they reach the bar." In 18 of the 22 interviews, respondents said that some students with disabilities use their IEPs as a "crutch." Mr. Roberts suggested one of the dangers in the IEP process is that "it breeds an increasingly pervasive sense of entitlement" where students gain a "learned helplessness." I asked Mr. Roberts to elaborate on his statement, and he responded:

The goal of this whole process is to help the kid. I agree with that, but does it help them to expect less from them, or worse yet, to make them feel as if someone owes them a grade or success because they have a disability? Too many times, the IEP sounds good and looks ideal, but results in the unintended consequence of breeding a slothful person who is willing to put forth less than their best effort.

Ms. Ingle expressed a similar frustration with the IEP process contributing to some student's lack of effort in the classroom:

I feel that there are individuals whose parents, or teachers, have made so many exceptions that the child comes to expect people to go the extra mile for them and they become dependant. They learn to be lazy.

Teacher Recommendations

In each interview, respondents were given an opportunity to suggest changes to the way our educational system manages the education of students who have disabilities. The most common response initially was to laugh, throw up their hands, and say, “I don’t know!” While teachers interviewed seemed at ease to recall success stories, quick to register complaints, and liberal with suggestions of facilitators and barriers regarding the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom; solutions were much harder to come by with 17 of the 22 respondents not offering any suggestions for changes in the special education process.

Ms. Deal stated the part about special education rules and regulations that left her the most frustrated were those dealing with discipline issues:

One thing that bothers me is that if a special ed. kid gets in a fight, or causes trouble, or is a constant problem, why should they be forgiven and sent back to class, and you know, not punished just because they are special ed. So it’s not just the academic part that needs to be addressed. There are some discipline issues as well.

I asked her if she had any suggestions regarding the “academic part” that needs to be addressed, and she responded, “I don’t really know how to fix it, I just know that treating one group of students one way and another group another way leads to resentment and problems.”

Ms. King suggested one improvement would be to increase the number of special education teachers available for consultation and to help with the paperwork:

The Special Ed Department needs a lot of help. They depend on one person, or two people to do all of the paperwork. They have ten times the amount of paperwork that I have to do, and that's a lot on these teachers and you know, they're here from early in the morning until late at night.

They need to think about the teachers. Having more special education teachers would also help us with our consultation students. They have so many cases that we just get checklists. It would be helpful to work more as a team with the special ed. department, so I guess I would like to see more resources go there.

Ms. King clarified that having more special education personnel would only be beneficial if “real partnerships, or triads between the special ed. department, the teacher, and the student with disabilities” were formed to best serve the students. She conceded, “I guess that would mean a lot more money and willing participants.”

Ms. Lawrence wanted to examine the way that special education students were included in standardized test score reports:

There might be a lot of things I would change, but one that I am afraid is directly going to effect me is the inclusion of all students in the reporting of standardized test scores. I don't mind accountability, but if I am going to be evaluated, and this school is going to be evaluated on the performance of all students, including those with disabilities, taking a standardized test, then there needs to be a disaggregation of the data. We need to be able to show how many of our students have disabilities if they are going to lump all the data together.

After some follow-up questions, Ms. Lawrence agreed that this was “more of a public relations thing than actually changing classroom procedures.”

Ms. Norris made two suggestions for changes she would like to see with the special education process. First, she stated that general educators should have more access to the records of the students with disabilities that were to be incorporated in their classes. She said, “Usually, the IEP meetings are held before we know anything about the students.” She added:

It is tough to be a participant in an IEP team meeting if you are not part of the team. We need to have more information if we are going to be expected to give our input.

I asked her if she thought teachers would be open to spend the time reading through files and becoming acquainted with students. She responded:

I suppose if we were given teacher's aids to help us process the information. That would help. I just hate that I never know the student or the student's history before they come into my class. We need more access to information.

As she offered the second suggestion, she was shaking her head "no," and laughing:

What I think we really need to do, and I know the trend is away from this, but we need to group our students by ability level. We used to offer Transitional Spanish for students who were a bit slower academically. Not all were special education students; I am not meaning we go back to self-contained special education classes by the boiler room. Some of them, however, were, and I think we all benefited from that class.

I asked her why she was shaking her head and laughing, and she responded, "Because I know we will never go back to that." When I followed up by asking why she thought we would not go back to transitional classes, she flatly stated, "Money for more teachers, and we are afraid we will hurt someone's feelings by segregating our classes by ability."

Although he had the least amount of teaching experience, Mr. Vetoe offered the most forceful suggestion in terms of the conviction I detected in his voice. Whereas the other four respondents who offered ideas on how they would change the special education process if they were in charge, I did not get the feeling any of them believed that their suggestions would ever come to fruition. Mr. Vetoe, on the other hand, acted as if he had thought about the question prior to my asking him. He responded:

Students with mild disabilities should be completely immersed in classrooms without IEPs, as the IEP simply makes them a different class of students with less responsibility for themselves, so that they learn to manipulate the system more than they actually learn from the classes. Students with severe behavioral disorders should be separated from their peers for mutual safety. Students with severe learning disorders should be placed in classes where they can learn at their level. They should be taught to be and do all that is possible with their limitation in mind, rather

than trying to force them into the mainstream mold where they will simultaneously fail to fit in and fail to learn skills that lie within their grasp.

Summary

Chapter four contained research data collected from 22 open-ended interviews and follow-up conversations with general education teachers located in Northeast Tennessee. The respondents were purposely sampled to represent maximum variation in terms of school size, years of experience, and subject matter taught. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using QSR NUD.IST. 4 software. Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), incidents were classified into teacher perceptions regarding incorporating students with disabilities in their classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. Within each of these categories, sub-categories emerged. The categories were then examined holistically to avoid repetition and to develop emerging themes.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Much of the history of educating children with disabilities is contemporary, with some states allowing the exclusion of students with disabilities from having access to educational services as recently as 1969 (Yell et al., 1998). The federal government has played an increased role toward providing students with disabilities a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) and subsequent reauthorizations, the most recent being the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997. The definitions of “appropriate education” and “least restrictive environment” have been a subject of much debate (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Some advocates suggested that the least restrictive environment almost always means the student with disabilities is to be accommodated in the general education classroom, and that the role of the special education department is to serve as a resource to assist the classroom teacher in making appropriate modifications for the students (Bartlett et al., 2002). Others insist that the “least restrictive environment” means that the student with disabilities is to be placed in the general education classroom when appropriate educational gains can be made, but that the special education department still offer a continuum of services ranging from self-contained classrooms for the more severely disabled, to consultation for mild cases (Van Reusen et al., 2000). While the debate over the meaning of “least restrictive environment” continues, the general education teacher

has been a noticeably absent voice (Kavale & Forness, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide general educators with an opportunity to provide this missing voice.

In order to collect data for this phenomenological study, open-ended interviews were conducted with 22 teachers in Northeast Tennessee. The subjects were purposefully sampled to gain maximum variation in terms of school setting, years of experience, and subject matter taught. The goal of this sampling technique was not to attempt to analyze which subjects or which schools were more effective at delivering educational services to students with disabilities but rather to select participants who differed from each other. In doing so a larger cross section of general education teachers were represented than if I had sampled teachers from the same school, same number of years experience, and same subject matter taught. Transcripts from the interviews were typed verbatim and coded using QSR NUD.IST. 4 Software. A reflection log was kept for each interview to record the non-verbal cues and verbal inflections, which cannot be recorded with written transcripts. Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), incidents were classified into teacher perceptions regarding incorporating students with disabilities in their classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. Within each of these categories, sub-categories emerged.

Though a review of pertinent literature, interviews with 22 general education teachers and member checking, certain conclusions and recommendations for further research, and future practice, have been developed as they relate to the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The specific findings of this research were organized under four major topics that clustered around the research questions asked of participants:

1. What are participant's perceptions regarding the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in general education classes?
2. What are participant's perceptions regarding the efficacy of this practice?
3. What factors are facilitators to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education class?
4. What factors are barriers to successful incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education class?

As data were analyzed and placed into one of these 4 categories, sub-categories emerged. From this information, conclusions and recommendations for further research and future practice were developed and identified. Chapter 5 includes the presentation of those conclusions and recommendations for further research and future practice.

Conclusions

The conclusions from this study concerning general education teachers' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of incorporation of students with disabilities into their classrooms are presented here as they relate to the four main research questions.

Perceptions

Within the scope of this study, five themes emerged regarding teachers general perceptions of the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom:

1. Respondents indicated they were unaware of special education terminology and changes.
2. Respondents expressed that they were excluded from the special education process.
3. Respondents perceived special education as a top-down mandate.
4. Respondents viewed IEPs as loose guidelines rather than rigid, inflexible documents.
5. Respondents indicated that they believed too many students were categorized as having a disability.

Respondents Indicated They were Unaware of Special Education Terminology and Changes. This finding was supported in the literature review conducted for this study. Kavale and Forness (2002) noted that general educators were characteristically unacquainted with special education terminology. The results from this study supported this notion. Of the 22 participants, only one indicated a knowledge of the difference between the terms mainstreaming, inclusion, and full-inclusion. This finding suggested that special education classes in teacher preparation programs and subsequent teacher in-service activities are deficient in equipping teachers with the knowledge-base necessary to discuss changes in special education. To the layperson, the differences in educational terms like “mainstreaming,” “inclusion,” and “full inclusion” may appear trivial. However, the terminology used represents real differences in attitudes and general philosophies toward educating students with disabilities (Bartlett et al., 2002). If general education teachers are to participate in this discussion, they should be equipped with the necessary knowledge.

Respondents Expressed that they were Excluded from the Special Education Process. An inquiry conducted by Snyder (1999) found that general education teachers

did not feel they had the knowledge or skills necessary to participate in special education decisions or implement those decisions. The study went on to suggest that general education teachers felt excluded from special education reforms. Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) noted that general education teachers have been left out of the decision making process concerning special education reforms. Viadya and Zaslavsky (2000) noted that sometimes the role of the general education teacher in an IEP team meeting is limited to their signature. The data collected in this study back up these findings. Twenty of the respondents in this study indicated that their role in making special education decisions for their classroom was simply to sign the IEP forms. Teachers interviewed stated they were typically excluded from IEP meetings due to scheduling conflicts, and when they were in attendance, their input was rarely solicited.

Respondents Perceived Special Education as a Top-Down Mandate. Bartlett et al. (2002) indicated that secondary school teachers were likely to view the incorporation of students with disabilities as something that had been thrust upon them by the administration if care was not taken to include them in the school's vision for inclusion. In order for inclusion to be successful, all stakeholders must be involved in the process and take responsibility for the outcome. When given as a directive as opposed to a joint decision, general educators are more resistant to the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in their classrooms (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). The findings from this study supported this research. Respondents in this study consistently expressed their view that the decisions regarding the incorporation of students with disabilities in their classrooms were made by superiors and there was not any room for debate. When the interview transcripts from this study are examined holistically in conjunction with the

nonverbal signals recorded in my reflection log, the general tone was that teachers did not feel prepared or empowered to make decisions concerning the placement or treatment of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Respondents Viewed IEPs as Loose Guidelines, Rather than Rigid, Inflexible Documents. During the interviews conducted for this study, respondents were asked how they handled the situation when a student with disabilities has a modification listed on his or her IEP that, in the teacher's professional judgment, was not warranted. Every respondent indicated that this situation was a reality in their classrooms. Given the situation, 19 of the 22 respondents indicated they did not adhere strictly to the IEP but rather did what they felt was best for the student. Two of the respondents who indicated they adhered strictly to the IEP were most concerned with the legal ramifications and the potential to lose their jobs. Only one respondent indicated that she called an IEP team meeting if she felt there were inappropriate modifications. During follow-up interviews, none of the remaining 21 respondents indicated they would call for a meeting. The general consensus was that they did not feel empowered to call a meeting, and when they attended IEP meetings, their opinions were not given much weight. Instead, teachers interviewed suggested that they would follow a course of action that would most benefit the student with disabilities, even if the course of action went against the IEP. Another incident when teachers interviewed suggested they would deviate from a strict interpretation of the IEP is when they had a class with several IEP students. In this case, respondents indicated they would modify for the whole class as opposed to on an individual basis for simplicity sake.

The finding that many teachers do not adhere strictly to the modifications on IEPs was not uncovered in the literature review conducted for this study. The absence of literature supporting the notion that general education teachers view IEPs as loose guidelines might be that this phenomenon is exclusive to the teachers included in this study. A more likely explanation is that not following the modifications as outlined on a student's IEP would represent an action that teachers and schools could be held legally responsible (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Although this finding resulted in uncovering a legally sensitive issue, it warrants further research.

Respondents Indicated that they Believed Too Many Students were Categorized as Having a Disability. The phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities is fairly modern, and thus, the numbers of students with disabilities who are served in general education classrooms has increased in the past three decades (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). According to the US Department of Education (2003), the number of students with disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms at least 80% of the time had almost doubled from 1985 to 1999. Schumaker et al. (2002) pointed out that most students with disabilities had real access to the general education classroom. With the growing number of students with disabilities being educated in general education classrooms, it would make sense that general education teachers would notice the change. The findings of this study support this notion. However, a related finding that was not uncovered during the literature review for this study revealed that some of the general educators interviewed believed that not all of the students who qualified for special services were really disabled. The findings included that teachers believed some students sought special education classification to lower expectations and make things easier for

themselves, or that some students were identified as qualifying for special education services because they were apathetic when taking diagnostic tests. One teacher suggested that the number of students who qualified for services would decrease if our educational system would intervene at a younger age and break the cycle of “learned helplessness.”

Efficacy

The second research question explored by this study was general education teachers’ perceptions regarding the efficacy of incorporating students with disabilities in their classrooms. No teacher interviewed indicated that he or she felt this practice was either entirely efficacious, or a total failure. The data collected from the interviews were categorized as intended results and unintended consequences.

Intended Results. The practice of incorporating students with disabilities in general education classrooms has led to increased socialization and more educational opportunities for these students (Snyder, 1999). O’Shea (1999) suggested that the benefits of this practice go beyond the student with disabilities to include their non-disabled peers. The benefits to both the student with disabilities as well as their non-disabled classmates are cited throughout literature (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; D’Alanzo et al., 1977; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1998; Peltier, 1993; Rogers, 1993; Snyder, 1999; Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000; Villa & Thousand, 2003; Yell, 1998). The findings from this study support this research. Teachers interviewed all shared success stories of individuals with disabilities who had been incorporated in their general education classrooms. The benefits noted for the student with disabilities included increased confidence, socialization, and some academic gain. The teachers interviewed also recognized the benefits of increased awareness and sensitivity to the general education students.

Unintended Consequences. Despite the noted benefits of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, there are some researchers who pointed out that the cost of this practice, possible harm to the student with disabilities and harm to the general education students, may outweigh the benefits (Schumaker et al., 2002). While no research was uncovered during the literature review for this study that suggested schools should revert to the exclusion of students with disabilities from access to educational opportunities, the honest debate over the cost of inclusionary practices versus the benefits still continues (e.g. Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Snyder, 1999; Villa & Thousand, 2003). Teachers interviewed for this study made frequent comments regarding the consequences of incorporating students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. A common response was that modifications contained in many IEPs resulted in lowering expectations for the student, and thus poorly preparing them for the future where exceptions will not be made. Teachers interviewed also indicated that students with disabilities who were included in general education classrooms often missed out on opportunities to learn life-skills that would better serve them in the future. Another consequence of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom uncovered during this study was that modifications such as abbreviated assignments and modified tests robbed students with disabilities of the opportunity to properly learn material and demonstrate knowledge. Because of this, many teachers indicated they ignored the directive on the IEP to modify either assignments or grades. An additional consequence to the incorporation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom that was noted was the negative effect on the other students.

Facilitators

One of the primary goals of this study was to give general educators an opportunity to provide their missing voice to the subject of incorporating students with

disabilities in their classrooms. There have been studies examining general education teacher's attitudes concerning this practice (e.g. Heflin & Bullock, 1999; King & Young, 2003; Schumaker et al., 2002; Schumm et al., 1995; Snyder, 1999; Van Reusen et al., 2000). However, opportunities for general education teachers to voice their opinions on facilitators and barriers for success were not uncovered during the literature review conducted for this study. In this study, respondents did not necessarily prescribe the means to obtain the facilitators and overcome the barriers to success, but rather made observations from their experiences as classroom teachers. The facilitators for successfully incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study can be grouped into four categories:

1. Confidence and inner motivation of the student
2. The rapport the teacher has with her students
3. Parental support
4. Support from special education teachers

Confidence and Inner-Motivation of the Student. The literature examined for this study concerning facilitators for successful incorporation of students with disabilities did not include the confidence and inner-motivation of the individual student. Perhaps the reason for the absence of this variable in the literature is that it seems outside of school officials' control. It would be very difficult for school systems to take total ownership of such a personal characteristic. However, respondents in this study consistently commented that the success of a student with disabilities in their classroom is largely contingent upon how confident that student is, and how hard he or she is willing to work to overcome the challenges before him or her.

Rapport. Another facilitator commonly voiced during the course of this study was the relationship the teacher had with the student who had disabilities. Research was uncovered during the literature review conducted for this study that suggested success

with inclusive practices would be more likely if general education teachers had opportunities for in-service activities that focused on awareness and acceptance of students with disabilities (e.g. O'Shea, 1999; Pivik et al., 2002; Sapon-Shevin, 1996). However, respondents in this study indicated success was more dependent upon their personal relationship with their students rather than simply an awareness and acceptance of the student's disabilities. Teachers interviewed in this study spoke with pride when they discussed the rapport they had with their students. Many of the teachers interviewed suggested that the success they encountered with their students with disabilities was attributable in part to the relationships they had built. Some suggested the students with disabilities were more apt to put forth effort if rapport had first been established.

Parental Support. In the literature review conducted for this study, the role of parental support was suggested as a facilitator to successfully incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (e.g. Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; O'Shea, 1999; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). The data collected in this study supported this research. Teachers interviewed suggested that parental involvement was not a necessary condition for success with students with disabilities, nor did the presence of parental support guarantee success, but that it was a factor that contributed toward success. Another point made by respondents was that in order for parental support to contribute to success, it had to be the right kind of support. Several teachers interviewed noted that some parents enter IEP team meetings with an adversarial posture as opposed to a willingness to listen to opinions of team members. General education teachers indicated that a collaborative relationship with parents contributed the most success to students with disabilities in the classroom.

Support from Special Education Teachers. Research reviewed for this study indicated that support for general education teachers by the special education department was imperative for the success of students with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). Common planning time, appropriate training opportunities, and consistent follow up and

support were noted in the literature as facilitators to successfully incorporating students with disabilities into the general education classrooms (e.g. D'Alanzo et al., 1997; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; O'Shea, 1999; O'Shea & O'Shea 1998; Pivik et al., 2002). While not as frequently noted as the other facilitators in the interviews conducted for this study, several respondents cited the relationship they had with their special education departments as a facilitator for their success with students who had disabilities.

Barriers

Teachers who participated in this study seemed eager to discuss the barriers to successfully incorporating students with disabilities in their classrooms. In fact, several times when facilitators were being discussed, the respondents would slip into a discussion of the barriers, and I would have to refocus them on the question at hand. The barriers to success that emerged from the interviews conducted in this study can be grouped into seven categories:

1. A lack of training in special education techniques
2. Classes that were too large or had several IEP students in them
3. Insufficient time to plan for and implement individual instruction
4. Lack of accountability in lower grades
5. Inappropriate placement of students with disabilities
6. Lack of support for student from home
7. Learned Helplessness on the part of the student

In many ways, the barriers to success regarding students with disabilities who have been incorporated in the general education classroom are a negative reflection of the facilitators. For example, whereas confidence and inner-motivation were noted as facilitators, learned helplessness on the part of the student was cited as a barrier to success. Parental support was viewed as a facilitator, and the lack of support was noted as a barrier. However, a lack of training, class size, insufficient time, lack of

accountability for the student with disabilities, and inappropriate placement were all mentioned as barriers to success, but the reverse of these barriers were not commonly identified as facilitators. For example, while lack of training emerged as a barrier to success, only two respondents identified that the training they had received was beneficial. Likewise, while class size being too large was commonly mentioned as a barrier, only two respondents identified a small class size as a facilitator. No respondents stated that the amount of time they had to plan and implement individual instruction was a facilitator to success. Furthermore, only one respondent indicated that the appropriate placement of students was a facilitator to the success, while many mentioned inappropriate placement as a barrier. The reason for this phenomenon might be that respondents were more likely to report the negative than the positive and wanted to air their grievances. Another explanation is that respondents may have rarely experienced the situation when they have felt they had adequate training, small enough class sizes, ample time, or that all of their students were appropriately placed. Having not experienced these situations, respondents would be less likely to identify them.

Lack of Training. In a study conducted by Snyder (1999), 84% of the high school teachers who responded felt they were “not confident in working with students with special needs” (p. 179). Seventy-seven percent reported that they had “no formal training in working with students with special needs” (p. 179). The findings from this study supported this research. All but one of the respondents in this study either reported that they had no training in special education or that they had just one course in special education in college. Respondents also complained that the training they received had focused more on identification and classification of disabilities rather than effective instructional techniques. While all of the schools used in this study offered in-service for special education, some of the teachers responded that the training essentially amounted to the threat of legal ramifications if modifications were not made. Several of the respondents in this study did not seek training in special education because they viewed

themselves as subject matter specialists and were not as interested in learning about students with disabilities

Class Size. The literature review conducted for this study did not uncover class size as a barrier to success concerning students with disabilities incorporated in the general education classroom. However, several respondents in this study indicated that class size hampered their ability to serve students with disabilities. Themes that emerged concerning class size were that teachers had too many students to individualize instruction for a few or that teachers had so many students with disabilities it was difficult to develop individual lesson plans. Respondents who had a few students with disabilities in large classes indicated they were likely to forget about their IEP students or choose not to make the modifications for fear of singling the student with disabilities out. The respondents who had five or more students with disabilities in the same class indicated they were likely to modify assignments for the whole class as opposed to just the few who had IEPs.

Insufficient Time. Research was uncovered during the literature review for this study that indicated the importance of planning time for general education teachers who have students with disabilities incorporated in their classes (e.g. O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). The data collected from this study support this research. Teachers who participated in this study also identified that the lack of time to implement IEP modifications within the confines of their class periods was also a barrier to success. Additionally, respondents in this study complained that they did not have enough time to follow up on all of their students with disabilities.

Lack of Accountability. The literature review conducted for this study did not uncover the lack of accountability for the students with disabilities as a barrier to success. However, several respondents in this study indicated that students with disabilities are often socially promoted without being held accountable for subject material. While respondents seemed hesitant to lay the blame on their elementary school colleagues,

several teachers interviewed expressed frustration that students were sent to them without the basic skills of reading or writing. This was of particular concern to many of the respondents because of the increased emphasis on accountability tests. They stated that it was not fair to receive a student who is significantly below grade-level in ability but yet be held responsible for them failing to pass a standardized test. A common complaint was that the lack of accountability in lower grades often created a sense of learned helplessness in the student. One teacher noted that with earlier intervention, the number of students who receive special services would decrease and thus break the cycle of learned helplessness.

Inappropriate Placement. A strong push in special education reform today is for full inclusion (Snyder, 1999). This means the incidents of students with disabilities being placed in the general education classroom is growing (Kavale & Forness, 2000). While some see this as a positive advancement for students with disabilities, it has resulted in a more diverse group of students for the general education teacher (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). In a study by Schumm et al. (1995), general education teachers indicated that they viewed themselves as subject specialists, and the job of remediation and teaching students with disabilities is up to the special education teachers. These two findings create a situation where changes in special education practices are increasing the demands upon general education teachers who have not necessarily agreed to their new role (D'Alanzo et al., 1997). The findings of this study support this research. Seventeen of the 22 respondents indicated that inappropriate placement of students was a barrier to success. The five outlying responses were teachers who either taught low-level at-risk classes or vocational classes. Many of the respondents indicated that they viewed themselves as equipped to teach particular subject matter but not to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities. Several respondents noted that placing a student with moderate to severe disabilities in a classroom geared toward higher academic abilities was counterproductive. The students with disabilities were not able to gain success with

the subject matter, participate in classroom discussions, and their disability was naturally exposed, which further alienated them and lowered their self-confidence. Some advocates might argue that the teacher is at fault in those situations for not adapting teaching strategies to accommodate students with disabilities (O'Shea, 1999). In the interviews conducted for this study, however, teachers consistently expressed that the student was responsible for adapting to their teaching style and the difficulties intrinsic with their subject matter. This is not to suggest that one view is correct and one view is incorrect, but to recognize a real philosophical difference between many special education advocates and general classroom teachers.

Lack of Support for the Student. Research has suggested that parental involvement is important to the success of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (e.g. Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; O'Shea, 1999; O'Shea & O'Shea 1998). Conversely, respondents in this study noted that the lack of support from parents or guardians is a barrier to success. Respondents often identified that the students who were the biggest challenges tended to have little to no support from home and/or legal trouble.

Learned Helplessness. In the literature review conducted for this study, the notion that the learned helplessness of a student with disabilities was a contributing factor toward a lack of success was not uncovered. In contrast, every respondent in this study noted that laziness on the part of some of their students was a factor that lowered their opportunities for success. Many of the respondents suggested that an IEP actually contributed to indolence for their students with disabilities.

The prevalence of this finding in this study coupled with the lack of this finding in the literature reviewed creates a cause for further examination. Perhaps this phenomenon was an exclusive view of the teachers interviewed for this study. An alternative explanation is that researchers are reluctant to place the burden of success on the shoulders of the disabled.

Recommendations for Research

The purpose of this study was to give general educators the opportunity to provide their voice to matters concerning the education of students with disabilities in their classes. The scope of this study and the lack of similar studies suggest the need for additional qualitative and quantitative inquiries. Specifically, the following topics warrant further investigation:

1. It is recommended that future investigations focus on the perceptions of general education teachers regarding the facilitators and barriers to successfully incorporating students with disabilities in their classrooms. This could be accomplished via qualitative studies that seek to better understand the phenomenon from a general educator's perspective or a quantitative study geared at measuring the prevalence of teacher perceptions and practices regarding inclusion.
2. It is recommended that future investigations explore the notion that general educators view IEPs as loose guidelines rather than rigid, inflexible documents. The legal ramifications of not strictly complying with IEPs are a serious problem. Likewise, the pedagogical concerns of teachers not doing what they feel is in the best interest of the individual student is equally disconcerting. The frequency in which this perception was noted in this study, coupled by the absence of this notion in the literature reviewed, warrants further study.
3. Many of the general educators interviewed for this study indicated that too many students are classified under special education. If this notion is true, practices used to identify students with special needs should be examined. If the notion is not true, studies aimed at uncovering the discrepancy between the perception of general educators and the reality would be appropriate.

4. With greater inclusion of students with diverse needs in general education classrooms, teachers are challenged to find effective ways to instruct all of their students. This may require some general educators to develop and refine new methods of disseminating information to a more diverse population of students. It is recommended that studies aimed at uncovering best teaching practices for reaching students with various disabilities be pursued.
5. Some educators believe that students with disabilities should be mainstreamed in the general education classroom as long as they can keep up academically with their non-disabled peers. Others believe that students with disabilities should be entirely served in general education classes with support from special education services. While to general educators, the differences between these views may appear trivial, it is imperative that reforms concerning inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom begin with a discussion of the philosophical bent being pursued. It is recommended that further research be conducted to reconcile the philosophical differences and open lines of communication between those who support mainstreaming and those who support full inclusion.
6. In the literature reviewed for this study that focused on facilitators and barriers to the successful incorporation of students with disabilities in general education classroom, no studies were uncovered that examined individual students with disabilities. However, in the research conducted for this study, each of the 22 respondents identified personal characteristics and traits of the individual student with disabilities as facilitators or barriers to success. It is recommended that research be conducted that is focused on students with disabilities, personal

characteristics, and traits that contribute to their success or failure in the general education classroom.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for practice that arose from this study include the following:

1. It is recommended that school systems provide training for general education teachers regarding best practices for modifying lessons for students who have disabilities.
2. In order for general educators to have a voice in the education of students with disabilities who have been incorporated in their general education classes, it is imperative that general educators know their rights and responsibilities in IEP team meetings. It is recommended that school administrators communicate the role of general educators in IEP team meetings and establish an atmosphere where all members feel like an active participant in the meeting.
3. It is recommended that focus be placed on early intervention for students with disabilities with the goal of greater self-sufficiency as the student progresses through school.
4. It is recommended that general educators be given adequate time with special educators to plan, discuss, and implement appropriate modification strategies for the students with disabilities who have been incorporated in their classrooms.

5. It is recommended that teacher-training programs supplement current special education instruction for general education teachers that include the opportunity to practice special education modifications under the direction of a mentor teacher.
6. The goal of an IEP is to provide a student with disabilities the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment with appropriate modifications, not to give the student an opportunity to pass without meeting any requirements. It is recommended that school officials monitor IEPs closely to insure that individual goals set by the IEP team are being met before passing the student on to the next class.
7. It is recommended that general educators be granted opportunities to participate in the decision making process concerning the development and implementation of the overall school's philosophy concerning incorporating students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

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APPENIDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Opening Prompts

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

I would like to begin by asking you some questions about yourself:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subject(s) do you teach?
3. If I observed your classroom, what style of teaching would I most commonly see?
4. Tell me about your students in general (what level are they, are they college prep, age, etc.).
5. Tell me about your class. What is the subject? What are your goals? How did you develop your curriculum?
6. What do you see as your responsibilities as a teacher?

Thank you. Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding the practice of incorporating students with disabilities in your general education classroom. In order to accomplish this, I would like for you to think of three specific incidents where you have encountered this practice. Although you can draw upon any of your experiences, it would be helpful if you selected a case that you feel was successful, one that was more challenging, and one somewhere in the middle. For each of these, I will ask you a series of questions:

1. Without mentioning names or referring to any specific disabilities, tell me about the student. Would you classify this student as mildly disabled, moderately disabled, or severely disabled?
2. Did you participate in the M-Team that drew up his/her IEP?
3. What modifications did you successfully implement for this student? To what do you attribute this success?
4. What modifications did you find difficult to implement? Why?
5. Overall, what do you feel were the benefits of having this student in your classroom (for him/her and/or the other students)?
6. What do you feel could have been done to enhance the experience for this particular student?

(Repeat these questions for all three critical incidents)

General questions regarding training and support

1. What pre-service training did you receive regarding students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
2. What in-service opportunities have you received regarding students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
3. What on-going support do you receive regarding students with disabilities in the general education classroom?

Open discussion questions

1. If you could change one thing about special education laws, what would it be?
2. If you could change one thing about teacher training and support regarding special education law, what would it be?
3. What do you see as the facilitators to successfully incorporating a student with disabilities in your general education classroom?
4. What do you see as the barriers to successfully incorporating a student with disabilities in your general education classroom?

Other questions may evolve during the course of the interview.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Principal Investigator: David L. Burgin

Page 1 of 3

Title of Study: Facilitators and Barriers to Incorporating Students With Disabilities in the General Education Classroom at the Secondary Level: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Perceptions.

This Informed Consent will explain about a research project in which I would appreciate your participation. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. By no means is there any pressure for you to participate in this research. Please initial each page to indicate that you have read and understand the information.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher perceptions regarding the practice of the incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the efficacy of this practice, and facilitators and barriers to this practice. This is not an attempt to evaluate any particular teacher, teaching style, or school system, but rather an attempt to better understand the phenomenon of incorporating students with disabilities in the general education classroom through the general education teacher's eyes.

Duration

The participants will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview with the researcher that should last approximately one hour. The participants will also be asked to allow the researcher to contact them by phone after the interview to clarify and confirm themes that might emerge.

Procedures

The participants will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview with the researcher. The researcher will use an open-ended interviewing style and will utilize a list of interview guide questions to conduct the interview. The interviews will take place at the schools where the participants are employed or other location at the convenience of the participant. The appointment time will be set at the convenience of the participant. Prior to the interview, a letter of request will be sent to the Principal in each school before the participant is contacted.

Possible Risks/Discomforts

No risks or discomfort should be associated with this research. The goal of the research is not to evaluate a particular teacher and no specific information will be shared with Directors or Principals regarding the teaching practices of the participants.

July 17, 2003

Subject's Initials _____

Principal Investigator: David L. Burgin

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Title of Study: Facilitators and Barriers to Incorporating Students With Disabilities in the General Education Classroom at the Secondary Level: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Perceptions.

Benefits

No direct benefit or compensation will be provided to the participants. Any potential benefit to the participant would arise from that individual's reflection upon the interview questions. The benefits of this study would be a better understanding of how general educators feel about incorporating students with disabilities in their general education classes. At this time, there is an apparent gap of literature regarding this topic, and this would provide a piece of this "missing voice."

Confidentiality

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records of this study will be stored in a locked file in the home office of the researcher located at 502 East Holston Avenue, Johnson City, Tennessee, for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, the Food and Drug Administration, and the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

Compensation for Medical Treatment

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at (423) 439-6134.

July 17, 2003

Subject's Initials _____

Principal Investigator: David L. Burgin

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Title of Study: Facilitators and Barriers to Incorporating Students With Disabilities in the General Education Classroom at the Secondary Level: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Perceptions.

Voluntary Participation

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. Your study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

Signature of Volunteer: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Letter of Request to Principals

Dear Principal:

As a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University in the program of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, I am interested in general educators perceptions regarding the inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom. The purpose of my study is to examine the practice of inclusion, the efficacy of inclusion, as well as facilitators and barriers to successful inclusion through the eyes of the general education teacher. The “missing voice” of the general education teacher in special education literature compels me to pursue this endeavor.

In order to conduct my research, I am requesting your permission to contact teachers at your high school to determine their interest in interviewing with me regarding this topic. The purpose of my research is not to evaluate any particular teacher or school, but rather provide an opportunity for general educators to share their perceptions concerning inclusion. All audiotapes and written materials will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be used for the names of participants and schools. In addition, participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form as required by East Tennessee State University.

If you would be willing for me to contact teachers in your school, please sign the enclosed permission form and return it to me in the enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope. If I can answer any questions or provide any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXX-XXXX. I very much appreciate your cooperation in this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

David L. Burgin
Doctoral Student
East Tennessee State University

Permission to Contact Teachers

Date: _____

I, _____, Principal of _____ School, give permission for David L. Burgin, a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, to contact teachers in my building to ask their permission to interview general education teachers for a study concerning the practice of inclusion.

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Auditor's Letter

G.L Carter Jr.
Professor Emeritus, NC State University
5757 Spencer Hale Road
Morristown, TN 37813

June 28, 2004

David Burgin
502 East Holston Ave.
Johnson City, TN 37601

Dear David:

Thank you for the opportunity of studying the documents dealing with the research project in which you have engaged in your doctoral program. May I complement you on the excellent writing by which you have represented your project. It is a project dealing with a very important matter. It should be of considerable interest to those directly involved in the public school system of Tennessee and beyond, including the schools of education. In my view, there is much in your study to which schools of education should take note. In doing so, they should look for implications to the programs of study they provide for those preparing to become teachers.

Allow me to complement you and your graduate advisory committee for you having designed and conducted a study relying upon non-quantitative evidence – the type of evidence appropriate for the phenomenon into which you were inquiring.

My observations on the results of your study are based upon my having examined the documents you have provided (your dissertation and transcripts of 10 oral interviews conducted with your study respondents). I am confident that members of your graduate advisory committee have guided your work in an appropriate manner – including judging the adequacy of your research questions, your study design, the plan for and manner of collecting evidence, and the processing and analyzing of that evidence.

Specific to your evidence and your analysis and presentation of that evidence: It seems that you have extrapolated, processed, analyzed and presented that evidence in a defensible manner. Your presentation of the results is well organized and very readable. You have arrived at defensible conclusions – including comparing your findings with those already reported in the literature. You have also pointed out, appropriately, similarities and differences between your findings and those reported in the literature. You have also pointed out findings of your study which go beyond those reported in existing literature.

On the basis of the examination I have been able to conduct of your study, if you had been a student in either of the graduate programs in which I have worked, I would recommend the acceptance and approval of your study for the purpose of granting the appropriate degree.

The experience upon which I draw in making these judgments include the following:

1. Masters of Science and PhD Degrees from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.
2. Serving for 18 years as professor in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Wisconsin, Madison; including serving that graduate department as Graduate Administrator for a number of years. In that capacity, I was responsible for administering the admissions and examinations processes for that department. In that department, there was a roster of approximately 400 graduate students at any one time (part-time and full-time, MS and PhD seeking).
3. Serving for 13 years as professor in the Department of Adult and Community College Education, NC State University. That department had a graduate student population of approximately 400 part-time and full-time students pursuing MS, Med and EdD degrees. For some of those years I served as Chairman of Graduate Admissions and Examinations. The two years preceding retirement, I served as Interim Department Head. It was in this department that I had the good fortune of serving with Dr. Terry Tollefson.

In each of the two graduate departments in which I served, I introduced and secured acceptance of masters and doctoral students' studies to be based on non-quantitative evidence. I conducted graduate research seminars on research designs utilizing non-quantitative evidence. At NC State University, I made a practice of not serving as major professor for students who sought to conduct studies based on quantitative evidence. The type of questions in which I was interested could be appropriately examined only by the use of non-quantitative evidence.

Best wishes as you complete your graduate work.
Sincerely,

G.L. Carter Jr.

VITA

David L. Burgin

Personal Data: Date of Birth: May 13, 1967

Place of Birth: Dayton, Ohio

Marital Status: Married

Education: Brentwood Academy, Brentwood, Tennessee, 1985.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Broadfield Social Studies
Education, B.S., 1989.

Tusculum College, Greenville, Tennessee; K-12 Concentration in
Education, MAED, 1997.

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed. D, 2004.

Professional

Experience: American History Teacher, Clay County Schools, Orange Park,
Florida, 1990-1992.

Social Studies Teacher, Johnson City Schools, Johnson City,
Tennessee, 1992- Present.

Administrative Assistant, Johnson City Schools, Johnson City,
Tennessee, 1997-1998.