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Elementary Teachers' Perspectives of Inclusion in the Regular Education Classroom

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 in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

Elementary Teachers' Perspectives of Inclusion in the Regular Education Classroom

by

Becky Lorraine Olinger

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine regular education and special education teacher perceptions of inclusion services in an elementary school setting. In this phenomenological study, purposeful sampling techniques and data were used to conduct a study of inclusion in the elementary schools. In-depth one-to-one interviews with 8 participants were conducted using semistructured format.

The 2 research questions were focused on perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services. The findings suggest teacher recognition of barriers that interfere with their ability to meet the needs of students with special needs, an understanding that successful inclusion requires teamwork between general and special education providers, and that inclusion in the general education environment may not be appropriate for all students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my parents. They have always been my biggest fans and have instilled in me the importance of education. They worked so hard to get me where I am today and without them I would be nowhere.

To my husband, you have been my rock. Your patience during this time has been tremendous. Thank you for being so supportive and helping me through this.

And to my daughter Gracie, I hope that seeing me work hard through this I can show you how important school is. I have had to sacrifice time with you, but that is all over. I hope you can see what I have done and decide to work hard at whatever you want to accomplish.

I truly love you all and am so thankful God put you all in my life!

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To my mother-in-law and father-in-law, thank you for your support through these past 3 years. I have needed you more than you ever know and you were always there.

To my sister, Dawn, it's your turn now!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is a philosophy and is meant to create settings where all students in a K-12 school and classroom are a full part of the learning community regardless of their strengths or weaknesses. There has been a trend toward inclusion practices for several decades (Timmons, 2002). In North America an educational initiative that advocated bringing students in special education and regular education together for academic instruction has restructured the way students were taught in the United States (Edmunds, 2003). The discussion among educators in special education over the past century has centered around the labels, categories, and instructional groups for these children as well as who is competent to teach these students and how they will be trained (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). A goal of these policies and practices has been to minimize differences between groups in learning.

Historically, special education has evolved as a comprehensive system for delivering services for students with disabilities. The earliest services were provided for students with hearing impairments in the 1500s, with visual impairments in 1784, and those with mental disabilities in 1911. It was necessary to change the educational program so that children with special needs could succeed in the regular curriculum. For students with mental disabilities special education curriculum was developed and implemented in the special education classes (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). This approach has evolved over time due to different laws set forth to prevent discrimination against students with disabilities.

The legal origins for the movement towards educating and integrating children with special needs can be found in PL94-142 commonly referred to as the Education of All

Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (IDEA's Definition of Disabilities, 2012). This bill was later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 and 2004. The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and sequential amendments to IDEA with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 created an awareness within the United States for the need for educational reform and in the provision of the opportunities given to students with special needs under IDEA (Macfarlane, 2012). The reauthorization of IDEA continues as the needs and demands of education shifts and are legally set for the students identified through special education 1975 (IDEA's Definition of Disabilities, 2012).

Gersten and Woodward (1990) suggested that The Regular Education Initiative represented a combining of resources between special education and general education. Previously special education and regular education operated as a dual system with respect to funding and services to children with disabilities. Regular education had little responsibility for the defined special needs population (Osgood, 2005). Therefore, inclusion was implemented.

Inclusion is a moving continuum (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The inclusion practices dictated the adjustments in the general classroom environment to ensure participation and individual progress for the student with special needs. Children who had previously been mainstreamed received academic instruction in a separate class with a specially trained teacher instead of being in the general classroom. Inclusive practices began to require adapting the general classroom to meet the needs of the student's special needs, while mainstreaming required the child to adapt to the classroom environment. This allowed the child to be integrated into the regular education class with special education personnel available to assist. Instruction and

grades are still provided by the highly qualified teacher. Mainstreaming allowed the child to be instructed in core subjects by the special education teacher in a separate classroom. This adaptation of inclusion promotes different feelings toward teaching students with special needs in the regular classroom (Wang & Birch, 1984).

Many studies have been conducted on the teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion model. Research has demonstrated that teachers with more positive attitudes toward inclusion have been more likely to adjust their instruction (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). These teachers were also likely to have a positive influence on their peers' attitudes toward inclusion (Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012). Unfortunately, the lack of special education experience and training in inclusive practices may have had a profoundly negative effect on teacher attitudes toward inclusion and students with special needs (Cook, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Titone (2005) reported that over the past 10 years a major obstacle to successful inclusion has been the lack of effective preparation for teachers. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perspectives on the necessary components for an effective full inclusion program. I explored the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of educators regarding their successes and difficulties in meeting the educational needs of children with special needs. My goal was to use the views of these educators to improve the inclusion programs in the school system in which they work. Hopefully, the findings of this study will be of value to other educators as well.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study was: What are the participants' perceptions of inclusion services in the system where they are employed?

1. What are the participants' perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion of students with special needs in a regular education setting?
2. What factors do teachers identify that enable them to successfully incorporate students with special needs into the regular education class in an elementary school setting?

Significance of the Study

This was a qualitative study of inclusion services offered in one Tennessee school system. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a regular classroom environment. Participants included licensed general education and special education teachers who are currently or have recently been involved in an inclusion program. Information was collected regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the programs as well as recommendations for service delivery through investigating the perceptions of the teachers of inclusion.

As increased numbers of students with special needs receive their instruction in the general classrooms, many educators have reported reservations about their ability to successfully work in an inclusive environment (Cook, 2004; Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Teachers have often reported that they were not prepared to adequately work with students with special needs in the regular classroom (Cook, 2002).

Limitations

Purposeful sampling allows for an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of a group Merriam (1998). This method was used to examine four elementary inclusion teachers and four regular education teachers from a Northeast Tennessee public school system. The study was limited by the nature of qualitative research in which data collected represent the perceptions and experiences of the participants in the study and cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the study. Themes and categories that emerged from the data are not intended to represent the perceptions and experiences of all inclusion teachers and all regular education teachers working in inclusion programs. Purposeful sampling was conducted for maximum variation and includes the possibility that experiences and views of the participants sampled do not fully represent those of other educators within the school system.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and acronyms are used as follows:

Children with Disabilities or Students with Disabilities (SWD) – A child with intellectual disabilities, 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 who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA’s Definition of Disabilities, 2012).

Highly Qualified - When used with respect to any public elementary school teacher, secondary

school teacher, or special education teacher teaching in a state, highly qualified requires that the teacher has obtained full state certification as a teacher or a special education teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in the state (Building the Legacy, 2012).

Full inclusion - All students regardless of handicapping condition will be in a regular classroom full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting (Rogers, 1993).

Mainstreaming - The selective placement of special education students in one or more regular education classes (Rogers, 1993).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with nondisabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate. They should have access to the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities, or any other program that nondisabled peers would be able to access. The student should be provided with supplementary aids and services necessary to achieve educational goals if placed in a setting with nondisabled peers (Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Law, 2012).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) - Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). All IEPs must be designed for individual students based on their individualized needs. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students to work together to improve the education of children with disabilities (IDEA's Definition of Disabilities, 2012).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – Under the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act, schools are required to provide a free appropriate public education to children with learning disabilities and other educational disabilities in public schools (Free Appropriate Public Education, 2012).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act Amendments of 1997 required that states establish educational program goals for special education students that are consistent with the standards of other students. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 sought to align the provisions of IDEA with the provisions of *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001, including the incorporation of language around having high expectations for special education students (IDEA, 1997, 2004).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has been reauthorized as the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2002. *No Child Left Behind* focuses on accountability by data collection and implementation of adherence to standards set forth by the federal government. These standards are tied to financial inducements. NCLB includes more choices for parents in the form of student help, school choice, and charter schools. Greater local control and flexibility for states extend to requirements and definitions for annual yearly progress, graduation rates, and acceptable student achievement levels. NCLB focuses on scientifically based research from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and neuroscience, and especially from research in educational settings (Ed.gov, 2012d).

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study was focused on the perspectives of four elementary special education teachers and four regular education teachers regarding inclusion in the elementary school setting. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the topic, statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study, research questions, definitions, and an overview. Chapter 2 consists of a review of current literature involving the history of inclusion including significant legislation and key literature. Chapter 3 provides a description of methods and procedures. Chapter 4 includes the analyses and interpretation of data collected through interviews. Conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations for practice and further research are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a regular classroom environment in an elementary school setting. Cook, Semmel, and Gerber (1999) found that positive attitudes of school personnel were critical for inclusion to be successful. The identification and incorporation of primary attitudes and techniques from the perspective of the educator has been critical to the provision of special education programs with the most successful outcomes. Special educators were put in the unique position to sell inclusion to parents, administrators, and regular education teachers. Special education teachers work with students through inclusion have had specialized training and have been frequently seen as knowledgeable advocates for children with disabilities (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997). The teacher's attitude was essential to the success or failure of inclusion (Cook et al., 1999; Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997).

At the turn of the 21st century the idea of inclusion attracted intense and conflicting interests in by educators and the public. Inclusion has risen above the idea of including children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in the general education classroom (Osgood, 2005). Inclusion was the generally accepted goal for educating students with disabilities (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

From the early 1900s into the 1960s, the terms integration and segregation were used in research and professional discussion related to this issue (Osgood, 2005). By 1918 compulsory

education laws were in place in every state in the United States (Burgin, 2003; Osgood, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 1995; Yell et al., 1998). With mandatory education polices, special classes in public schools became more common (Goodin, 2011; Osgood, 2005; Tudor, 2004). By 1974 mainstreaming had become preferable to segregating students with disabilities. By the 1980s aggressive efforts to integrate virtually every child regardless of the severity of the disability increased; this gave rise to the term full mainstreaming. During the 1980s education used the term mainstreaming as well as the term inclusion (Osgood, 2005).

What is Inclusion

Inclusion is based on IDEA's principle of the least restrictive environment (Turnbull et al., 2013). IDEA's presumption in favor of inclusion declared

each state must establish procedures to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...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 education with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013, p. 38)

Inclusion then refers to the participation of students with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers in academic, extracurricular, and other school activities.

The practice of inclusion has changed throughout the history of special education.

Turnbull et al. (2013) identified four consecutive phases of inclusion. First was mainstreaming. This is an educational arrangement of returning students from special education classrooms to the general education classrooms, typically for the nonacademic portions of the school day (Grosenick & Reynolds, 1978; Turnbull & Schulz, 1979). This practice was followed by the Regular Education Initiative that was an attempt to reform general and special education by

creating a unified system capable of meeting the child's individual needs in the general education classrooms (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986).

The third practice initiated was inclusion through accommodations. This was an additive approach to inclusion that assumed the only workable approach to including students with disabilities in general education classes was to add instructional adaptations to the predefined general education teaching and learning approaches (Pugach, 1995).

Next was inclusion through restructuring, which is a design that recreates general and special education by merging resources to develop more flexible learning environments for all students and educators (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Sailor, 2002; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2002).

Universal design for learning (UDL) has become the most common form of inclusion practice. UDL refers to the design of instructional materials and activities to make the content information accessible for all children (Rose & Meyer, 2006). Through UDL, students with disabilities can access the general education curriculum with modifications achieved through technology and instruction. For example, a child with a disability may need electronic formats of instructional materials if he or she has difficulty with writing (Turnbull et al., 2013).

The Road to Inclusion

From 1930 to 1960 special education in schools changed dramatically. During these 3 decades the number of students identified as disabled increased, and these children were placed in special education. Research on the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of a wide range of categories of disabilities lengthened. The expansion of public school special education programs enabled legislatures to pass laws by various states beginning early in 1930 and into the 1940s and

1950s (Webb, 2006). These laws typically permitted local districts to establish specified classes or programs for children with disabilities. According to Webb (2006) these laws required certain programs to be established and provided funds to support the efforts. These laws also addressed the operation and policies of requirements regarding service to children with disabilities in public schools and particular settings within those schools (Osgood, 2005).

The expansion of public school involvement and investment in the education of special needs students developed continuous growth of a variety of special settings for students with disabilities. According to Osgood (2005) as the number of categories and separate settings increased, considerable discussion and debate arose regarding the effectiveness of the separation of students with disabilities as instruction. During the 1940s and 1950s this debate was framed as one of segregation versus integration (Osgood, 2005). Osgood (2005) stated that despite occasional comments regarding the social contact between children with disabilities and children without disabilities, most everyone involved in the education of children with exceptionalities saw segregation as appropriate. Concerns about the repercussions of separation became an issue and grew stronger between 1930 and 1960 (Osgood, 2005). Parents and practitioners questioned the efficacy of segregated settings and the effects of academic and social development (Osgood, 2005).

Special education's development in America during the 1960s was influenced by significant and educational initiatives (Osgood, 2005). According to Osgood (2005) the dramatic change in the nature and involvement of the federal government was pushed by the leadership of President Kennedy by developing public awareness and policies towards disabilities. He also stated that Kennedy's administration's proactive involvement remained strong and continued after his assassination. Kennedy's legislative initiatives included both Public law 88-156 and

Public law 88-164 (Osgood, 2005). This was a comprehensive act that established a Division of Handicapped Children and Youth within the U.S. Office of Education and authorized funding for expanding training of special education personnel and provided support for more research (Osgood, 2005). By the early 1970s, the debate over segregation versus integration of students with disabilities had extended and called for a reform of special education in general. Mainstreaming became the alternative to segregation (Osgood, 2005).

Teacher training and teacher attitudes impacted the effectiveness to incorporate children with special needs into the general classroom and attracted attention as integration efforts proceeded. Osgood (2005) stated that teacher educational programs developed to address instruction of students with disabilities have existed since the late 1800s. According to Osgood (2005) between 1949 and 1961, the number of institutions of higher education that offered certification programs for teachers of children with intellectual disabilities grew from 22 to 140. There was a lack of consistency in the content of such programs and their steady growth continued as the number of special education classes increased. Unfortunately, states were slow to enact legislation for appropriate requirements for endorsement in licensure for teaching students with special needs (Osgood, 2005).

Reflection and debate regarding the future of special education and its programs developed highly important realms: policy practice in the public schools, and legislation and litigation at the state and federal levels. The efforts to integrate students with special needs appropriately brought about more educational initiatives (Osgood, 2005). Although the success was mixed, results were encouraging for the students with special needs and broadened more efforts into mainstreaming students. This need for those efforts was guaranteed by important

legislation and court decisions like the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975 (Osgood, 2005).

Public Law 94-142

In 1975 Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act that guaranteed equal educational opportunity for all children with disabilities (Spring, 2012). According to Osgood (2005), this legislation mandated a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment for all children identified as disabled. Children could no longer be excluded from public education based on a handicap (Osgood, 2005). This strategy was intended to remove the label attached to students with disabilities, improve socialization in the classrooms, and help students to work out real world situations (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). Students were entitled to identification, diagnosis, and classification procedures that were free of bias. They were guaranteed the right to receive an individualized education plan (IEP) and due process of law in implementing those rights (Osgood, 2005).

In 1990 PL 94-142 was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA. ed.gov, 2012). This reauthorization continued to emphasize the need for regular classrooms to adapt to meet the needs of students with disabilities, maintain the importance of the least restrictive environment, expand services, and add to the list of categories identified (Osgood, 2005). In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized and a variety of changes were made (Osgood, 2005).

One of these changes was to protect the rights of students whose disabilities resulted in violent or dangerous behaviors (Osgood, 2005). According to Osgood (2005) the changes

removed expulsion as an option for school systems for students with special needs whose disabilities might manifest through violent behavior. Now schools would have to develop behavior plans and other strategies to address behaviors and emotional problems (Osgood, 2005; Palmaffy, 2001).

Another important amendment improved parent participation (Osgood, 2005). Schools were required to collaborate with parents and provide education regarding provisions and protections of the law (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996; Palmaffy, 2001). Parents were educated to become more involved and participate in their child's educational plan (Osgood, 2005).

Civil Rights

United States' public schools faced many more challenges beginning in the 1960s. Discussions regarding social and economic inequality led to internal exploration. The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision by the Supreme Court in 1954 was one of the most crucial events in American social intellectual history during the 20th century (Osgood, 2005). In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) in *separate is equal* by declaring the practice of segregating schools on the basis of race to be unconstitutional. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is considered a landmark case for the court systems to apply the separate is not equal clause and "paved the way for blacks to be integrated into American public schools" (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007, p. 180). This new concern for civil rights and efforts to meet the needs of students eventually affected the children with disabilities (Osgood, 2005; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007; Tudor, 2004; Winzer, 2012). Segregation in public schools was determined to be a denial of equal protection under the law and made it unfeasible to defend segregation for other groups of minorities including the children

with special needs (Osgood, 2005; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). This decision affected developments in law, politics, social policy, and education. The federal governments under John F. Kennedy determined that greater involvement was necessary to promote action and ensure the enforcement of law, protect the civil rights for all Americans and promised public schooling (Webb, 2006). From 1960 to 1968 special education expanded in the terms of its number of programs offered and students served (Osgood, 2005).

The Civil Rights Act (1964) is an example of precedent-setting legislation. Signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2, 1964, this act prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and made employment discrimination illegal (Civil Rights Act, 1964; Federal Education Policy and the States 1945-2005, 2005). The Civil Rights Act was considered the most influential piece of legislation in education for civil rights since Reconstruction (Federal Education Policy and the States 1945-2005, 2005). The 1964 passage of this federal legislation was a stepping stone for the future of civil rights cases. An example of one such suit is the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971). The ruling of this lawsuit was essential for mainstreaming students with disabilities. The decision of this case was based on the Fourteenth Amendment and the concept that separate facilities were unequal. As a result the Philadelphia public schools were court ordered to place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and to provide a free and appropriate public education suitable for the students' needs (Federal Education Policy and the States 1945-2005, 2005; PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971).

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

In the mid-1970s there were an estimated 3.7 million children with disabilities in the United States (Bernard & Mondale, 2001). Despite these numbers most state laws allowed children who were deemed uneducable to be excluded from coming to school. Two important federal court cases demanded the rights of children with disabilities to an appropriate education for their needs (Webb, 2006).

In *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* it was estimated that 18,000 of 22,000 children identified with intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, vision impairments, hearing impairments, and learning disabilities in the District of Columbia were not being served. Rejecting the district's defense that it did not have the money to serve the children, the court ordered that:

no child eligible for a publicly supported education in the District of Columbia public schools shall be excluded from a regular public school assignment by a rule, policy, or practice of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia or its agents unless such child is provided (a) adequate alternative educational services suited to the child's needs, which may include special education or tuition grants, and (b) a constitutionally adequate prior hearing and periodic review of the child's status, progress, and the adequacy of any educational alternative. (Webb, 2006, p. 300)

The second case, *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, was also concerned with the notion that children with disabilities were not being provided a public education. In an out-of-court settlement the state agreed to provide a free public education to all children with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 6 and 21. It also specified that due process would be established to resolve disputes (Webb, 2006).

The decisions in *Mills* and *PARC* and combined lobbying by groups representing people with special needs, special education professionals, and parents of children with special needs led Congress to pass the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Webb, 2006). This act also prohibits discrimination by failure to provide access and reasonable facilities to people with disabilities (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act not only guaranteed the educational rights of children with disabilities but also defined and expanded the rights for all children. The EHA provided over \$1 billion annually to be distributed through the states to local school districts to help fund educational services for children with disabilities (Webb, 2006).

The EHA introduced different principles in education. The most fundamental of these was the right for all children with disabilities to receive a free appropriate education and related services to meet their needs. According to Algozzine and Ysseldyke (2006) this law also required every child receive a comprehensive, nondiscriminatory evaluation before being placed in special education and that an individualized education program be prepared for children who receive special education services. Another very important provision was the extensive due process requirements designed to ensure the rights of children with disabilities. EHA did not require students to be mainstreamed, but it did encourage the practice (Webb, 2006).

Regular Education Initiative

The Regular Education Initiative emerged late in the 1980s through the movement to increase more integration of students with disabilities into the mainstream through a fundamental restructuring of special education (Osgood, 2005). The Regular Education Initiative of the

Reagan administration was a federal proposal that encouraged inclusion services. It deemed that categorizing children by a disability served no real purpose other than to segregate and isolate students further (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986).

The proposals for restructuring special and general education created a dramatic shift in policies regarding the treatment of students with disabilities (Astuto & Clark, 1988; Clark & Astuto, 1988; Verstegen, 1987; Verstegen & Clark, 1988). One of the premises on which REI was based stated that students with special needs would be served best by improving education for all students. This meant that every student was fully integrated into the general classroom. Students were not given labels. Costs were lowered by the elimination of special budgets and administrative categories, and the focus became excellence in education for all students regardless of disabilities (Kauffman, 1989).

REI was based on a number of premises. Osgood (2005) stated the first premise was that students were more alike than different so there was no need for special education services. Second, he said that all good teachers could use the same strategies to teach all students. Third, children could be provided a high-quality education without giving them certification in special education and providing them with a different program. Fourth, education outside the general education classroom was not necessary. All students could be educated in the same classroom. Finally, the segregation of students according to their handicapping conditions was discriminatory and did not provide for equitable educational opportunities (Osgood, 2005).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Since the enactment of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the United States transformed its efforts to provide a free and appropriate education for children with disabilities (Winzer, 2012). The original legislation was revised several times but most

notably with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, which passed in 1990 (Winzer, 2012). Further revisions of IDEA, combined with Americans with Disabilities Act, contributed to today's multifaceted approach to special education. As of 2002 there were 13 categories of disabilities recognized under federal law, and persons from birth through the age of 21 were entitled to a variety of educational programs and support services through public schools (Osgood, 2005).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, was the federal law that governs special education. This federal law was a combination of both civil rights statutes and educational laws and comprised of three core requirements according to McLaughlin and Nolet (2004):

- All children with disabilities who need special education must be provided a free, appropriate public education, or FAPE.
- Each child's special education must be designed on an individual basis to meet his or her unique needs and must be provided in the least restrictive environment, or LRE. This requires that to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers. The regulations also required that each district make available a continuum of placements as part of meeting the LRE requirements. These placements include general education classrooms, special education classrooms, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. The placements do not have to be used, but must be available if needed based on an IEP team decision.
- The rights of every child and youth with a disability and his or her family must be ensured and protected through procedural safeguards (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was followed the next year by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Passed during the presidency of President Johnson, the ESEA represented a major new commitment of the federal government to quality and equality in the schools (Titone, 2005). Federal revenues for education increased from \$2.0 billion in 1965-66 to \$4.9 billion in 1974 (Titone, 2005). ESEA allocated over \$1 billion in federal funds annually to education. According to Titone (2005) the ESEA included five major sections or titles. The largest was Title I that provided assistance to local school districts for the education of children from low income families. Other sections of the ESEA provided funds for library resources, textbooks, instructional materials, and strengthening state departments of education. The act was expanded in 1966 and 1967 to include programs for Native American children, children of migrant workers, children with handicaps (Title VI), and children with limited English-speaking abilities (Webb, 2006). In 2002 Congress amended ESEA and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind

The education program embodied in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was the No Child Left Behind Act. The goal was to have all students achieve at grade level proficiency by 2014 (Webb, 2006). The reauthorization was developed to help every child reach his or her academic potential and could not be disadvantaged by discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, economic standard, or disability (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). NCLB's funding was directed at promoting higher achievement of low-income and minority students and held schools accountable for the progress of all students (Webb, 2006).

Based on the United States Department of Education (2012) site, the purpose of NCLB was to guarantee that all children have an equal opportunity to attain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. According to The U.S. Department of Education (2012) this purpose could be accomplished by:

- Ensuring that high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials were aligned with challenging state academic standards so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators could measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement.
- Meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance.
- Closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.
- Holding schools, local educational agencies, and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education.

- Targeting resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest.
- Improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, and learning by using state assessment systems designed to ensure that students met challenging state academic achievement and content standards and increased achievement overall, but especially for the disadvantaged.(U. S. Department of Education, 2012).

The No Child Left Behind Act was closely aligned with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* was signed into law on Dec. 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush. The provisions of the act became effective on July 1, 2005, with the exception of some of the elements pertaining to the definition of a highly qualified teacher that took effect upon the signing of the act. The final regulations were published on Aug. 14, 2006 (IDEA. ed. gov, 2012).

According to Kaufman and Blewett (2012) key components of the revised plan were:

- Closely aligning special education law and No Child Left Behind. It guaranteed that students with disabilities were fully included in the district-wide achievement measures. These assessments determined whether school systems faced coercive action. The bottom line was that states and school districts must show academic progress with students with disabilities.
- Allocating funds for serving students with disabilities who have yet to be identified as children with disabilities.

- Reforming the due process procedures.
- Altering rules for discipline for students with disabilities (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012).
- Every state must develop specific criteria to determine if a child has a learning disability and if they require special education.
- Determination of the existence of a specific learning disability was done by the child's parents and a team of qualified professions.

Kaufman and Blewett (2012) also stated the factors included to determine a learning disability were:

- Inadequate achievement measured against expectations for a child's age or the grade-level standards set by the state
- Insufficient progress when using a process based on response to scientific, research-based interventions (frequently referred to as RTI)
- Evidence of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both.

In correlation with the previous requirements, a child could qualify for special education as long as the child's learning difficulties were not the primarily the result of a visual, hearing, or motor disability, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, limited English proficiency, or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math. Also, parents must be provided with documentation of assessments on achievement used as part of an intervention process and must be notified of their right to request an evaluation under IDEA. The timeframe for completion of an evaluation may be extended by mutual written consent of the parents and the school (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2012).

Demographics and Inclusion Where Research was Conducted

The school system where the research was conducted serves 4,057 students. There were five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There were 2,383 students in grades PreK-6. Of those students, 386 students received special education services. These services included inclusion, resource, speech, occupational therapy, or any other special services. There were 180 students in grades PreK-6 receiving inclusion services. These were students who received their special education services in the general education classroom with support from an inclusion teacher.

The special education department of the school system employed 26 staff members. Inclusion services were provided by 10 inclusion teachers system wide. There were six self-contained teachers also known as CDC teachers. These students stayed in a special education during the day based on their academic needs. There were also two behavior modification teachers. These teachers worked with the school system to provide support for students with behavioral issues. We also had a behavior modification classroom for our elementary students and our middle school and high school students. In addition, there were four special education PreK teachers. These teachers provided early intervention to students from age 3 through age 5.

Inclusion in Research

All educational programs revolved around maximizing student success. For students with disabilities the environment in which to achieve this performance was under debate (Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012). King (2003) explained that “inclusive education means that all students within a school regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, or disabilities in any area become part of the school community” (p. 152). Inclusion was built on

the idea that all students should be valued for their exceptionalities and be included as important members of the school (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008).

But inclusion must be implemented effectively in order for success.

Sailor and Roger (2005) provided six evidence-based principles for a successful model of inclusion within schools. These were:

- General education teachers accepted the responsibilities for and directed all students' learning. Parents were encouraged to participate in supporting the model.
- All school resources were brought together to benefit all students.
- Schools addressed social development and citizenship by incorporating positive behavior supports for all.
- Schools were organized, data-driven, problem solving systems where all personnel took part in the learning process.
- Schools fostered a positive working relationship with families and communities.
- Schools departed from traditional management and communication processes.
- Principals and other school leaders played a critical role in the educational reform of moving students to the inclusive environment.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies showed that successful implementation of inclusion depends on the teachers' attitudes. The teachers' attitudes could enhance or impede the implementation of inclusion. The results of various studies that have examined teacher perspectives portrayed mixed feelings (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011).

Perspectives

There were a variety of opinions in regards to inclusion among teachers. Classroom teachers reported they often felt that they were not prepared and did not have the time to work with children with disabilities. Teachers often stated that they must give most of their time to students with special needs while they are in the classroom (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, and Loveland (2001) found that inclusion teachers had significantly more positive perspectives toward inclusion than the regular education teachers. Another study conducted by De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) revealed that the majority of teachers have neutral or negative attitudes towards inclusion. There were no results reporting clear positive results in De Boer's study. Chmiliar (2009) developed a case study and found that the teachers demonstrated a positive perspective regarding inclusion. Some teachers had reservations about teaching students with severe disabilities and all said a lack of time is a major concern. Cagran and Schmidt (2011) studied how teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are determined by the type of special needs the students have. In the case of students with physical impairments, teachers expressed the highest level of consent and the lowest in the case of pupils with behavioral and emotional disorders. Cagran and Schmidt's study also showed that teachers' professional expertise in working with pupils with special needs is another important factor.

Need for Support

Lohrman and Bambara (2006) studied the supports and resources needed by regular education teachers in order to have a more positive perception of inclusion. They concluded that two levels of support were needed. First a school-wide culture was needed where there is a vision for inclusion, in-class support, and a collegial atmosphere. The second level described

how individualized supports, like training, contributed to the teachers' confidence or apprehension. De Boer et al. (2011) found several variables that relate to teacher's attitudes such as training, experience, and type of disability. Hardin (2005) stated that teaching experience was a key to better perspectives. This correlated with Giangreco and Broer's (2005) finding that skills and training were a major concern in implementing appropriate inclusion. Giangreco, Backsus, CicholskiKelly, Sherman, and Mayropoulos (2010) studied the need for paraeducator training to facilitate inclusion. By incorporating the paraeducator into the inclusive setting, this provided extra support for staff and students that also created a more positive atmosphere. Paraeducators were heavily relied upon to provide support to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Often the paraeducator was responsible for providing instruction to an individual student or group of students. The knowledge and training of these individuals was imperative for the success of the inclusive classroom. According to McLaughlin and Nolet (2004) many parents and special educators were concerned about the level of training and the amount of responsibility these individuals were given. Several research-based training programs and curricula for paraeducators have been developed. Education and training was being implemented in order for paraeducators to work effectively with students with special needs. Programs also included strategies for training special education teachers in techniques to supervise paraeducators as well (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

Berry (2011) studied teacher perspective on experienced education teachers and found that teachers needed to be provided with information regarding school and district policies and procedures and establishing communities of practice as support for new teachers in the inclusive setting. Pavri and Monda-Amaya (2001) described how this kind of strong support can bring out the positive perspectives among students and teachers in an inclusive school.

Summary

The review of literature began with the history of special education and the beginning of inclusion. Many legislative acts were developed in order to mandate inclusive settings. The literature also showed that there has been a shift of educational practice regarding inclusion. This change has occurred because of advocates for students with disabilities and legislation. Inclusive classrooms are diverse settings with relationships between students, teachers, and parents. It is important to look at how the stakeholders experience the diverse aspects of inclusion and their perspectives to develop a clear picture of an inclusive classroom (Schumm & Vaughn, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 identifies the procedures used to investigate special education and general education teachers' perceptions of inclusion in the elementary school setting. A qualitative research method was used for an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and thoughts regarding inclusion in elementary public schools (Merriam, 2009). Four characteristics are identified to help understand the characteristics of qualitative research. One characteristic is the focus on process, understanding, and meaning. Another is the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Third is focusing on the process is inductive. And the fourth is the product is descriptive (Merriam, 2009). Using a phenomenological study design, the goal of the research was to create a description of what and how the subjects experience inclusion (Moustakas, 1994). Completion of the study provided the opportunity for improvement in inclusion practices for inclusion teachers and administrators.

The following questions were used to examine the perspectives of the regular education and special education teacher concerning inclusion services in an elementary school setting.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study was: What are the participants' perceptions of inclusion services in the system where they are employed?

1. What are the participants' perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion of students with special needs in a regular education setting?

2. What factors do the participants identify that enable them to successfully incorporate students with special needs into the regular education class in an elementary school setting?

Research Design

Interviews were used to conduct a qualitative study of inclusion in the elementary school setting. Participants in the study were selected based on purposeful sampling definitions.

Subjects fitted the definition of a general education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school setting who had worked in an inclusion program in the school system where the research was conducted. This selection process provided the information cases necessary for an ample qualitative research design (Merriam, 1998). Participants were asked to sign an informed consent prior to participation in the study. In-depth interviews were conducted one-to-one with eight participants identified as satisfying the purposeful sampling definition (Merriam, 1998). Data collection began with a structured collection of demographic data information and progressed towards a structured format focused on the educators' experience on inclusion. Using structured interviews that began with open-ended questions permitted flexibility during the data collection process facilitating an increased understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2012).

Interviews occurred during the teachers preferred time and location.

Open coding was used to categorize the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2007) open coding is the process of examining data, breaking them down, comparing them, and categorizing them. The concepts are closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Merriam (1998) states coding is simply the transmitting of some form of shorthand to segments of information for later use. After transcribing the information collected during the interview process, I looked for themes in the data and categorized accordingly. Patterns emerged among the coded data. These patterns or common themes were the core of the theoretical

framework (Patton, 2001). Common and/or uncharacteristic themes were then organized for collaboration.

The Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people understand their experiences (Creswell, 2012). According to Denizen and Lincoln (2005) there is no qualitative researcher who is completely void of bias. Reality is based on perception and it is that unique perspective of the interviewer, the participant, and the interaction of the two that is the essence of the qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). Bias can occur when the selection of data fits the prejudiced notion of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 2013). A personal bias occurs with the preconceptions the researcher brings prior to the study. However, Gall, Borg, and Gall (2006) point out that in phenomenological studies the researcher has a personal familiarity with the study being conducted. It is this close experience with the event being studied that lends credibility to a qualitative study and sets it apart from a study founded in quantitative methods (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2001); however, the researcher may have biases that could impact the study. Rather than eliminating them, it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may influence the data (Merriam, 2009).

It was important to note the personal biases developed in my experience as an inclusion teacher for 8 years. Experience in the field of special education and inclusion contributed to the selected topic. At some point in my profession, I worked with some of the participants of the study. According to Creswell (2012) phenomenological studies impose shared experiences between the researcher and subjects. While working closely with the subjects, this helped create empathy and insight regarding their observations.

I am employed in the city school system where the study occurred and hold a position that carries the role of an expert in the field of special education. Expert power is an individual's power originating from the expertise of the person and the organization's needs for those skills (French & Raven, 1959). In French and Raven's (1959) division of power, expert power is also used as information power. While the difference between expert power and information power is refined, people with this type of power are well informed and knowledgeable of the skills. Any perception of my opinion regarding inclusion could have an effect on the participants' responses. In this regard undue influence and my biases could potentially impact participants' responses. During the interviews the researcher's opinions were not discussed and the focus was on the subject.

The terms emic and etic are referred to in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). The term emic refers to a psychological mindfulness where the researcher remains open to the understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Merriam, 1998). The term etic is retained from an outsider's viewpoint and compels the researcher to recognize his or her own clarification of the viewpoint being told (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). It is important to be psychologically emic throughout the study. It must be noted that I have worked with teachers in inclusion programs and know they have opinions about the program.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be influenced by the credibility of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Although many may be reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research, structures for ensuring rigor have been common practice for many years (Shenton 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe four evaluative criteria for establishing trustworthiness. It is by using the techniques used for establishing credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability that validity and reliability in qualitative research are addressed. According to these criteria of credibility, researchers try to demonstrate a true picture of the phenomenon being presented (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. To allow transferability, sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork is provided to be able to decide whether the existing environment is similar to another and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting. Merriam (1998) writes that external validity “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 85). The ability to access the dependability criterion is difficult in qualitative work. In order to address it more efficiently, the processes within the study should be reported in detail enabling a future researcher to repeat the work if not necessarily to gain the same results. Researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings arise from the data and not their own biases. Here steps must be taken to help guarantee as much as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the interviewees, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In order to meet the criteria of trustworthiness in the study, I transcribed interviews carefully by notating every word said from the recordings and organized data to ensure external validity.

Selection Process

Participants for the study were selected based on purposeful sampling techniques in order to provide a rich, thick descriptive study of a bounded entity (Creswell, 1998). The study was set in a city with multiple elementary schools in the public education system. There are five elementary schools in the city. There were approximately 2,300 students enrolled in the city’s five elementary schools at the time of the study. Two of the area elementary schools were larger

schools (500 students or more), two were medium schools (400-450 students enrolled), and one was a smaller school (fewer than 399 students).

Two basic types of sampling are probability and nonprobability sampling. Probability sampling allows the researcher to generalize the results of the study from the sample to the population from which it is drawn. Nonprobability sampling is most commonly used for qualitative research because generalization is not a goal for this type of research (Merriam, 2009). The most appropriate form is purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). It is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample to attain the most information (Merriam, 2009). The participants in the study have expertise in the inclusion program. Their opinions are valuable material to study.

The participants in this study were licensed general and special education teachers who were currently teaching inclusion classes in the elementary schools. The elementary schools in the city were PreK-6 grades. Because most school systems begin middle school in sixth grade, the researcher interviewed fifth grade general education teachers and inclusion teachers in each elementary school with the exception of the school the researcher works in. Each participant was asked via email to participate in the study. A meeting was conducted individually to inform them of the study and a consent form was signed. A data sheet with demographic information was completed prior to the discussion. Each participant was assigned a pseudo name for confidentiality purposes.

Data Collection

The method of collecting data for this study was conducting in-depth individual interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) noted:

Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion...in qualitative interviews each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share. (p. 4)

The individual interviews were conducted at a time and place chosen by those being interviewed. All interviews were recorded using an iPad and a Livescribe pen. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among those categories. Inductive analysis is the process in which researchers synthesize and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Merriam (1998) suggests that the names of the categories can come from the researcher, the participants, or the literature. Merriam provides guidelines to determine the effectiveness of categories:

- Categories should reflect the purpose of the research. The categories will emerge and be determined as the data is collected and analyzed.
- Categories should be thorough. All data that are identified important to the study will be placed in one of the categories.
- Categories should be mutually exclusive. Each unit of data will fit into only one category.

In this study, transcripts from the interviews were initially coded according to emerging themes in the data. Next, categories were developed in order to better ascertain patterns among the themes. By refining the data in this manner common threads emerged from the collected data. This type of organization formed the theoretical framework for the study.

Ethical Considerations

The validity and reliability of the study depends upon the ethics of the researcher. Ethical issues are likely to arise with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings (Merriam, 2002). Ethical considerations included protecting the identity of all individuals involved in the interviews. Consent forms and confidentiality agreements were provided and discussed. Acknowledging this ethical consideration, it might have been that participants refrained from full disclosure for fear of reprisal from persons in authority should they portray the services and programs in the school system as less flattering. Coding the participants' names is a tool but not an assurance for complete confidentiality.

Partial coercion is also a consideration. Partial coercion occurs when the study may have direct benefits for the program the participants are charged with delivering (Gall et al., 2006; McMillan & Shumacher, 2006; Merriam, 1998). This set of circumstances may have impeded the participants' true free choice to participate or not participate. Their responses may have reflected that compromise.

Summary

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the research methodology including the research design addressing my subjectivity and trustworthiness of the study, selection process, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of the inclusion program from the perspective of general education and special education teachers. The teachers in this study were purposely selected in an effort to provide a rich, descriptive study. This study was limited to the perspective of teachers with experience in inclusion programs in one city.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS
Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a regular classroom environment. This study was intended to listen to the perceptions of the teachers on inclusion and use that information to improve inclusion in the regular classroom.

The data for this study included results from semistructured interviews based on 12 questions. The questions addressed the elementary teachers' perceptions of inclusion services in the system where they are employed. In some cases follow-up questions were asked of the participants for further clarification.

The results of the interviews have been synthesized into categories according to emerging themes. The categories provided organization of the participants' responses into four areas: perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and the barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services.

Participants

Participants in the study were selected based on purposeful sampling definitions. Subjects fit the narrow definition of a general education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school setting who had worked in an inclusion program in the school system where the research was conducted. Pseudo names were assigned to each participant in this study to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 is a summary of participant demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

| Name | Gender | School Size | Years of Experience | Years Teaching Inclusion | Highest Degree Earned |
|---------|--------|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Clark | Male | Large | 16 | 16 | Master's |
| Cindy | Female | Large | 7 | 7 | Bachelor's |
| Jessica | Female | Medium | 25 | 20 | Bachelor's |
| Annie | Female | Medium | 6 | 5 | Bachelor's |
| Jamie | Female | Small | 28 | 20 | Master's +30 |
| Katie | Female | Medium | 16 | 16 | Ed.S. |
| Jeni | Female | Medium | 13 | 7 | Master's |
| Barbara | Female | Small | 13 | 13 | Ed.S. |

1. Large School- Defined as a school with 500 or more students.
2. Medium School- Defined as a school with 400 - 450 students.
3. Small School- Defined as a school with fewer than 399 students.

Clark is a male general education teacher in a large elementary school setting. He teaches Language Arts and Reading to general education and special education students in a general education classroom. He receives special education support with his students with the help of an educational assistant. This is his 16th year teaching in an inclusion classroom.

Cindy is a female inclusion teacher in a large elementary school setting. She works with students in grades K-6. She helps support the students receiving special education in the general education classroom by working with the general education teachers and students to

accommodate their special needs. This is her first year as an inclusion teacher. She has taught as a general education teacher for the past 6 years.

Jessica is a female inclusion teacher in a medium elementary school setting. She has worked as an inclusion teacher for 20 years. She works with students with special needs in grades 3-6. She supports her students by working with general education teachers and educational assistants to meet the needs of special education students.

Annie is a female general education teacher in a medium elementary school setting. She is highly qualified in math and works with general education and students in special education with the support of an educational assistant and inclusion teacher. She has been teaching in an inclusion setting for 5 years.

Jamie is a female inclusion teacher in a small elementary school setting. She has been working in the inclusion setting for 20 years. She works with grade 3-6 and helps support her students with special needs by working in the general classroom with the general education teacher.

Katie is a female general education teacher in a medium elementary school setting. She has been working with students with special needs and general education students in the general classroom for 16 years. She teaches Language Arts and Reading and receives support for her students with special needs with the help of an educational assistant.

Jeni is a female inclusion teacher in a medium elementary school setting. She has been an inclusion teacher for 7 years and provides support to her students by working closely with the general education teacher. She works with grades K-6.

Barbara is a female general education teacher in a small elementary school setting. She has taught in an inclusion setting for 13 years. She teaches Math and receives support for her students with special needs with the help of an inclusion teacher.

Interview Data

This section reports data collected from participants in face-to-face interviews. Participants' views are represented as they relate to each interview question.

Interview Question 1

What is your definition of inclusion?

Two of the eight participants' definition of inclusion was educating students with learning disabilities in the general classroom setting with their nondisabled peers. Jessica's definition was, "students with disabilities are included in the general education setting with special education modifications to meet student's individual needs." Annie defined inclusion as, "placing students with special needs in the general education classroom with ample support to obtain their set goals and be successful." Jamie described what inclusion looks like to her. She said, "The students with special needs are with their peers working on the same material as their non-disabled peers. At times, the activities may be modified, or revised, but the students with special needs are a part of the classroom." Katie's definition was, "when students with special needs are taught in a general education classroom." Barbara added "students with disabilities are mainstreamed in the regular classroom, but given extra support and modified instruction." Jeni's definition of inclusion was, "serving students with disabilities in the general academic classroom with their peers, as well as all other classes (special area, lunch, recess, etc.)."

Interview Question 2

To what extent should special education teachers assist in the instruction of students with special needs in the general education classroom? If yes then why? If no, then why not?

All participants agreed that the special education teachers should assist in the instruction of the students in the general education classroom. Below is a list of explanations:

Jeni stated special education teachers should assist as much as they can in the general classroom, depending on their schedule. “This way, they incorporate more things like small group instruction, stations, re-teaching and one on one instruction,” she said. Annie explained they are the teachers who are specifically and extensively trained on techniques and strategies specific to specific learning disabilities. “I realize that it is completely unrealistic to have the special education teacher in the classroom consistently for large amounts of time due to their case loads. However, I do feel that they should be in the classrooms, working with the students with special needs and the general education teacher as often as possible.”

Cindy stated, “With limited funding and special education staff, the teacher’s time would be limited because the special education teacher still has the responsibilities of the remainder of their caseload as well as conducting IEP meetings and other special education paperwork to maintain. In an ideal world, with more special education teachers, the case loads could be split and the special education teachers would be more available to team teach in the classroom to offer their knowledge and support.”

Katie stated special education teachers should play a vital role in the general education classroom. “They should collaborate with the general education teacher on a daily basis.” Jamie added, “Many teachers do not feel comfortable making modifications and may need guidance for a while.”

Jessica said special education teachers should provide support to general education teachers by communicating students' present level of performance and ways to make accommodations in the regular classroom to meet individual needs

Barbara said a special education teacher should be hands on and be a main source in the instruction of the special education students. She stated, "As a general classroom teacher, I do not have the knowledge or background to effectively teach [or] handle students with disabilities in the way they deserve."

Clark stated:

I definitely believe that the special education teacher should assist the general education teacher or team teaching as much as possible as well as on a daily schedule. It would be great if the special education teachers could be more available in the general classroom to offer their insight and support with all students.

Interview Question 3

How can special education teachers meet the needs of students identified with special needs in the general education classroom?

Four of the participants reported special education teachers can meet needs of students in the general education classroom by making sure modifications and accommodations are being met. Jamie stated, "The special education teacher or an assistant many times needs to be in the classroom with special needs students. This allows the special education teacher or assistant to make sure modifications are being made." Annie added, "The special education teachers can frequent the classroom and get to know the kids they are writing IEPs for. This would give them

insight to how each student was responding to the general classroom setting and help identify any necessary adjustments that need to be made by the general education teacher.”

Cindy stated:

The special education teachers could help in meeting the needs of the handicapped student in the general education classroom by assisting with planning and providing the accommodations for assignments and testing specified on the IEP and/or assist with the general education students while allowing the general education teacher time to work with the special education students in the room.

Participants also reported the special education teacher can provide support for the general education teachers. Annie said special education teachers could offer the general education teachers some differentiation techniques and strategies specific to the specific disabilities.

Jessica added special education teachers could provide support to classroom teachers by providing additional staff, materials, behavioral support, or assistive technology.

Interview Question 4

How can general education teachers meet the academic needs of students with special needs in their classrooms?

Participants agreed that following the special education student’s IEP will help meet the needs of students in special education. Katie stated the general education teacher must make sure the IEP is followed. The teacher can modify the amount or type of homework, perhaps give a different test, alter the font size, give oral instructions, etc. Jessica added they can meet the academic needs by using special education accommodations to meet the individual needs of students.

Annie declared that differentiation in the classroom is important to meet the needs of students in the general education classroom.

Differentiation is key to meeting the academic needs of students. General education teachers need to be well versed in differentiation and make sure they are consistently offering differentiated learning experiences. This is an interesting topic for me because, we, as teachers, are expected to differentiate instruction, however, we are given no instruction or guidance on how to do so (especially with specific learning disabilities). This would be a fabulous and extremely beneficial in-service opportunity, for even the most seasoned teachers. I strongly believe in differentiation and attempt to provide opportunities as much as possible; however I do find myself feeling as if I am grasping at straws sometimes with specific students.

Cindy and Clark said that working together is imperative of the success in a general education classroom. Cindy stated, “General and special education teachers should work together as a team to best meet the needs of these students.” Clark added, “I feel that the general education teacher and special education teacher should work closely together on a daily basis to best meet the needs of these students.” Jeni stated that staying in contact with the special education teacher to get any ideas, support, and any questions answered will help support the general education teacher in the classroom.

Interview Question 5

What types of the instructional skills do general education teachers have to teach both students with special needs and general education students?

Some of the participants mentioned the use of training to work with students with special needs. Jamie said, “Teachers often feel they have not been trained enough, but really common sense and just trying different approaches is the best. There is no one way or magic key. The general education teachers have to accept this and do the best they can with what they are

working with.” Clark responded that most new teachers are thrown into the job and are expected to learn as you go when it pertains to the student in special education today.

I know the reason I am a firm believer for inclusion today is how I was trained during my first years of teaching. This happened due to having the special education teacher in my classroom every day to team teach the lessons. I was able to observe and learn from the experienced special education teacher. This is so much better than attending seminars and/or classes to gain the needed knowledge to perform the job to the best of your abilities.

However, Cindy disagreed. She stated:

All teachers should have training for special education. This would allow more knowledge of IEPs, accommodations, rules for testing, RTI, behavior problems, specific disabilities and handicaps, etc. With more training and information, I feel that teachers wouldn’t fear these children and their disabilities as much.

Katie mentioned varying the type of instruction will help all students, not just students with special needs. Also, the use of learning stations helps the teacher to differentiate instruction from everyone. Jeni said that knowing how to pair students in order for successful peer tutoring or the use of manipulatives for understanding difficult skills.

Interview Question 6

What types of instructional skills do special education teachers have to teach both students with special needs and general education students?

A variety of answers were given from the participants.

Annie said that special education teachers can offer a wide variety of techniques, strategies, and ideas to work with, not only for the students with special needs, but the general education students as well. Katie added that special education teachers can bring patience and knowledge of best practices on how to handle a variety of learning disabilities. Jamie said, “Special education teachers can figure many different ways to teach the same information. They

do not expect students to all learn at the same pace and are flexible and patient. These teachers realize how important it is for both general education and students with special needs to work together. It benefits all students.” Barbara reported that special education teachers need to be able to modify the curriculum and give assistance on the same instructional skills. Jeni said special education teachers have the skills of knowing the better ways to instruct certain students with special needs in order for them to achieve success in the classroom.

Barbara and Clark reported that special education and general education teachers are both teachers, so they should have the same skills. Barbara stated:

Special education teachers should have as much exposure to general education students as they do to their caseload kids (unless the teacher is in a self-contained classroom/atmosphere). Both general and special education teachers are teachers. They are there to teach all students. The difference is the paperwork and the running records that are kept. The special education teacher has different paperwork responsibility than the general education teachers, who are responsible for paperwork, as well. It is easy for a special education teacher to only see it from their standpoint. If a special education teacher has never been in the general classroom then they have no idea what stress the general education teachers are under and wouldn't be able to understand why they are or are not doing something with or for students with special needs.

Clark added:

Both the special education teacher and general education teacher are teachers and are expected to teach all students. The special education teacher could easily benefit from being in the general classroom. If the special education teacher is never in the general classroom, then they will not gain knowledge of what is taking place with the students they are responsible for, whether good or bad.

Interview Question 7

What types of instructional skills are general education teachers lacking to teach both students with special needs and general education students?

Some of the skills noted are background knowledge or information of special education. Barbara stated, “As a general education teacher, I have no background or much knowledge with

special education. Therefore, I am lacking many skills that will help me teach students with handicapping conditions.” Clark added that his skills that are lacking include the information, knowledge, and exposure to all of the different disabilities. Jeni said, “General education teachers are lacking just more information about their students, especially students with special needs. Whether it is how to approach them or what different kinds of skills the students already have. Knowing just a little background information can sometimes make a huge difference.” Cindy said the instructional skills that are lacking are information and exposure to different disabilities and conditions. Katie said:

Regular education teachers are lacking the knowledge of specific conditions like autism. We have not had a class on best practices for students with autism. Most of the information I use, I have researched myself.

Annie noted that skills were needed for disability specific forms of differentiation. Jamie said that experience in working with special needs students was lacking for regular education students. “Once these teachers have these type of students a while, they usually work through things better and better.”

Interview Question 8

What types of instructional skills are special education teachers lacking to teach both students with special needs and general education students?

Participants had various answers. Below are their responses:

Jeni said, “Coming from an elementary teacher’s perspective, it’s finding what works best for students through hits and misses. What works well for one student may not work as well for another. Will the students work better in small groups or pairs? It’s taking the time to find what works best for each one.”

Annie said, “They are lacking those skills acquired through working in a differentiated classroom with both special education students and regular education students. They do not have the opportunity to work with the regular education students and I feel that this may, in some cases, hinder their level of expectations for the students with special needs.”

Cindy and Clark had similar responses. They reported that special education teachers need more general education exposure with curriculum, teaching, and students.

Katie said, “I would hope they aren’t lacking anything. Most of the special education teachers I have dealt with are very knowledgeable with dealing with all students.”

Jamie said, “Special education teachers may not be in tune to teaching large numbers of students at once, and may have difficulty with the pace the information must be presented and mastered.”

Barbara said, “Communication between regular and special education classroom teacher, time being the main factor in that area. There just isn’t enough time to collaborate with each other to teach effectively. The special education teachers are not in the general classroom for the instruction therefore must do the best they can, but are teaching at all grade levels.”

Interview Question 9

How would the achievement levels of students with special needs increase if they were placed full time in the general classroom?

Some participants reported that it depends on the individual student. Annie said that this is very individualized and depends on both the disability, the degree of the disability, and the individual child. “We are full inclusion with all students with special needs in the general education classroom (with the exception of the students in the CDC classroom).” Clark stated:

Depending on the situation and or severity of the handicapped student, I firmly believe that with full inclusion, those special education students can learn and achieve growth on

standardized testing. I, myself, have proven that students with IEPs and or learning disabilities have shown tremendous growth while under my tutelage. By believing in them and providing every day encouragement, it is amazing what these children can accomplish.

Jessica also said that it depends on the handicapping condition. She stated, “Those students that are in the general classroom for socialization, I do not think achievement levels would improve very much. I have observed high functioning students achievement levels improve by participating in the regular classroom.”

Jeni stated, “Students with special needs typically feed off of other students by nature. You always have students that understand more in one subject than another. By grouping students with special needs with those that would benefit them academically, then I believe their achievement levels would increase. Peer tutoring is an excellent tool in the classroom for increasing achievement and social skills if used the right way.” Katie added that she would see their confidence boost which would increase their performance level. Jamie reported that the students with special needs do learn in the general class, as long as there is acceptance and modifications. She said, “The social skills as well as the academic skills grow. The achievement levels of the students with special needs will rise.”

Some participants do not see a growth in achievement levels. Barbara said, “The achievement level would not improve. I have a severely autistic child in my homeroom that is in the classroom full time. She cannot communicate her wants and needs. She has yet to turn in any assignment that was not completed by her aid or father in their handwriting. There are days she will refuse to write, but has an ‘A’ in every class. She is a major class disruption and it takes two to three special friends (classroom students) to calm her down. This child needs to be learning life skills so she can function in everyday life. I feel we are doing her a huge disservice

by having her in the classroom full time.” Cindy stated, “I do not particularly agree with full-inclusion. I feel that it should be more case to case. Some students are not capable of learning what they need to learn in the regular classroom setting. They may have missed skills or are still two grade levels behind. Some students benefit more from one-on-one or very small groups to get caught up or moved forward in their education.”

Interview Question 10

Is the general classroom with special education consultant services an effective environment to educate students with special needs? If yes then why? If no then why not?

The participants reported that this is based on an individual basis. Jeni said, “Consultative services works, but only for a minority of special education population. An example would be a child is autistic but demonstrates high academic levels. This student functions for the most part as well as the norm, but still needs support when it comes to social cues or pre-vocational skills such as organization.” Annie said, “Some students do extremely well in the general classroom setting, while others need a smaller group setting to thrive. In order for the general classroom setting to be successful, special education consultant services needed to be fully provided consistently.”

Jessica said:

This is based on individual needs. If the IEP team feels that students’ needs can be met with minimal support from special education teachers or the team is considering dismissing from special education, then I believe it could be beneficial. I believe that this should just for a short period of time. If student can function in the general education classroom without modifications or services then I do not see the benefit.

Barbara also reported it depends on the severity of the handicap. “One of my students has a designated aid, and she is wonderful, but she spends most of the day keeping the student from having melt downs, running out of class, and completing her work for her. If she had no aid, I

would not be able to keep her under control. I could not teach her and the rest of my class.”

Clark added that these services can be beneficial, depending on the severity of the disability and situation as well as the effect that the benefits will be having on their education.

Interview Question 11

What factors facilitate successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education class?

Facilitating factors listed below:

- teachers who are going to embrace students in special education and their needs
- teachers with a solid classroom structure.
- teachers with a good support system- principals, staff, everyone
- the student’s own ability to adapt
- the availability of special education support
- level of differentiation offered by the regular education teacher
- consistent communication.
- teamwork
- resources.
- peer tutoring

Interview Question 12

What factors are barriers to successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education class?

- weak support system
- lack of training
- understaffing

- lack of time
- lack of teamwork
- too strong of focus on test scores
- class size
- special needs students can be disruptive

Findings

The results of the interviews and anecdotal data have been synthesized into categories according to emerging themes. The categories provided organization of the participants' responses into four areas: perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and the barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services.

Perceptions of Inclusion

It is that unique perspective coming from life experiences and the participants' sole way of organizing and accommodating information that is inherently enriching to a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012; Exner & Erdburg, 2005). The research questions used in the interviews for this study were designed to discover the participants' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of incorporating students with special needs in general education classes through inclusion programming in an elementary school setting.

The participants stated inclusion does not apply to all students with special needs. Katie said, "I think for most kids it is great, however, it doesn't meet the needs for all students. If an inclusion student is demanding all the time out of the teacher and everyone in the classroom,

then it is not the best fit.” Cindy stated, “Inclusion is great for students that are close enough to grade level that they just need someone to assist them with pacing and staying on task.”

Jamie stated:

Inclusion is not for everyone. Inclusion should be discussed as an option for all students but discuss pros and cons for each student. It should not be mandated for all special education students. I believe that inclusion can benefit those students that can be academically successful in the general education curriculum with special education modifications. For those more disabled students, inclusion can help with socialization. But again, should be decided on individual basis. Inclusion can interfere with self confidence and socialization for some. For those students inclusion could be just during non academic times. Having students in academic class that are years above their level has proven to me to be embarrassing to some students, no matter how great of an inclusion program and how well staff is trained.

Clark clarified that for himself it always goes back to building a program for each individual student. This could be by incorporating inclusion with resource support. There may also be inclusion during non academic time, with a more self-contained support. Or inclusion can be implemented by a teacher or educational assistant with special education modifications.

The participants’ acknowledgment of the need for additional staffing was noted. Staffing can be an issue to implement inclusion appropriately. Annie stated inclusion would be beneficial if the funding for special education were what it should be and could be fully staffed. Barbara said, “Inclusion would be more beneficial with more manpower. Resource should be implemented in the disability area to address the deficits in depth but again there has to be more manpower and more schedule flexibility.” Jami said that inclusion does not remediate deficits, but resource services do. She stated, “Unfortunately it is cheaper to hire aides which assist with inclusion instead of another teacher salary to assist with more in depth pull-out.”

Effectiveness of Inclusion

Participants were asked if the general classroom was an effective environment for students with handicapping conditions as long as they receive consultative special education services. The majority of the participants responded that consultative services can work, but it is based on an individual basis or depending on the severity of the disability.

Jeni said that consultative services work but only for a minority of special education population. She stated, “An example would be a child is autistic, but demonstrates high academic levels. This student functions (for the most part) as well as the norm, but still needs support when it comes to social cues or prevocational skills such as organization.” Annie reported that this, also, is based on an individualized basis. “Some students do extremely well in the regular classroom setting, while others need a smaller group setting to thrive. In order for the regular classroom setting to be successful, special education consultant services needed to be fully provided consistently.”

Jessica stated:

This is based on individual needs. If the IEP team feels that student’s needs can be met with minimal support from special education teachers or the team is considering dismissing from special education then I believe it could be beneficial. I believe that this should just for a short period of time. If student can function in regular education classroom without modifications or services then I do not see the benefit.

Cindy said that these services can be beneficial, depending on the severity of the disability and the effect that it is having on their education. Barbara also reported that it depends on the severity of the handicap. “My student has a designated aid, and she is wonderful, but she spends most of the day keeping the student from having melt downs, running out of class, and

completing her work for her. If she had no aid, I would not be able to keep her under control. I could not teach her and the rest of my class.”

Supports that Facilitate Inclusion Programs

The participants were asked what factors facilitate successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education class. Participants reported strongly about two supports: teamwork and resources.

Participants agreed that teamwork was a major support for successful inclusion. Jessica said that regular education teachers who are willing to implement the modifications to the general curriculum make a successful inclusion program. Cindy stated, “Regular and special education teachers must work together, along with anyone else involved in that group of children’s education. What is the saying...it takes a village to raise a child. I feel the same about teaching one.”

Clark stated:

First and foremost, I believe it has to be teamwork. The regular education teacher and special education teacher must work together in order for the inclusion process to be deemed successful. This includes the parents, principal, and all other stakeholders involved in the students’ education. Next, all parties involved should have open lines of communication in order to discuss needs, concerns, and fears when it comes to providing the best education possible.

Katie deemed the most important facilitator of successful inclusion was the need for resources. These resources could include time or staff. Barbara stated, “For successful incorporation of students with special needs, we need help from resource and designated aids and even this is sometimes not enough depending on the severity.” Jamie said that adding peer tutors and group activities would help to make inclusion successful.

Barriers to Successful Incorporation of Inclusion Services

The participants were asked their opinions on what are the barriers to successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education classroom. Multiple answers were given but some had common ideas varying to lack of teamwork, time restraints, lack of training, and testing.

Some of the participants reported that they saw teamwork as an issue for successful inclusion. Jeni said that being “closed minded” hindered successful incorporation of inclusion. She stated, “Having the mindset that your way is the only way. This leads to a weak support system for the children.” This idea agrees with Cindy’s response in which, “not taking advice or accepting assistance from others. We need to work together as a team.” Jessica reported that a barrier is teamwork as well. She stated, “Teachers that are not flexible and unwilling to make modifications for students with disabilities make it difficult for inclusion to work. They don’t want to be bothered with this extra work. They can’t see how they are hurting the children with this attitude.”

Clark added a barrier in lack of teamwork by stating:

A barrier I see is the resistance of accepting new ideas, suggestions, criticism, and just plain good advice; whether it is from a seasoned veteran or from a brand new rookie. We are all in this together. Let’s act like it.

Another barrier that the participants focused on was time restraints. Annie said that the special education teacher’s involvement in the general education setting can be lacking due to time restraints and understaffing. For Annie, a barrier she faces is the time it takes to reteach or to modify work. “...I just can’t take all that extra time from instruction when I have to make all these students be on grade level.”

Lack of training for the teachers and staff can be a barrier as well. Annie stated, “Regular classroom teachers are not properly trained to accommodate or differentiate instruction based upon specific disabilities.” Jessica reported seeing this issue as well and said that she felt proper training needs to be given to staff members who will be working with special needs students.

Some participants reported that they saw the focus on test scores has become a barrier.

Cindy stated:

Another huge barrier is making the test scores the number one priority. Not all students can be reached through test score. Some students may bomb those tests but the teacher should be able to look back to the beginning of their time with that student and see that they were able to move that child forward in their education. Ideally, we would like it to be a year or more in growth but some are not capable of those gains. Success has so many different levels.

Clark views test scores as an issue as well.

I believe one such barrier has to be the stress and pressure of the almighty test score. Not every student will be able to score as high as expected. Every student has different factors that will influence the predicted outcome. I feel success can be measured in many different ways. It should not be based solely on one assessment.

Summary

Chapter 4 was comprised of research data obtained through a structured collection of demographic information and eight open-ended interviews conducted using a semistructured format (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a general classroom environment. The participants in this study are licensed general and special education teachers who were currently teaching inclusion classes in elementary schools. The

special education and general education teachers in this study were purposely selected in an effort to provide a rich, descriptive study (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews were recorded using an iPad and a LiveScribe pen recording device. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts from the interviews were initially coded to identify emerging themes in the data. Next, categories were developed in order to better ascertain patterns among the themes. This type of organization formed the theoretical framework for the study. Categories identified through this research process were classified as perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services. Categories were examined first by looking at each interview question then holistically in an effort to avoid repetition and to provide an aggregate study of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a general classroom environment. I researched the opinions and experiences of eight teachers working in an inclusion setting in elementary schools regarding their perceptions of inclusion and how they feel inclusion can be effective and the barriers and facilitators of inclusion.

One reason I conducted this study was to listen to the perceptions of these teachers and use their responses to make a better inclusion model. Based on the summary of the literature and the teacher's experiences, similar ideas were noted. The themes that emerged from these interviews could be addressed and used to improve the school system's inclusion model. As a beginning administrator I hope to use this information in my school.

Interviews were used to conduct a thorough qualitative study of inclusion in the elementary school setting. Eight participants in the study were selected based on purposeful sampling definitions. Subjects were unique as they fit the narrow definition of a general education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school setting who had worked in an inclusion program in the school system where the research was conducted. Interviews began with a structured collection of demographic data information and progressed towards a structured format focused on the educators' experience in inclusion. Using structured interviews that began with open-ended questions permitted flexibility during the data collection process facilitating an increased understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2012).

Open coding was used to categorize the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2007) open coding is the process of examining data, breaking them down, comparing them, and categorizing them. The concepts are closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Merriam (1998) stated coding is simply the transmitting of some form of shorthand to segments of information for later use. After transcribing the information collected during the interview process, I looked for themes in the data and categorized accordingly. Patterns emerged among the coded data. These patterns or common themes were the core of the theoretical framework (Patton, 2002). Common and or uncharacteristic themes were then organized for collaboration. The themes noted were: perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services. A summary of the findings and conclusions are presented here as they relate to the two main research questions followed by recommendations for practice and further research.

Discussions and Conclusions

This section presents discussions based on the findings from Chapter 4. Research questions were addressed based on interview data. Conclusions were drawn to improve future practice for myself and others viewing research.

Research Question #1

What are the participants' perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion of special needs students in a general education setting?

Research by Cook et al. (1999) and Fox and Ysseldyke (1997) denoted attitude as an influential factor in inclusion programs. The participants had various perceptions towards inclusion.

They reported that inclusion may not be for every child with special education needs. Based on responses, participants have seen that students who may require more assistance in the general education classroom have more difficulty being successful in inclusion programs.

Other concerns from participants included issues with limited time and energy available from the classroom teacher to satisfactorily meet the needs of the disabled student. Teachers may need to put more time and effort into planning for students with disabilities. They also may need to spend more time working with students with disabilities in the classroom because they need extra help. In order to meet those needs the participants reported staff and resources are needed to implement it all correctly. Staff and resources could include educational assistants, extra technology, tutors, and educational resources for planning.

Research Question #2

What factors do teachers identify that enable them to successfully incorporate students with special needs into the general education class in an elementary school setting?

Participants reported that teamwork was an identifying factor to successfully incorporate inclusion in the general classroom. This teamwork must occur mainly between the general education and special education staff. Yoder (2000) reported the need for some type of negotiation that must occur in the classroom in terms of expectations between special education and general education. Participants agreed upon the importance of establishing rapport with one another in order to create a positive environment for facilitating communication and collaboration. Participants cited awareness of the general education teachers' preferences for communicating and the resulting approach by the special education teacher as important in establishing a positive working relationship and negotiating expectations within the classroom environment. A willingness to be patient while relationships between special education and

general education developed was deemed necessary in order to nurture a positive regard that seemed eagerly sought after.

Resources are also needed in order to incorporate a successful inclusion classroom. The two resources noted were time and the need for more staff. The participants stated more instructional time is needed to accommodate the students' needs and plan for their learning. This is because there can be such a variety of skill levels in a classroom, so the teacher tries to work with each child to meet his or her individual needs. Also time is needed to meet with the team of teachers who work with the students with special needs. This time to meet could be used to collaborate with others to get ideas on how to best meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. This team of teachers may not be enough to meet the needs of the teachers; therefore, more staff may be needed. Teachers discussed the importance of having more support in their classroom. This support can come from the special education teacher or an educational assistant.

Conclusions

This study was created to identify components needed for a more effective inclusion program based on the perspectives of teachers working in inclusive settings. The objective was to improve inclusion programs in school systems for all stakeholders. After collecting and analyzing data, I found that the teachers' perspective of inclusion is that it may not be suitable for all children with special needs. The teachers noted different variables that help to make inclusion successful. These facilitators were noted in Chapter 4 and were teamwork and resources. As a beginning administrator I wanted to listen to the teachers' opinions about inclusion to determine if it would be something that could help me develop an inclusion program

that best supports the learning of all students. I also wanted to share this information with other administrators so they could use the findings.

In regards to the research, this information helped me understand the feelings of teachers on an inclusive program they work with daily. I was able to listen to them discuss their needs and the barriers to facilitate a successful inclusion classroom. Based on their need for teamwork and resources in an inclusion classroom, as a school leader. I can begin advocating with central office administrators their needs in order to help them be successful and engage them in conversations that enable them to advocate for themselves.

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this study, as a principal, I, or other principals, could develop a schedule at school where teachers will be given extra time to collaborate with other teachers and plan for their students. For example, in our school we have a day each week with extra time for Professional Learning Communities. This time could be used as well for strategies to work together and accommodate needs of students. Meetings such as this could provide general and special education teachers with opportunities to address the issues that come up as a result of the inclusion model. The teachers could identify problems and discover among themselves how to better use the resources available to meet those problems. At times, I could also attend the meetings to listen and help the teachers if they have any needs. Based on the findings of this study there are some examples of areas I could help with:

- Engaging the faculty and staff in professional conversations that help them identify specific needs of students and how to address these needs seems appropriate. As the data in this study suggest, teachers have a strong sense of the needs of their students. Engaging them in planning together how to identify and address these specific needs

seems appropriate. There are a variety of levels of disabilities in a classroom. Some of these disabilities are identified for students with IEPs, but other students have similar although less severe learning needs. Teachers can develop and/or learn strategies to implement instruction for the multiple needs in their classroom. Initially, it may be necessary to provide training for the faculty and staff in communication and teamwork strategies.

- Potential outcomes of professional community conversations and team work among the faculty and staff would likely be modifications in how students are placed in classrooms and variations in how instruction is delivered to various groups of students. These professional conversations would likely improve both the quality and efficiency of services delivered to students. They would also better illuminate the needs for any additional services needed by the faculty and staff to meet students' needs. This could be more educational assistants or paraprofessionals to help the students with special needs in the general education classroom or this can be highly qualified special education teachers or it could be additional programmatic training by faculty and staff.

I would like to use the results of this study to engage the principal where I teach to discuss our inclusion model. Currently our school has two special education teachers and seven educational assistants. I feel our school has the necessary staff needed in order to implement a successful inclusion model. I would like to engage the faculty in professional development activities that enable them to improve learning opportunities for both special needs and general education students in the inclusion classroom. I could do this by brainstorming with teachers how to better use personnel resources to meet the needs of students. Teachers and assistants likely have ideas that will help. Also, the faculty and principal can examine the process for placement of students

in the general education environment. Grouping a few students with similar needs can allow for provision of more resources specific to their needs. A team of general education and special education teachers could be involved in student classroom placement from one year to the next.

Recommendations for Research

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of inclusion programs in an elementary school setting from the perspective of the general education and special education teacher. The lack of research on teacher perspectives at the elementary level on inclusion programming and the relatively limited input from general education and special education teachers suggest the need for additional qualitative and quantitative inquiries within this scope of study.

Recommendations for further investigation are as follows:

1. It is recommended that studies of this nature be replicated to contribute to the breadth and depth of this topic and for comparative analysis. This could be accomplished through qualitative studies focusing on the perspective of administrators, parents, and/or students and by expanding the study to teachers in other school systems. A quantitative study might expand into multiple regions measuring the prevalence of teachers' perspectives regarding inclusion.
2. This study was limited to inclusion in elementary settings. It is recommended a study investigating the dynamics of inclusion programs from the teachers' perspectives be expanded into middle schools, high schools, and preschool settings. Focusing on barriers and facilitators may provide data that could contribute to an improvement in service delivery and potentially positively impact student performance.

Summary

The findings from this study concerning general education and special education teachers' perceptions of inclusion services in elementary settings were presented as they relate to the research questions. The research questions focused on perceptions regarding the practice of inclusion in an elementary school setting, the effectiveness of inclusion, the supports that facilitate inclusion programs, and barriers to successful incorporation of inclusion services. The findings revealed teachers' perception of inclusion is based on what the child needs. Facilitators needed to incorporate inclusion successfully are teamwork and better use of available resources. Participants identified barriers as a lack of teamwork, time restraints, and lack of training with special needs children and standardized testing.

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APENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Letter

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your records.

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers regarding inclusion in a regular classroom environment. The results of this study will be published as a doctoral dissertation.

II. PROCEDURES:

One-on-one Interviews: The researcher will conduct individual interviews with a minimum of 8 teachers, 4 inclusion teachers and 4 general education teachers, who are teaching or have taught inclusion classes. During the individual interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and views concerning what inclusion is, barriers working with children with special needs, and how you feel inclusion can improve. With your signed permission, the interview session will be recorded and the researcher will take notes.

III. ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS:

There are no alternative procedures except not to participate.

IV. DURATION:

You will participate in one 60 to 90 minute individual interview.

V. POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There are no known or anticipated risks for participation in this study beyond that which you face in your normal daily activities and routines. Pseudonyms will be used during the individual interview and in interview transcripts. If you accidentally use the real name of a student or other

person during the interview, the tape will be momentarily paused and reversed to erase that portion of the tape. You have the right to decline to answer any particular interview question or discontinue the interview at any time. You can withdraw from the study at any time. No names or personally identifying information will be included in interview transcripts or in the final dissertation report that would allow the information to be traced back to you, your child, or any other person. At the conclusion of the interview and subsequent transcription, you will be allowed to review your personal transcript for accuracy and potential changes. You will also be offered a copy of the final research report.

VI. POSSIBLE BENEFITS:

The possible benefits of your participation are the opportunity to be heard and give voice to your perceptions, thoughts, and experiences regarding educational interventions for children with special needs in an inclusion setting. You will have the opportunity to provide useful knowledge that can assist administrators and school personnel in the school system as they plan, implement, and evaluate the inclusion model and how it can be implemented effectively. Your stories, successes, concerns, and suggestions will contribute information to school staff that may assist them in planning and improving educational services for students with special needs in the regular classroom. By participating in this research study, you will have an opportunity to add your voice and experiences to the existing field of knowledge.

VII. COMPENSATION:

No compensation will be provided to the participants.

VIII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW & VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling me, Becky Olinger, at (423) 967-0149. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

IX. ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. The results of this study will be published as a doctoral dissertation. Pseudonyms will be used in the individual interview and interview transcript. No names of parents, teachers, students, or personally identifying information will be included in interview transcripts or in the final research report. No school names will be used in data gathered or in the final research report other than a Northeast Tennessee public school district. Audiotapes will be destroyed on completion of transcription and checking for accuracy. A copy of the records of this study will be kept in a

secure, locked metal file cabinet in my home for at least 5 years after the end of this research, in keeping with Institutional Review Board standards. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research, including Dr. Eric Glover (Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, ETSU) and Becky Olinger (researcher), will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to the current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

X. METHOD OF RECORDING INTERVIEW:

The researcher will use a LiveScribe pen and iPad to record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The recordings will be destroyed on completion of transcription and checking for accuracy.

XI. PERMISSION TO QUOTE:

Your words may be used in the final research report to clarify or further explain your perceptions or a component of the theoretical framework. The researcher will not identify the source of the quote. In addition, the researcher will take precautions to ensure that there are no identifiers in the body of the quote.

XII. CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:

If you have any questions, problems, or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call me, Becky Olinger, at (423)967-0149, or my doctoral research chairman, Dr. Eric Glover, at (423) 439-7566. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439-6002.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)

DATE

Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of inclusion?
2. To what extent should special education teachers assist in the instruction of students with special needs in the general education classroom? If yes then why? If no then why not?
3. How can special education teachers meet the needs of students identified with special needs in the general education classroom?
4. How can general education teachers meet the academic needs of students with special needs in their classrooms?
5. What types of the instructional skills do general education teachers have to teach both students with special needs and general education students?
6. What types of instructional skills do special education teachers have to teach both students with special needs and general education students?
7. What types of instructional skills are general education teachers lacking to teach both students with special needs and general education students?
8. What types of instructional skills are special education teachers lacking to teach both students with special needs and general education students?

9. How would the achievement levels of students with special needs increase if they were placed full time in the general classroom?
10. Is the general classroom with special education consultant services an effective environment to educate students with special needs? If yes then why? If no then why not?
11. What factors facilitate successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education class?
12. What factors are barriers to successful incorporation of students with special needs in the general education class?

