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Perceptions of Elementary Educators Toward Inclusion

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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

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by

Laurel Marie Stanley

May 2015

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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of Elementary Educators Toward Inclusion

by

Laurel Marie Stanley

Since the late 1990s there has been a considerable increase in the number of students with disabilities who receive instruction in inclusive settings. The participation of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms continued to grow with the passing of The No Child Left Behind Act (2001), formerly known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. While previous legislation called for students with disabilities to participate in all standardized testing, The No Child Left Behind Act called for the closing of the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. An accountability system with sanctions for individual schools and school division not showing gains towards closing the achievement gap was also established with the passing of the No Child Left behind Act, making the progress of students with disabilities a priority for all educators.

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of general education teachers, special education teachers, and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary setting. In-depth, structured interviews were conducted with the 12 participants at a time and location of their choosing. Ten interview questions guided the process and the participants' responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Previous qualitative studies have been conducted with varying results. The review of the literature indicates that the perceptions of educators toward inclusion may impact the design and subsequent success of inclusion programs as well as the academic progress of students with disabilities. Many factors seem to contribute to the development of teacher perceptions of inclusion, including professional development training and special education classes taken by general education teachers.

The data were analyzed by first coding themes found in the interview responses. The themes were then categorized by using ordering and sorting techniques that permitted emerging patterns to be documented. The findings indicate that the participants of this study do not perceive that inclusion is appropriate for all students with disabilities. The participants cited the following features as being necessary elements of inclusion: coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Recommendations for practice and for future research were based on the data analysis.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother who has taught me that I am stronger than I ever believed I could be in life. She is my rock and has been with me every step of the way, through the good times and the bad times. Adversity has made me stronger and I am so thankful that I have a mother who has instilled in me the will to be resilient and successful regardless of what comes my way. I can only hope that I have passed these teachings on to my son Jared, who is the pride and joy of my life.

Thank you to Jared for his patience and support throughout this process. Remember that hard work and dedication are essential components of success. I admire you for already demonstrating these qualities at such a young age. I have no doubt that you will accomplish all of your goals in life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to the faculty of the ELPA department, the chair of my committee Dr. Pamela Scott, my coworkers, my friends, and most importantly my family. These individuals consistently provided the reinforcement and encouragement I needed to be able to complete this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state had undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms."

~ Chief Justice Earl Warren

The 1954 Supreme Court Case *Brown v. Board of Education* denounced racial segregation in schools and also deemed education as a constitutional right that must be provided on equal terms. The Supreme Court further ruled that equal protection under the law was guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment and, therefore, states must provide equal opportunities for all citizens who are within their jurisdiction (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). This ruling increased equal educational opportunities for all minorities including those with disabilities.

The passing of P. L. 94-142, later renamed the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, strengthened the movement for equal opportunities for students with disabilities. The EAHCA provided that students with disabilities were entitled to a *free appropriate education* (FAPE) in the *least restrictive environment* (LRE). Consequently, an increased awareness was placed upon educating students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in a general education setting (Yell et al., 1998). Changes to the legislation in 1990 resulted in the renaming of the EAHCA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004. These reauthorizations to IDEA provided additional safeguards and educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001**).**

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001), formerly the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (ESEA), established an accountability system that focused on closing the

achievement gaps between student subgroups including those with disabilities. Inclusion of

students with disabilities into the general education classroom has increased with the

implementation of this legislation. During the 2004-2005 school year roughly 96% of students

with disabilities nationwide participated in the general education classroom while half of the

students with disabilities participated in an inclusive setting (Alquraini & Gut, 2012).

Inclusion refers to the practice of students with disabilities participating in the general

education classroom with their nondisabled peers. It is one of many service options listed under

the IDEA's continuum of educational services available for students with disabilities. The

implementation and design of inclusion practices varies from school to school and school

division to school division. However, there are certain characteristics that seem to be consistently

evident in successful inclusion classrooms. Some of these characteristics include the availability

of resources, teacher quality and training, and the pairing of the special education and regular

education teachers (Amerman & Fleres, 2003). Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley (2012)

stated that teachers reported the need for adequate resources, structured planning time, and

additional training on inclusive practices in order to effectively implement inclusion.

Previous studies have been conducted regarding the perceptions of educators involved in

inclusion programs (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2009; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010;

MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Some studies suggest that the perceptions of educators

regarding inclusion influences whether or not the outcome and implementation of inclusion are

successful (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; Nel et al., 2011). De Boer et al. (2009) state that

teachers with more experience in inclusive classrooms have more positive attitudes than those

with less experience in providing inclusion services. Various studies also tend to support that inclusion settings do increase the academic progress of students with disabilities (Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2000; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Individual schools and school divisions undoubtedly vary not only in the implementation but the success of their inclusion programs. Additionally, the amount of training and professional development that teachers receive regarding teaching students with disabilities tends to influence the perception of educators towards inclusion (Forlin & Sin, 2010).

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

Determining the necessary elements of inclusion programs for students with disabilities continues to be an issue for debate. Viewpoints from professionals in the field vary just as perceptions about the necessary elements of inclusion programs vary in school divisions and individual schools. Proponents of pullout programs indicate that students with disabilities require specialized instruction under IDEA and advocate that special educators use their specific knowledge to instruct students (Coyne & Simmons, 2004; Wang, 2009). Those who favor inclusion believe that students should not be thought of as either special education or regular education students. Rather, all students should be instructed according to their learning styles and needs (Dunn, 2002; Sapon-Shevin, 2007). There are also professionals in the field, who state that inclusion is only appropriate for some students and that all educational settings must be considered based on each student's individual needs **(**Kauffman, McGee, & Brigham, 2004; Richmond, Aberasturi, Abernathy, Aberasturi, & DelVecchio, 2009; Smelter, Rasch, & Yudewitz, 1995**).**

Since the late 1990s there has been a considerable increase in the number of students with disabilities who participate in inclusion settings. Initially, the increase in inclusion was an effort

to provide more socialization opportunities for students with disabilities (Osgood, 2005). However, today's continued growth in the participation of inclusion is due to the recent legislative requirements found in NCLB calling for the close of the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers.

Due to the repercussions of whether or not students with disabilities demonstrate measurable academic progress, the most beneficial educational setting question continues to be debated. It is important to evaluate the perception of general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators who are currently or have recently been involved in inclusion programs. There is an entire scope and quality of services available to students with disabilities; but for the purpose of this study, I examined the perceptions of those currently involved in inclusion programs to determine the necessary elements of an inclusion program. The identification of educators' perceptions regarding inclusion may provide information that will be helpful in implementing more effective inclusion programs.

<u>Research Questions</u>

The overarching question for this study is as follows: "What are the participants' perceptions of inclusion services in the system where they are employed?" Subsequent focalizing questions include the following:

1. "What are the perceptions of general and special education teachers and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary setting?"

2. "What are the necessary elements of an inclusion program in the elementary setting?"

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will add to existing research surrounding the perceptions of both general and special educators and administrators regarding the necessary elements of an effective inclusion program in an elementary setting. Educators from this school division may use the findings of this study to improve or make changes to the current inclusion model. The findings will identify the perceptions of the general and special educators and administrators regarding inclusion and the components that are necessary for an effective inclusion program in an elementary setting.

Limitations of the Study

Purposeful sampling was used to gather information from four general education teachers, four special education teachers, and four building level administrators who all work in elementary school settings. Qualitative research focuses on the experiences of the participants of the study; therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to other groups. However, purposeful sampling allows a more in-depth study of the participants' experiences to be documented (Patton, 2002).

Definition of Terms

Child with a Disability – Virginia regulations that govern special education define a child with a disability as a child who was:

evaluated in accordance with the provisions of this chapter as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disability (referred to in this part as "emotional disability"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. This also includes developmental delay if the local educational agency recognizes this category as a disability in accordance with 8VAC20-81-80 M.3. If it is determined through an appropriate evaluation that a child has one of the disabilities identified but only needs a related service and not special education, the child is not a child with a disability under this part. If the related service required by the child is

considered special education rather than a related service under Virginia standards, the child would be determined to be a child with a disability. (Virginia Department of Education, 2011a, Sec1:2)

Free Appropriate Education (FAPE) – "Special education and related services provided in

conformity with an IEP, are without charge and meet standards of the State Department

of Education" (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 426).

General Education Curriculum – "Refers to the curriculum used by nondisabled students"

(Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2010).

Highly Qualified Teacher - "Teachers who are certified by the state or pass the state teacher

examination, demonstrate competence in the subject area they teach, and hold a license

to teach. Elementary school teachers must demonstrate knowledge of teaching math and

reading. Middle and high school teachers must have majors in the subjects they teach or

demonstrate knowledge of that subject" (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 426).

Inclusion – "The practice of serving students with a full range of abilities and

disabilities in the general education classroom – with appropriate in-class support"

(Roach, 1995).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) - "A detailed, structured plan of action required by

IDEA that informs and guides the delivery of instruction and related services"

(McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2013).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – "Legal requirement to educate children with disabilities

in general education classrooms with children who are not disabled to the maximum

extent possible" (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 427).

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).

Pull-out – when a student left the general classroom environment to attend another

classroom or area for instruction (Waldron, 1996)

Response to Intervention (RTI) – "In determining if a child has a specific learning disability,

refers to scientific, research-based intervention"(Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 430).

Special Education – "Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique

needs of a child with a disability." (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 430).

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study was focused on the experiences of four general education

teachers, four special education teachers, and four building level administrators with inclusion in

elementary school settings. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, statement of the problem,

research questions, limitations of the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 includes the

literature review of the subject. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology that was

used to answer the two research questions. Chapter 4 includes analyses and clarification of the data. The conclusion, summary, implications for practice, and suggestions for expanding the research are found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of special

education teachers, general education teachers, and building level administrators regarding

inclusion services for students with disabilities in elementary settings. Previous studies have

found favorable outcomes for inclusion programs that were implemented by educators with

positive attitudes (De Boer et al. 2009; Solis et al. 2012). Smith and Smith (2000) noted that the

attitudes of educators towards inclusion may be influenced by the following factors: training,

resources, and collaborative planning time for general and special education teachers. The type

and severity of the students' disability, previous inclusive teaching experience, support from

administrators and colleagues are additional factors that may affect educators' perceptions of

inclusion (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, & Norwich, 2011; De Boer et al., 2009; Solis et al.,

2012).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom began to

increase in the late 1990s as federal legislation required students with disabilities to participate in

both state and district assessments (Yell et al., 1998). Additional federal legislation called not

only for continued participation in these assessments but for the closing of the achievement gap

between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers, which further expanded the

inclusion movement. Today, inclusion is widely practiced and there is evidence that students

with disabilities who receive inclusion services are making some academic gains (Alquiraini &

Gut, 2012).

History of Special Education and Special Education Law

Dating back to the colonial era of our nation, children with disabilities were often kept at home while those without disabilities attended school. The exclusion of children with disabilities in educational settings was often due to lack of education on or understanding of the disabilities. England's positive experiences in educating those with disabilities including those who were deaf and blind influenced America to initiate the education of students with disabilities (Osgood, 2005). Separate schools or institutions for students with disabilities were established in America in the 1800s; however, there was much to be learned about individuals with disabilities. With the increased establishment of these institutions, Osgood (2008) indicated that removing individuals with disabilities from society became more of a priority than providing educational services to them.

Both public and private schools and institutions were established for individuals with disabilities who were defined by one of the following three categories: deafness, blindness, or cognitive disability (Osgood, 2008). The number of institutions increased between 1850 and 1900 as state governments were involved in classifying and arranging treatment for those with disabilities (Osgood, 2008). By the end of the 19th century, most states provided funding to these facilities as they were deemed a necessary aspect of society (Osgood, 2008).

By 1900 the development and expansion of public schools brought the issue of educating students with disabilities to the forefront. Programs and special accommodations were made in an effort to educate students with disabilities; however, segregation of these students was implemented and strongly advocated by educators and researchers alike (Osgood, 2005). Proponents of these separate programs asserted that students with disabilities needed individual programs due to their social maladjustment and the potential disruption of others' learning. The

common practice during this time period was to identify students with disabilities and place them in separate programs outside of the regular classroom (Osgood, 2005).

Throughout the history of education all three branches of government have played a significant role in shaping and developing the course of special education; however, it was not until the 1980s that more positive outcomes for students with disabilities were documented. The judicial system has heard arguments related to equality for students with disabilities for well over 200 hundred years. Initially, both state and federal courts upheld school systems that excluded students with disabilities; however, additional legislation expanded the rights of students with disabilities, and consequently the courts' decisions provided positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Currently, the number of students with disabilities who are educated in a general education classroom continues to increase (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2013).

Compulsory Attendance Laws

States began passing compulsory school attendance laws contingent upon age and completion of certain grade levels as early as 1852; however, by 1918 all 50 states had authorized laws requiring that all children attend school (Yell et al., 1998). Even with this legislation, students with disabilities were often denied the opportunity to attend public school by school officials. Students with disabilities who were seen as not being able to benefit from instruction were often expelled and, therefore, excluded from educational opportunities while the courts upheld school systems' position on these matters (Yell et al., 1998).

In the 1919 court case, *Beattie v. Board of Education,* the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that school officials had the right to exclude a student who negatively impacted the other students and required too much of the teacher's time (Yell et al., 1998). The student in this case had a condition that caused him to drool, have issues with his speech, and involuntarily make

facial expressions. He was suspended from school and school officials recommended that he attend a day school for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

The Supreme Court of Illinois declared in the 1958 case, *Department of Welfare v. Haas,* states are not required to provide a free public education to those who are "feebleminded" or "mentally deficient" (Yell et al., 1998). In this case a student had been sent to the Lincoln State School and the Department of Welfare was seeking payment from the individual's parents for his stay at the school. The Court ruled in favor of the Department of Welfare and further asserted that those who were mentally deficient were not capable of benefitting from an education (Yell et al., 1998).

Many of the state courts continued to rule that the compulsory attendance laws did not mean that states had to provide an education to students with disabilities. As recently as 1958 and 1969 the courts ruled that the compulsory attendance laws did not require states to provide educational services to students considered to be "feeble minded" (Yell et al. 1998). In 1969 North Carolina passed legislation that made it a crime for parents of children with disabilities to pursue school attendance for their child after the public school had excluded them (Yell et al.). Subsequently the exclusion of students with disabilities in public education continued and was supported by the judicial system.

The Civil Rights Movement and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was instrumental in beginning the legal journey for public education to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities. In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) racial segregation in public education was deemed unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. This landmark court case was a consolidation of many cases from different states in which the plaintiffs challenged the separate

but equal decision previously rendered by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In the *Brown* case the justices found that separate but equal schools for students of different races was unconstitutional based on the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The Supreme Court further ruled that states must provide the same opportunities for all citizens. The Court's ruling laid the groundwork for parents and advocacy groups to demand educational equality for students with disabilities.

The Court's decision in the Brown case did not have an immediate impact on special education; however, it laid the foundation for equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Initially the Brown decision sparked many discussions regarding the separate educational settings for students with disabilities. It was not until later that the ruling was challenged and applied to court cases involving students with disabilities (Osgood, 2005).

PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) and Mills v. Board of Education (1972)

Additional court cases filed in the 1970s, including *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens* (PARC) v. *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972), resulted in the requirement of public education to provide educational services to students with disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Fourteen different families of children with mental retardation claimed that the schools were not providing a free appropriate education to students with mental retardation (Osgood, 2005). In a consent agreement the State of Pennsylvania recognized its obligation to provide a free appropriate education to all students. The outcome of the *PARC* case guaranteed the education of children, ages 6- 21 with mental retardation in regular classrooms or in special classrooms as necessary (PARC v. Pennsylvania, 1972).

In *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) the parents of seven children with disabilities living in the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit citing that their children were being denied a

free appropriate education (Osgood, 2005). The children represented in this legal case had various disabilities including brain damage and orthopedic impairment. The court ruled that it was the responsibility of the school district to provide a free appropriate education for all students. The outcome of the *Mills v. Board of Education* expanded the *PARC* ruling by ensuring a free public education of all school-aged children regardless of the severity of the disability (Yell et al., 1998). Both of these court cases were fundamental in establishing the education of students with disabilities as a constitutional right.

Educational opportunities for students with disabilities continued to vary significantly from state to state even after these rulings. By 1973 at least 45 states had laws addressing the education of students with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). However, the state laws often had loopholes that prevented many students with disabilities from receiving a free appropriate education. The phrase "those who could benefit from education" was often included in the legislation, which left the meaning open to interpretation (Martin et al., 1996). Individual states would often cite lack of financial funding, inadequate facilities, and insufficiently trained teachers as reasons for not providing educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). Due to the inconsistency among states in providing educational opportunities to students with disabilities, the federal government became involved in the process of pursuing equity through legislative mandates.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and Education of the Handicapped Act

Congress authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 as a way to ensure that underprivileged children were receiving a valuable education (Wright & Wright, 2006). An amendment was added to the ESEA 1 year later that provided a grant for states to initiate, expand, and improve educational programs for handicapped children. In 1970

the Education of the Handicapped Act, also known as P. L. 91-230, replaced the initial grant

programs of the ESEA; however, the objective of providing more and improved programs to

handicapped children remained the same (Wright & Wright, 2006). The National Council on

Disabilities made the following remarks regarding the ESEA:

> Congress first addressed the education of students with disabilities in 1966 when it
> amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to establish a grant
> program to assist states in the "initiation, expansion, and improvement of projects […]
> for the education of handicapped children." In 1970, that program was replaced by the
> Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 91-230) that, like its predecessor, established a
> grant program aimed at stimulating the States to develop educational programs and
> resources for individuals with disabilities. Neither program included any specific
> mandates on the use of funds provided by the grants; nor could either program be shown
> to have significantly improved the education of children with disabilities (Wright &
> Wright, 2006, p. 13)

Education for All Handicapped Children Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), also known as P. L.

94 – 142, emerged as the first law that exclusively addressed the education of students with

disabilities (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). Federal funding, another provision of this legislation, was

provided to states to aid in educating students with disabilities. Procedural safeguards were also

put into place by this legislation that promised to protect the rights of students with disabilities as

well as their parents (Wright & Wright, 2006).

Significant outcomes of the EAHCA include the following:

  1) An individualized education plan (IEP) was required for every student with a disability.

2) Schools must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities

in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

According to the LRE provision of the EAHCA students with disabilities are to be

educated with their nondisabled peers "to the maximum extent appropriate" (Wright & Wright,

2006, p. 427). This mandate allowed for a more effective integration of students with disabilities

in regular classrooms and decreased the number of students with disabilities who were served in separate settings (Osgood, 2005).

In *Daniel R. R. v. Texas State Board of Education* (1989) the question of the least restrictive environment was challenged. A 6 year old student with Down's syndrome was spending half of his school day in a regular preschool classroom. Daniel was not making progress and was unable to complete tasks independently, so the school system recommended that he spend the entire day in special needs prescshool classrom. The parents disagreed and pursued a due process hearing in which the lower court agreed with the school system. The Supreme Court of Texas agreed with the lower court, citing that the school system had offered a continuum of services to Daniel in order for him to be successful at school. The following two questions were derived from this landmark case and continue to be used to determine if school systems are in compliance with the LRE mandate of IDEA (Hulett, 2009):

1. Can education in the regular classroom with the use of supplemental aids and services be achieved satisfactorily?

2. If it cannot, has the school mainstreamed the child to the maximum extent appropriate?

Several changes have been made to the EAHCA since 1975 as Congress is required to reauthorize part of the law every 4 years. Some of the changes include the 1986 law that provided funding for early childhood intervention services including disabled children from birth to age 2. Other changes in 1986 included that parents who won lawsuits would be awarded attorney's fees (Yell et al., 1998).

In 1990 additional amendments were made to the EAHCA and the title of the law was changed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA ensured additional funding to the states to educate students with disabilities and also regulated how students with

disabilities would be educated. Over the years IDEA has grown in the areas of individualized programming, early intervention programs, procedural safeguards, and the identification of students with disabilities (LaMorte, 2002).

The 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA reinforced the idea that a free appropriate education did not equal the "best possible education," as was found in the 1982 Supreme Court case *Board of Education v. Rowley* (Seligmann, 2012). In this case the parents of first grader Amy Rowley challenged the school system's denial of a full-time sign-language interpreter in all of Amy's academic classes. Several lower courts sided with the school system and agreed that a full-time sign-language interpreter for Amy was not necessary at this time (Seligmann, 2012).

Most advocates of students with disabilities viewed the Court's ruling as a negative interpretation of the term "free appropriate public education." The Rowley case was the first legal battle in which the Court applied the contents of IDEA and is, therefore, considered a landmark ruling that set the precedent for future litigation. The Court's interpretation of the Rowley case continues to be used today in determining the appropriateness of individualized education plans (Seligmann, 2012).

In 2005 the National Council on Disabilities published a position statement concerning whether or not the burden of proof lies with parents or school systems in determining a free appropriate education according to IDEA (National Council on Disabilities, 2005). At the time of the publication the Supreme Court had ruled in the *Schaeffer v. Weast (*2005*)* case*, in which a student's parents were claiming that the IEP written for their son was inappropriate. In a split decision, the Court ultimately found that the burden of proof lies with the party who initiates the litigation, which in this case was the parents of a student with a disability (Wright & Wright, 2006).

The IDEA does not stipulate which party bears the burden of proof in litigation cases just as the ESEA did not indicate specific directives for the funding of programs for students with disabilities. The Court's ruling in *Schaeffer v. Weast* (2005) was interpreted as a barrier to ensuring appropriate educational placements for students with disabilities. However, the Court also indicated that individual states could override the decision by establishing laws that put the burden of proof on the school systems. Families of students with disabilities may or may not have the responsibility of the burden of proof in litigation depending upon the state in which they reside (Wright & Wright, 2006).

Vocational Education Act of 1963

During the 1960s many Americans were found to be living in poverty and education was seen as the solution to America's economic decline. As a result President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty and began implementing many initiatives including the Vocational Act of 1963 to improve the situation (Webb, 2006). The Vocational Education Act of 1963 was the first federal vocational legislation that addressed the needs of disadvantaged individuals including those with handicapping conditions (Friedel, 2011). Students with disabilities now had access to vocational programs that expanded their rights and future opportunities.

The Vocational Education Act was expanded and strengthened by amendments in 1968 and 1976. The amendments ensured that federal funding for vocational education would be used for secondary and postsecondary students and more specific groups of individuals, including those who were deaf, mentally retarded, or had other disabling conditions (Friedel, 2011). Localities were required to establish vocational education advisory boards and states had to provide evidence of efforts to assist vocational educational programs that were inclusive of eligible individuals (Friedel, 2011).

<u>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</u>

Section 504 was signed into law by President Nixon in 1973 and was the first law that

protected individuals with disabilities from discrimination by agencies that receive federal

funding. The law applied to state and local agencies as well as public school systems and

institutions for higher learning. Section 504 provides the following:

> No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps in the United States [. . .] shall,
> solely by reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied
> the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving
> Federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

The United States Department of Education supports the Office of Civil Rights (OCR),

which is charged with the responsibility of enforcing Section 504. Considering that Section 504

provides individuals with the same provisions that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is

understandable that the OCR is in charge of this task. To determine eligibility under Section 504

the legislation describes individuals with handicaps as the following:

> any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits
> one or more major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is
> regarded as having such an impairment. The regulation further defines a physical or
> mental impairment as (A) any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic
> disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems:
> neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs;
> cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genitourinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and
> endocrine; or (B) any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation,
> organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities
> (U. S. Department of Education, 1995).

According to the statute major life functions are outlined as caring for one 's self,

performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

Depending upon the handicapping condition, students who qualify under Section 504 may

require classroom accommodations to address the disability. Students qualifying under Section

504 due to physical impairments may require a special diet or specialized medical treatment while at school (Rosenfeld, 1996).

Although both IDEA and Section 504 protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, the laws have several differences. The major difference between the two laws is that Section 504 works to remove barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in activities and programs while IDEA provides more services and safeguards to students with disabilities (Rosenfeld, 1996). The main function of Section 504 is to ensure that individuals with disabilities are not discriminated against by agencies that receive federal funding and by doing so, Section 504 " levels the playing field" for these individuals (Rosenfeld, 1996).

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984

The Carl. D. Perkins Act, also known as P. L. 105-332, replaced the 1963 Vocational Education Act. The two central purposes of this legislation were to strengthen our economy and to further expand access of special needs population to vocational programs (Friedel, 2011). Special needs individuals were defined as those with limited English proficiency, individuals with disabilities, and those considered disadvantaged.

This legislation positively affected students with disabilities by ensuring that vocational education programs were accessible to them and that goals were included in their IEPs to address the vocational programs. The quality of the programs was also assessed as a result of this legislation and required school systems to inform students with disabilities and their parents of vocational programs 1 year in advance (Friedel, 2011). The Perkins Act was significant in advancing the vocational education of students with disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 1990. Like Section 504, the ADA was patterned after the 1964 Civil Rights Act but was different in that it protected individuals with disabilities from discrimination in all aspects of public life. The ADA defines individuals with disabilities by using the same language as the Section 504 definition: a person who "has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities", a person who has a history or "record of such an impairment", or a person who is "regarded by others as having such an impairment" (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 295).

Public schools were primarily affected by Title II of the ADA that requires all state and local government agencies including those privately owned and those that receive federal funding are handicap accessible. Under Title II of the ADA state and local agencies are also required to provide the means for effective communication to individuals with speech or hearing difficulties (Wright & Wright, 2006). Title II required that public school systems comply with these mandates. The ADA did not impact the field of special education as significantly as other legislation, but it did strengthen the rights of individuals including students with disabilities.

No Child Left Behind (2001): Closing the Achievement Gap

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which is a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was enacted in 2001 with the intent to close the achievement gap of minority and disadvantaged students. The ESEA legislation essentially provided states with funding for the education of students with disabilities; however, the ESEA lacked specifications of how the funds were to be spent and what programs were to be implemented, which limited its impact on educating students with disabilities. Citing lack of

academic progress as evidenced in the Nation's Report Card, Congress developed the NCLB and in 2001 President George W. Bush signed it into law (Wright & Wright, 2006).

NCLB added specific requirements that ensured the focus of educating students with disabilities shifted from equal access and participation in state assessments to closing the achievement gaps that exist between disabled students and their nondisabled peers. The most significant mandate from this legislation requires minority and disadvantaged students including students with disabilities to make annual measureable academic progress on annual state testing (NCLB, 2002). Schools and school divisions are held accountable and face sanctions if these students do not make measurable academic progress on yearly standardized testing in the content areas of reading and mathematics (NCLB, 2002).

To meet the requirements of NCLB by scoring at least proficient on state testing, schools offer remedial programs to students who are struggling academically. An attempt to align NCLB with IDEA was made in 2004 when school divisions were allowed to use the response to intervention (RTI) approach to identify students with learning disabilities instead of the traditional discrepancy model determined by specialized testing (Colker, 2013). The RTI approach provides intensive intervention services to struggling students that are very similar, if not the same, as what the NCLB requires for all students who are not making progress. However, each of the laws obviously serve different purposes with IDEA working to help children overcome their disabilities and meet individualized goals, while NCLB assists struggling students in scoring proficient on state testing (Colker, 2013).

Sanctions for individual schools and school divisions that consistently do not meet the federal and state requirements can be severe. Repercussions for failing to meet the established requirements can include removal of principals and teachers and the loss or redirection of federal

funding (NCLB, 2002). Educators are charged with ensuring that students with disabilities make measurable academic progress while federal law mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Hulett, 2009). In order to effectively and consistently close the achievement gap, schools must evaluate the best educational placement for students with disabilities.

<div align="center">Inclusion Versus Pullout Programs</div>

Given the state and federal mandates that students with disabilities must make measurable academic progress, educators must examine the instruction of students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings versus pullout programs. Students with disabilities need access to the general curriculum and the expertise of a teacher with specific content knowledge. In fact the NCLB Act states that all teachers must be "highly qualified," a mandate that requires the following the levels and certification: a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure, and proof of content knowledge in each subject for which they are responsible (NCLB, 2002). This requirement has resulted in an increase in inclusion services because many special education teachers do not meet the definition of a "highly qualified teacher" (McLeskey et al., 2013).

It is significant to note that the trend towards inclusion has not always existed and as recently as1989 Congress reported that a large portion of students with disabilities were being educated in separate educational settings (McLeskey, Henry, & Axelrod, 1999). However, with the addition of the least restrictive mandate to IDEA in 1990, a steady increase has been noted in the number of students with disabilities who are participating in inclusion classrooms. Ludlow (2012) reported that from 2008-2009 more than 60% of students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their day in general education classrooms.

Yet, the majority of students with disabilities have been educated in separate classrooms by a special education teacher. The philosophy behind the pullout model advocated for students with disabilities to receive intense, individualized instruction in a small group environment by a specially trained teacher (Richmond et al., 2009). Advocates of inclusion argue that students with disabilities need access to the general education classroom and regular classroom in order to make progress in academic and social areas (Rea & Walther-Thomas, 2002). Those who favor pullout programs cite that students with disabilities need specialized instruction in a smaller setting in order for their needs to be met (Smelter et al. 1995). There are also professionals in the field who believe that education must be individually based on each student's needs, level of disability, and learning style (Dunn, 2002). Elliot and McKenney (1998) assert that while pullout programs are easier to implement, they are not in the best interest of students with disabilities.

Many studies have been conducted in an effort to evaluate the academic progress of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms versus pullout programs. Rea and Walther-Thomas (2002) found that students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms received better or comparable academic outcomes than those of their peers who were served in a pullout program. The outcomes of another study what was conducted over a period of years in three different settings indicated that students with disabilities did not make measureable academic gains as a result of inclusion classes (Zigmond et al., 1995). Martson (1996) researched the academic progress of students with disabilities in three different instructional models: inclusion only, pullout, only and combined-service model (inclusion and pullout). His findings concluded that students with disabilities who received instruction via the combined-service model made the most academic progress (Martson, 1996).

Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) found that students who were receiving reading instruction in pullout programs were not getting individualized instruction. Their study showed that the special education teacher had many students from different grade levels in the resource classroom at the same time. Most of the teachers included in this research were providing whole group instruction to students instead of individualizing the instruction to meet the needs of students (Vaughn et al., 1998). The results of this study are concerning considering that 90% of students with learning disabilities struggle with learning to read (Turnbull et al., 2010).

Richmond et al. (2009) studied the reading achievement of two groups of students who were classified as learning disabled. One group received reading instruction in the general education classroom while the other was instructed in a pullout classroom. The results indicated that both groups made progress in the area of reading comprehension; however, the progress of one group was not more significant than that of the other (Richmond et al., 2009).

Determining the Most Appropriate Educational Setting

Determining the most appropriate educational setting continues to be a function of the IEP committee. Members of the IEP committee are charged with reviewing the continuum of service options listed under IDEA in order to evaluate educational settings for students with disabilities based on their individual needs. The IDEA mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the general education classroom whenever possible. The specific IDEA mandates include:

- To the maximum extent appropriate children with disabilities including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities are educated with children who are nondisabled;

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- 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 is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and
  services cannot be achieved satisfactorily;
- And the educational placement of each child with a disability is as close as possible to
  the child's home (Wright & Wright, 2006).

Due to the significance of whether or not students with disabilities demonstrate measurable academic progress, the most benefical educational setting question continues to be debated. It is more important now than ever to determine which educational setting provides the best opportunity for students with disabilities to make academic progress. There is an entire scope and quality of services available to students with disabilites; but for the purpose of this paper inclusion services will be the focus.

<div align="center">Arguments For and Against Inclusion</div>

The inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom remains an issue for debate among professionals in the field. Of significant concern is that inclusion may work for some students with disabilities but may not be appropriate for others. This concern is validated by the continuum of service options that are available to students with disabilities in IDEA. Critics of inclusion indicate that the extent of each student's disability must be taken into account when considering the option of inclusion. Waldron and McLeskey (1998) found that students with a mild learning disability make more academic gains than those with more severe learning disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Kauffman and Hung (2009) discuss the education of students with intellectual disabilities and state that inclusion should take place when appropriate but concur that the learning of students should be the most significant concern, not

the place in which the learning occurs.

Proponents of inclusion for all students with disabilities argue that social integration is the goal for those students with more severe disabilities, but exposure to the grade level curriculum is also imperative to their academic progress (Amerman & Fleres, 2003). Students with more severe disabilities may be in need of different accommodations and modifications in the general education classroom; additionally, they may also be assessed differently. Others indicate that students with more severe disabilities need specialized instruction in a separate setting (Waldron & McLeskey, 1998).

Hallahan and Cohen (2009) assert that many students with learning disabilities are not receiving specialized instruction due to the inclusion movement. Students with learning disabilities are in need of intensive, small group, and one-on-one instruction with repetition and review of academic skills and concepts that are delivered at a slower pace (Hallahan & Cohen, 2009). There is little evidence that students with learning disabilities receive this type of specialized instruction in inclusive classrooms, which supports the philosophy that inclusion is not appropriate for all students (Hallahan & Cohen, 2009).

Training of Preservice Teachers

Training preservice teachers about students with disabilities and teaching in inclusive settings is an area that may play a role in determining teachers' perceptions and support of inclusion. Teacher education programs for general education teachers require minimum coursework and fieldwork in the area of special education, which leaves new teachers ill-prepared for teaching in inclusive settings (McCray, McHatton, & Alvarez, 2011). This lack of preparation can transfer into a fear of the unknown, possibly resulting in negative feelings regarding teaching in inclusion classrooms. However, Roach (1995) reported that practicing

teachers believe preservice training can be too generalized and that professional development while in the classroom is more beneficial and further assists teachers in understanding how to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Although general education teachers are more responsible now more than ever for educating students with disabilities, McCray et al. (2011) found that often one course related to inclusion and special education is required in teacher preparation programs. Incorporating special education content into the entire general education curriculum for preservice teachers would increase their knowledge and consequently enhance their ability to work with students with disabilities (McCray et al., 2011). McCray et al. state that more effective training for preservice teachers regarding students with disabilities would strengthen inclusion by providing additional information on beneficial instructional strategies and classroom accommodations.

It is important to mention that certain common characteristics have been found to exist in successful inclusion settings. Amerman and Fleres (2003) found that the following factors greatly influenced inclusive settings: pairing of the teachers, grading, lesson planning, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of both the general education teacher and the special education teacher. The components of effective inclusion classrooms are of particular interest because the quality of inclusion programs has a substantial impact on the educational results for many students with disabilities (Cook, Tankersly, Cook, & Landrum, 2000).

Inclusion Models

Elliot and McKenney (1998) shared the following four successful inclusion models that have been cited in research studies: consultation, team teaching, aide services, and limited pullout services. Consultation refers to the special education and general education teacher regularly discussing the needs of students with disabilities. Students who receive consultation

services are able to maintain in the general education classroom with accommodations and limited assistance. Team teaching or coteaching describes the cooperative efforts of both the special education teacher and the general education teacher in instructing students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) found that team teaching is the least used inclusive model reported by teachers; however, their results did not indicate an explanation of why team teaching is used so infrequently. Some inclusion models use the services of instructional aides to provide inclusion services to students with disabilities in the regular classroom, but this model is often criticized due to the lack of education and training of paraprofessionals (Giangreco, 2010). The reference to limited pullout services refers to instruction in the special education classroom only during noninstructional times of the school day (Elliot & McKenney, 1998).

Benefits of inclusion in the intermediate grades include the following: allows for best teaching practices, active assessment, and personal growth (Elliot & McKenney, 1998). Inclusion allows students with disabilities to work with their nondisabled peers on academic tasks that provide beneficial learning opportunities. General education teachers also have occasion to evaluate and assess the academic needs of students with disabilities in a more through manner. Students with disabilities profit from strong relationships with their classroom teachers and in developing their self-esteem (Elliot & McKenney, 1998).

<div align="center">Previous Studies and Outcomes</div>

Previous studies have been conducted regarding teacher perceptions and the academic outcomes of students with disabilities in pullout programs versus inclusion settings. The findings of the studies vary as to whether or not pullout programs or inclusion settings produce more favorable academic gain. The research also indicates that the perceptions teachers have of

inclusion impact the design, implementation, and success of inclusion programs (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000). It is also important to note that the studies were completed in elementary, middle, and secondary settings and had distinctive factors that may or may not have affected the outcomes (Rea & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Richmond et al. 2009; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Perkis (2004) mentions that teacher quality and instructional resources are factors that should be taken into consideration when examining inclusion and pullout programs.

Hurt (2012) conducted a study regarding the academic achievement of students with disabilities from four different Southwest Virginia school divisions in grades 3-8. He compared the achievement of students who had received pullout instruction with those students who had received inclusion services in the content areas of reading and math. Hurt (2012) concluded that the educational placement of these students did not have a significant impact on the students' academic achievement in reading and math.

According to Waldron and McLesky (1998) students with disabilities made more gains in the area of reading in inclusion settings than pullout programs. Another study examined the academic progress of eighth graders in two different middle schools, where one group received instruction in a pullout setting and the other was instructed in an inclusion classroom (Holloway, 2001). The findings of this study are in agreement with Waldron and McLesky's results in that students with disabilities made the most academic gains in inclusion settings (Holloway, 2001).

Holloway (2001) points out those students with disabilities tend to make more progress in inclusion settings in the content area of reading. However, some studies indicate that academic progress in the area of mathematics for students with disabilities does not show a significant increase regardless of the students' educational setting (Holloway, 2001). More studies should be completed involving the progress of students with disabilities in reading and math in order to

show a trend or the lack thereof regarding this finding.

Many of the studies conducted on this topic have been able to document an increase in the level of academic achievement of students with disabilities who participate in inclusion classrooms (Holloway, 2001; Rea & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). However, there are some studies that have found that the academic achievement level of students with disabilities did not increase as a result of their participating in inclusion classes (Hurt, 2012; Richmond et al., 2009; Zigmond et al., 1995). One particular study with an adequate sample size and a strong research model documented that there were not any increases in the academic achievement level of students with disabilities who were instructed in inclusion settings (Zigmond et al., 1995). Richmond et al. found that the reading achievement of students who are learning disabled who participated in inclusion classrooms was not higher than those students with learning disabilities who participated in pullout programs.

It is important to note that the settings and implementation of inclusion programs varied in these studies. Future studies on this topic must take into consideration the following factors: teacher quality, instructional resources, administrative support, training of both regular and special education teachers, pairing of the regular and special education teachers, and the extent of staff development. Two other factors that should be examined closely are the sample sizes of the studies and the disability categories of the students.

<u>Perceptions of Teachers</u>

Cook et al., (1999) found that the positive attitudes of educators towards inclusion were central to the success of inclusive classrooms. Teacher attitudes are considered one of the most important variables in determining the successful implementation of educational programs. Many factors seem to contribute to the development of positive teacher attitudes, including

professional development training and special education classes taken by teachers (Jobe, Russ, & Brissie, 1996).

Henning and Crane (2002) examined the exposure of preservice teachers to inclusion experiences and the subsequent effects on their perceptions regarding inclusive classrooms. The results of their study showed a positive correlation between the amount of exposure to inclusion classrooms and the level of positive perceptions of pre-service teachers. Collaboration and coplanning between special education teachers and general education teachers were cited as being positive and beneficial to the process (Henning & Mitchell, 2002).

Leatherman (2007) conducted a study of teachers who were self-described as being positive regarding teaching in inclusion classrooms. The results of Leatherman's study indicated that even among those teachers with positive perceptions about inclusion there are still significant needs in order for inclusion to be more successful. Teachers involved in the study reported that they were in need of additional education and support from building level administrators (Leatherman, 2007).

Boer et al. (2011) found that primary school teachers held negative or neutral feelings towards inclusion. The primary school teachers' feelings towards inclusion seemed to be related to certain variables, such as training, the number of years of inclusive teaching experience, and the severity of the students' disabilities (Boer et al., 2011). Although teachers' perceptions of inclusion seem to impact its success, the extent of the correlation has not been documented.

Perceptions of School Principals

It should be noted that the attitudes and perceptions of school principals can also impact the success of inclusion programs. Praisner (2003) asserts that the behavior that principals exhibit towards inclusion and the potential progress of students with disabilities affects the

overall success of inclusion programs. A relationship was found to exist between the level of professional development that principals received and their attitudes towards inclusion (Praisner, 2003).

Daane et al. (2000) found the administrators in their study to have positive attitudes about inclusion in elementary settings; however, the administrators indicated that there continues to be a need for pullout services for some students with disabilities. It was also found that both special education and general education teachers disagreed that the inclusive classroom was the most beneficial placement for students with disabilities while the administrators in the study agreed that it was. The need for more training for general education teachers was an item on which that all participants agreed (Daane et al., 2000).

Effective school principals establish and maintain a collaborative school culture by creating supportive relationships characterized by open discourse between staff members (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Principals discuss the needs of all student groups including students with disabilities with staff members for the purpose of developing and implementing effective strategies to ensure the success of the school and individual students (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). MacFarlane and Wilson (2013) noted that teachers' perceptions of inclusion are related to school principals' expectations about inclusive education. By modeling a positive collaborative approach that advocates for the success of all students, school principals can influence the success of inclusion programs in individual schools (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

Due to the recognized significance of educators' attitudes a large part of inclusion research is made up of perception studies (Cook, Tankersly, Cook, & Landrum, 2000). In fact, the attitudes and perceptions of educators' regarding inclusion has been studied for over 50 years

(Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). It should also be noted the majority of the research on the subject of inclusion has centered on students with mild disabilities. Cook et al. (2000) recommended that additional research be conducted on educators' perceptions of inclusion of students with severe disabilities.

Summary

The review of the literature in this chapter covered the history of special education, legislative acts that govern special education, and previous studies' outcomes regarding the most beneficial educational placement for students with disabilities. The literature does not support pullout services over inclusion services as being the most advantageous educational placement for students with disabilities. Inclusion is broadly practiced today in elementary, middle, and secondary public school settings and it is important to examine the perceptions of educators who are currently involved in providing inclusion services. Chapter 3 contains the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the methods used to examine the perceptions of special education, general education, and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary grades. A qualitative research method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants perceive their experiences with inclusion in the elementary setting. Qualitative research focuses on gathering data from participants in natural settings about real world experiences. One of the most notable characteristics of qualitative research is that it focuses on the participants' perspectives of their experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative researchers are responsible for reporting the gathered information from the viewpoints of the participants. Using a case study design, the goal of the research was to describe the participants' experience with inclusion in an elementary setting. The results of the study provided opportunities for reflection by general education, special education teachers, and building level administrators of current inclusion practices in the elementary setting.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine the perceptions of special education teachers, general education teachers, and building level administrators regarding the elements that are necessary for inclusion programs in the elementary grades. Inclusion programs are defined as educational services in which students with disabilities receive instruction from both a general education teacher and a special education teacher in the regular classroom setting. Four special education teachers, four general education teachers, and four elementary administrators

were interviewed in order to assess their perceptions about the necessary elements of inclusion programs in the elementary grades.

The following questions were used to study the perceptions of special education, general education, and building level administrators concerning inclusion classes in the elementary grades.

Research Questions

This study was focused on the perceptions of general and special educators and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary setting in one school division in Southwest Virginia. The overarching question for this study was: What are the participants' perceptions of inclusion services in the system where they are employed?

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of general and special education teachers and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary setting?

Research Question 2

 What are the necessary elements of an effective inclusion program in the elementary setting?

Research Design

Open-ended, structured interviews were conducted in this qualitative case study of inclusion in elementary settings. Qualitative researchers use open-ended interviews in order to develop a deeper understanding of participants' viewpoints without influencing their responses by using preselected categories by way of questionnaires (Patton, 2002). Structured interviews require that the same questions be asked in an identical manner and in the same order (Patton, 2002). Prior to conducting the interviews with the participants of the study, I conducted a mock interview with a colleague to evaluate the quality and comprehension of the interview questions

in the research protocol. I evaluated the colleague's understanding of each question and when necessary I adjusted the format and wording of individual questions to ensure that the purpose of the question was clearly conveyed to all participants.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants of this study. The participants were general and special education teachers and building level administrators who were currently working in an inclusion program in an elementary setting. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants prior to the beginning of the study. Demographic data were collected from the participants as well as data that documented their experience with inclusion.

The data were categorized by open coding, which is described as "the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 62). It can be difficult for researchers to extract themes and patterns from open-ended interview questions due to the detailed nature of the responses (Creswell, 2007). To begin creating categories researchers must assign codes to single pieces of data and then group the ones that have likenesses (Merriam, 2009). The participants' responses were transcribed and closely examined for similarities and differences. The collected data were recorded and emerging themes were identified and examined.

The Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research methods rely heavily on the skill and competence level of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Identifying potential personal biases and monitoring them is a significant responsibility of the researcher when conducting qualitative studies. Patton (2002) acknowledges that neutrality is a position that difficult to maintain; however, neutrality does not mean that the researcher is detached from the experience. In qualitative research the researcher generally has close contact with the participants and often develops empathy toward them while

simultaneously enhancing his or her own insights regarding the experience.

It is essential for me to note the potential biases that I may have developed during my tenure as a special education teacher and in my current position as an elementary school principal who supervises teachers who participate in providing inclusion services. This topic has significant meaning to me due to my past experience as a special education teacher. I have supervised and am currently supervising some of the participants in this case study. As a precaution due to my supervisory role, a research assistant will conduct and record the interviews of those I have supervised and am currently supervising in order to gather accurate information from the participants.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness of the Study</div>

Qualitative research requires researchers to not only collect but to also analyze the data, which calls for an increased awareness of the researcher towards tendencies of bias (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002) asserts that the credibility of qualitative study is dependent upon the following three factors: "the credibility of the researcher", the use of "rigorous methods", and the "philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (p. 552). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers carefully review guidelines and regulations pertaining to research methods and potential ethical issues (Merriam, 2009). One such regulation requires that researchers report possible personal prejudices and inaccuracies in the study results (Patton, 2002).

Critics of qualitative research indicate that subjectivity of the researcher hinders the reliability of the results (Patton, 2002). A structure for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research by limiting subjectivity was developed and continues to be used today. Two well-known researchers in the qualitative field, Guba and Lincoln, indicated that qualitative research must meet the conditions of the following criterion: "credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability" (Shenton, 2004). Merriam (2009) refers to credibility as to how the results of the study correspond to reality. In qualitative research transferability is considered to be how generalizable the results are to other situations, while dependability is defined by the likelihood of the results repeating if the same methods were used (Shenton, 2004). The last criterion of confirmability is ensuring that the results reflect the experiences of the participants and not the biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers work toward comfirmability by being forthcoming about their potential biases and by discussing the possible inadequacies of the study itself (Shenton, 2004). Researchers consistently work to meet the specific requirements of these four criterions in order to strengthen the methods and results of their studies.

To add to the trustworthiness of this study the interview responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim by me or the research assistant. I did not interview the participants or transcribe the responses of those who have or are currently working under my supervision in order to further ensure the reliability of the study. Comments were not made by the research assistant or me as the participants were interviewed.

<div align="center">Selection Process</div>

Purposeful sampling techniques were used to select participants for this study. This sampling method was used in this study to illuminate the research questions with information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Patton states that, "studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 230). Participants were selected from the same rural school division in Southwest Virginia. This particular school division has seven elementary schools. All of the participants have experience with inclusive education in the elementary setting and are currently teaching in an inclusive classroom or serving in an administrative role in a school that currently practices inclusion.

The participants of the study were special education teachers, general education teachers, and building level administrators who have more than 1 year of experience with inclusion in the elementary setting. The elementary schools in the school division housed students in grades PreK-5. Participants met with the researcher prior to interview to sign consent forms and to share demographic information. To ensure confidentiality the participants were assigned pseudo names.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

In-depth, structured individual interviews were conducted in order to collect data for this study. Patton (2002) states that qualitative interviews, "yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (p. 4)". Concentrated efforts were made to ensure that the participants' responses were recorded verbatim in order to document direct quotes and to gain the individual perception of each participant's experience with inclusion in an elementary setting.

The interviews were scheduled and conducted at a time location that was chosen by the participants. Participants responded to identical predetermined questions asked in the same order, which provided a structured interview experience. The interviews were recorded by either the researcher or the research assistant. Interview responses were transcribed then reviewed, and punctuation, when necessary, was added to the text by the researcher or the research assistant. The interview transcriptions were reviewed by the interviewees. They were given the opportunity to make changes to the transcription in an attempt to document their exact perceptions regarding their experiences with inclusion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of qualitative research is considered to be inductive in that the researcher concentrates on documenting categories, themes, and patterns (Patton, 2002). Interview responses from the participants were first coded by themes found in the data. The data were then categorized in an attempt to document patterns among the themes. In order to effectively categorize the data, I ordered and sorted the categories to search for the emerging patterns.

Qualitative research uses patterns to make generalizations about connections between the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The responses were reviewed after the codes, categories, and patterns were established to see how well the data clarify the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Determining the patterns among the categories allowed me to differentiate between significant and nonsignificant information found in the data.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical practices of the researcher impact the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative studies. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants are ethical considerations related to qualitative research studies. All participants in this study were provided with consent forms and confidentiality agreements. The participants were then referred to by pseudonyms assigned by the researcher or the research assistant in an attempt to further ensure confidentiality.

Summary

Chapter 3 gives a description of the research methodology used in this study. The purpose of this study was to document educators' perceptions of inclusion and the effective elements of an inclusion classroom. Educators in this study were purposefully selected in order to gather information-rich data. The study was limited to the perceptions of educators within one school division in Southwest Virginia.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of four special education teachers, four general education teachers, and four building level administrators toward inclusion in elementary settings. The study provided documentation of the perceptions of the participants concerning inclusion in elementary settings and the information gained from the documentation will provide an opportunity for reflection of the current inclusion practices in this Southwest Virginia school division. This chapter will provide information about the way in which the data were analyzed.

The data from the study were collected from the responses given by participants to 10 questions in a structured interview setting. All of the questions addressed the educators' perceptions of inclusion in the school division in which they are employed. A mock interview was conducted with a colleague who is also an educator to ensure that the intent of the questions would be clear to the participants. Based upon the mock interview experience, the questions were adjusted to improve the interviewee's comprehension of the interview questions.

The interview responses were first coded and then categorized, and emerging patterns were then documented. Categories were established based on the responses of the participants into the following four areas: perceptions of elementary educators' towards inclusion, necessary elements of inclusion, essential supports in the regular classroom, and potential barriers to inclusion.

Participants

Participants met the purposeful sampling definitions of special education teachers, general education teachers, and building level administrators who work in an inclusion classroom or school in an elementary setting in the school division where the research was conducted. Four general education teachers, four special education teachers, and four building level administrators participated in the study. The participants were referred to by pseudonyms in the study as an attempt to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Jade is a female general education classroom teacher who has 3 years of teaching experience and all 3 of those years she has taught inclusion classes. She is currently teaching language arts classes in a third grade inclusion classroom setting in which the special education teacher is in the classroom for 60 of the 80 minute instructional block. The reading specialist also comes in during this 60 minute timeframe and lends additional support to the general classroom teacher.

Samantha is a female special education teacher with 7 years of experience of teaching and has 7 years of teaching experience in inclusion classrooms. She currently coteaches in a third grade math classroom and works closely with the general classroom teacher in planning lessons and activities that meet the needs of students with disabilities. Samantha provides instructional services to students with disabilities in grades K-5.

Nicolette is a female building level administrator in an elementary school that houses students in grades PreK-5. She has over 38 years of experience in education with at least 10 years of experience in supervising inclusion classrooms. Nicolette has implemented inclusion in the elementary school in which she works and currently assists in facilitating an inclusion model.

Zoe is a female regular classroom teacher who currently teaches fourth grade reading and math. She has 17 years of experience with 7 of those years teaching in an inclusion classroom. The special education teacher currently is in her classroom for 30 minutes during the instructional block for math.

Ella is a female special education teacher with 9 years of teaching experience in a variety of settings included a self-contained setting. She has 4 years of experience in teaching inclusion in the general education classroom. Ella currently provides in inclusion services in a fourth grade language arts classroom.

Sarah is a female building level administrator in an elementary school with 23 years of experience total; 12 of those years were spent as a classroom teacher. She has implemented a school-wide inclusion model, when appropriate, in which the special education teacher travels to the general education classroom to provide services and coteach with the general education teacher. Although inclusion had been in place as part of instructional plan at this elementary school for many years, Sarah promoted and helped to facilitate more of a school-wide inclusion model, when appropriate and of course, based on the students' needs, this school year.

Gina is a female general education teacher with 18 years of experience in education; she has 4 years of experience in teaching using an inclusion model. She has taught in several different grade levels both in self-contained and departmentalized settings. Gina teaches language arts and social studies to fourth graders this school year. The special education teacher provides inclusion services daily for a period of 30 minutes each day during the language arts period.

Hailey is a special education teacher with 5 years of teaching experience; she also has 5 years of experience in teaching in inclusion settings. She currently provides inclusion services to

students in grades 3-5 in the content area of language arts. Hailey spends 60 minutes in each language arts block in grades 3-5.

Brittany is a building level administrator who has 25 years of experience in education. She has 15 years of combined experience as a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Brittany has been in administration for the last 10 years of her career.

Linda is a general education classroom teacher with 10 years of teaching experience. She has 2 years of experience in teaching in an inclusion setting. Linda currently teaches in a third grade math classroom where the special education teacher comes in for a 30 minute period each day.

Madison is a special education teacher with 10 years of teaching experience. All 10 of her years of experience have consisted of teaching in an inclusion setting; she currently provides inclusion services in the regular classroom in the content areas of reading and math for approximately 30 minutes daily.

Carol is a building level administrator with 19 years of total experience with 3 of them being in administration. She has facilitated an inclusion model in her school in which the special education teacher goes into the general education classroom for a large part of the instructional block for language arts in grades 3-5. In this school, the special education teacher is scheduled to spend 60 minutes in each language arts classroom in third through fifth grade each day.

<u>Interview Data</u>

The following data were gathered from the participants' in-depth, individual interview with the researcher or research assistant. The interview responses were transcribed verbatim and the quotes used in this section reflect the exact wording used by the participants.

<u>Interview Question 1</u>

What is your definition of inclusion?

Two of the 12 participants defined inclusion by indicating that the special education teacher goes into the general education classroom to coteach with the general education teacher in order to meet the needs of all students including those with IEPs. Nicolette defined inclusion as, "where all children are together working and the teachers are differentiating instruction based upon their individual needs." To Ella inclusion is, "an educational setting that includes all type of learners in one physical setting." Linda's definition of inclusion is, "inclusion is more of a process" in which "you include the kids in the regular classroom." Sarah described inclusion as "special education students having access to the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment, of the same setting as their peers." Jade explained that inclusion is, "having all levels of kids in the classroom and meeting the needs of the neediest kids, as well as the average and gifted students." Madison stated that inclusion is, "having a model in place as a school and a classroom where the special education teacher, the general education teacher along with the administration try to put a model in place for students with disabilities to allow access to the general curriculum as much as possible with peers the same age in the same grade." Brittany sees inclusion as "students remain in the core classroom, with the support of special education personnel, either a teacher or an assistant…for part of the day or part of a core class or all of a class." Carol's definition of inclusion is, "the education of special education students in the regular education classroom alongside their peers." Hailey expressed that inclusion is, "children that have labels under IDEA working in a classroom with typical students, higher learning, and slow learning students that are not identified." To Zoe inclusion is, "all students involved in the learning process in the classroom."

How do you define an effective inclusion classroom?

All of the 12 participants indicated that coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching were all necessary elements of effective inclusion classrooms. Further explanations of the participants' views regarding the necessary elements of effective inclusion classrooms have been included in the individual statements below:

Gina stated that an effective inclusion classroom takes a "team and all students working together with both teachers." Samantha expressed that, "communication is one of the biggest keys for effective inclusion." She further asserted that a "good relationship between the general education teacher and the special education teacher is important." Nicolette described an effective inclusion classroom is one that "runs seamlessly" in which both teachers are working with all students. She further explained that an observer "cannot tell the difference between one teacher and the other." Ella mentioned that inclusion "fosters a team aspect and all the students and all the teachers feel as if they are on the team, learning the goal and the content." Linda discussed the importance of communication between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. She said, "They need to plan together, communicate daily, and they both need to have the same goals for all of the children." Sarah also agreed that, "constant communication is key" between the special education teacher and the general education teacher; however, she went on to say that the, "most important thing is for the educators to know each child's areas of strengths and weaknesses, and to work together to meet their specific needs." Planning together and coteaching were also seen by Sarah as being significant elements of an effective inclusion classroom. Jade indicated that having a coteacher in the general education classroom is important when trying to meet the needs of all students. She remarked that an

effective inclusion classroom as having "all different levels of kids and being able to effectively teach all of the cognitive levels." Madison discussed the value of collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. She also mentioned that "looking at data" and "reviewing student progress" as important pieces of the collaboration that should be taking place.

<u>Interview Question 3</u>

Is inclusion working in this school? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Seven of the 12 participants indicated that inclusion was working better in some classrooms than others. The participants who expressed that inclusion was partially working in their schools expressed that a lack of coteaching and collaboration, weakness in the relationship between the general education teacher and the special education teacher, and the mindset of some colleagues toward inclusion as impeding the development of inclusion in their individual schools. Carol stated that, in one of the classrooms where inclusion is not working as well, "the regular education teacher has never had experience in giving up control of her classroom and is therefore having a hard time allowing the special education teacher to interact simultaneously in the delivery and discussion of instruction." Zoe stated that, "professional development on how to address the needs of all students" would be beneficial to all teachers and produce better results with inclusion. Linda indicated that inclusion does not work in some grade levels due to personality conflicts between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Madison mentioned that some general education teachers are not "as flexible as others with allowing others to come in and be a part of the classroom." This lack of flexibility can interfere with the role of the special education teacher in the general education classroom. Madison went

on to say, "Unfortunately, in come classrooms you feel like a teacher's assistant and you are not given a whole lot of time to work with the students."

The participants who stated that inclusion was working in their schools discussed the strength of the relationship between the general education teachers and the special education teachers. Consistent collaboration, coteaching, and the flexibility of both teachers were also cited as being significant factors that contribute to inclusion in their schools. Ella described the relationship between the general education teacher and herself as "a relationship that kind of respects each person and allows each person to bring their ideas to the table, and nobody is feeling more superior to the other or more professional than the other." Brittany mentioned that inclusion is approached as "a team effort, not that it is one or the other's sole responsibility to teach or instruct the special education students." Hailey expressed that flexibility is a determinant of whether or not inclusion is working; she went on to say that flexibility has "made inclusion work this year" in her particular school.

Interview Question 4

Are the needs of students with disabilities met in the regular education classroom? If yes, how? If no, what needs to change?

All participants concurred that the need of students with disabilities are being met in the regular education classroom. Sarah stated that, "the majority" of teachers "are doing everything they can to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms; however, if what they are doing isn't working with a particular student according to assessment data, then it's our responsibility to find more effective strategies that will make that concept click for the student." Linda indicated that inclusion helps to meet the needs of all students and allows both teachers to work

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with small groups of students. Ella explained that both the general education teachers and the special education staff are "very aware of the accommodations that the students we are targeting need and what they are legally required by law to have."

Some participants discussed the need for small group and pullout time with the resource teacher in addition and in conjunction with inclusion services, if students with disabilities are having difficulty with a specific concept in the general education classroom. Carol mentioned that the special education teacher may need to take the students with disabilities out of the classroom at times "if their needs become greater and more intense than the inclusion setting allows the teachers to address." Madison referred to the occasional pullout instruction of students with disabilities as a "modified version of inclusion." She further stated that "inclusion is not a placement, it's a model." Hailey also discussed the need for occasional pullout instruction for students with disabilities who are participating in an inclusion classroom.

Interview Question 5

What is the role of the special education teacher in the regular education classroom?

Nine of the 12 participants suggested that the special education teacher's role in the general education classroom was the same as that of a general education classroom teacher. Many responses indicated that the special education teacher should be seen as being equal to the classroom teacher by the general education classroom teacher as well as the students. Linda explained that she and the special education teacher often switch roles in that one provides the direct instruction while the other monitors the students. She said, "I think she is equal to the regular classroom teacher and that's how it should be." Gina described the special education teacher's role as a "shared role" and the role is "more or less the same" as the general education teacher's role. Planning, gathering materials, and determining the appropriate flexible group for

the students are responsibilities that are shared by Gina and the special education teacher.

Nicolette expressed, "They are regular teachers. They should be team teaching. There are two adults in the classroom with a degree. It should be seamless and they should be working together. The special education teacher makes sure that we are following the IEP guidelines and suggests strategies for all kids, both regular and special education." Carol also concurred that the special education teacher should be seen as being equal to the general classroom teacher. She stated:

"The role of special education teacher is to provide the support needed, via differentiation, for his/her students to be successful in the regular classroom. This requires that the special education teacher be viewed as an equal in the classroom, equipped with the same resources, plans, and strategies as the regular education teacher. The special education teacher is then responsible for adapting the requirements of the regular education classroom, to a level in which they are accessible for students with disabilities.

The other participants responded that the role of the special education teacher in the regular education classroom varies depending upon the classroom in which they are providing inclusion services. The special education teacher sometimes takes on the role of an instructional aide and is viewed as part of the support staff instead of an instructional staff member. Madison discussed that she is considered a "support to the general classroom teacher."

Interview Question 6

Do special education teachers meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom? If yes, how? If no, why not?

The participants unanimously agreed that special education teachers meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Zoe commented that special education teachers do meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom by "assisting with directions, clarifying the vocabulary, breaking down the information into smaller pieces, and using visuals." Samantha indicated that special education teachers meet the

needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom not only instructionally but also by making sure that "all IEP goals and objectives are being met and accommodations are being provided."

<u>Interview Question 7</u>

Do regular education teachers meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom? If yes, how? If no, why not?

The majority of the participants responded that regular education teachers are meeting the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom in a variety of ways. Gina indicated that regular education teachers follow the IEP to make sure all of the students' accommodations are provided. Nicolette explained that the regular education teachers at her school have made progress in this area and are now taking ownership of the special education students. Samantha said that the general education teachers "look at individuals, instead of the class as a whole" which helps them to "differentiate based on individual needs."

Some of the participants responded that the general education teachers in their schools are inconsistent in meeting the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Zoe discussed that teacher attitude at her school affected the way in which general education teachers work with students with disabilities. She indicated that the "teacher's perception of resource students and how they learn" affects the general education classroom teacher's ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Hailey reported that some of the general education teachers at her school are very familiar with the students' IEPs and make modifications and provide accommodations accordingly; however, she also shared that some of the general education classroom teachers "believe that the special

education teacher should provide all of the accommodations."

<u>Interview Question 8</u>

What do special education teachers need in order to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom?

Nine of the 12 participants included in their responses that special education teachers need collaboration and a common planning time with the general education teacher in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Madison expressed that collaboration is essential and having the "same perceptions, ideas, and goals as the regular teacher" is necessary to help students be successful. Samantha noted the need for a common planning time in order for both teachers "to look at where special education students are, where they are going, and how we are going to accomplish that." Jade said that in order for the special education teacher to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the classroom that "constant communication" between the teachers is necessary for the special education teacher to make appropriate instructional plans.

The need for special education teachers to have access to the most current data is critical in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom as noted by Carol and Sarah. Ella mentioned that is important for special educators to have a "really big tool bag" of tricks, strategies, and memory techniques in in order to help students learn the curriculum. Sarah also agreed that special education teachers need a "varied repertoire of strategies and resources" in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Nicolette shared that special education teachers need to increase their knowledge in the content areas and in the specific curriculum of each grade level; however, she acknowledged that being familiar with the specific curriculum for each grade level presents a challenge for them. Additional instructional

time was an element that Gina and other participants felt would help special education teachers meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

Interview Question 9

What do regular education teachers need in order to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom?

The need for additional professional development to assist regular education teachers in meeting the instructional needs of students with disabilities it the regular classroom was mentioned by several of the participants. Brittany stated that, "A teacher who has been in the profession for 5, 10, or 20 years requires constant updates concerning special education instruction. Special education categories are constantly evolving and it requires teachers to constantly evolve their knowledge of instructional strategies." Ella discussed that regular education teacher teachers need "a little more knowledge about specific disabilities." She went on to say that having this knowledge would increase the regular education teacher's understanding of what strategies work with certain kids with specific disabilities. Samantha and Nicolette noted that professional development regarding inclusion with examples of coteaching models would benefit regular education teachers and assist them in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom.

Additional instructional time with students in the regular classroom is needed in order for regular education teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Sarah stated that the regular education teachers need more time "because time and intensity is a huge factor in meeting the needs of students with disabilities." Two regular classroom teachers, Gina and Jade, also indicated the need of for additional instructional time for students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Madison mentioned that regular education

teachers in her school have expressed the need for more instructional time in the regular classroom for students with disabilities. She also added that, "We have no control over some things depending on the budget, and the district, and the breakdown of the student-teacher ratio."

Collaboration between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher was mentioned by several of the participants. Linda mentioned the importance of communication and the need for regular education teachers to see "the special education teacher as a help and not a hindrance." Carol also discussed the benefits of communication between the two teachers and mentioned that regular education teachers need "targeted, specific strategies" from the special education teacher in order to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

Interview Question 10

What issues can affect the success of inclusion classrooms?

The participants responded that many different factors can affect inclusion; however, most of the participants most frequently mentioned the attitudes of teachers and the collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher as affecting the success of inclusion. Carol indicated that the success of inclusion classrooms is definitely affected by "opportunities to coplan." All of the following factors were mentioned by the participants as being possible barriers to the success of inclusion classrooms:

- time
- lack of collaboration
- lack of understanding
- teacher attitudes toward inclusion
- lack of a common planning time

- weak relationship between general education teacher and special education teacher

- scheduling

- lack of resources

- understaffing

- disruptive students

- lack of flexibility

- not appropriate for all students

<u>Findings</u>

The data from the participants' responses have been analyzed by first coding then categorized based upon the emerging themes. Consequently, the responses were arranged into the following four areas: perceptions of inclusion, the necessary elements of inclusion, essential supports in the regular classroom, and potential barriers of inclusion.

<u>Perceptions of Inclusion</u>

The research and interview questions were devised in an attempt to reveal the participants' perceptions of the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms in an elementary setting. The participants stated that inclusion in the regular classroom setting is not appropriate for all students with disabilities when considering factors such as, behavior, attention deficit, and substantial cognitive weaknesses. Ella described that the reason inclusion is successful in her school is due to the "group of learners targeted for inclusion" and she further expressed that "inclusion is not for all students." Linda stated,

> We do have one child that doesn't come in my room for math. He would run out of the classroom and stuff so he is not with me at all anymore. He stays in the classroom for reading, but he has math one –on- one now. It has helped the other kids, him not being in there because he was so distracting to them. That can be a downfall of inclusion in any school. It doesn't work for some children.

Nicolette explained that inclusion is being done at her school, but that resource is being offered to specifically "very low academic students." Madison shared that having students with various challenges in the classroom is "distracting to the other students in the classroom." Hailey discussed students with attention deficit disorder and the challenges that are presented for them in the regular education classroom. She indicated that "there are several distractions in the classroom" and that these kids benefit more from one-on-one in the resource room."

The need for students with disabilities to receive additional instructional time with both the general education classroom teacher and the special education classroom teacher was recognized by the participants. Gina stated that special education teachers need more time to work with students with disabilities, while Jade indicated that regular classroom teachers needed additional time to work with special education students. Sarah mentioned that both regular and special education teachers need added time with students with disabilities but acknowledged that in order to do so "more manpower is needed."

Necessary Elements of Inclusion Classrooms

The participants were asked to define an effective inclusion classroom in order to determine their perceptions of the necessary elements of inclusion. Some responses were repeated numerous times by the participants and most of the participants' replies included the elements of coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching. Hailey indicated that co-planning was essential to the success of inclusion classrooms and that both teacher had "to be on the same page." Linda discussed the importance of daily planning and communication between both teachers in order for inclusion classrooms to be successful. Carol stated that,

> Through the collaboration and coplanning of the regular education teacher and the special education teacher, inclusion is maximized. The best inclusion setting occurs when two teachers are working together so closely to meet all the needs of the students, that the

students themselves do not see a difference between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher.

Reviewing both formative and summative assessment data was also discussed as a necessary element of an inclusion classroom by several of the participants. In regard to reviewing the data, Nicolette expressed that, "both teachers get immediate feedback which they use to group the students." Carol discussed that both teachers use the data, "along with the current IEP goals to drive their instruction." Sarah commented that both teachers use the assessment data to help determine what strategies may need to be implemented to assist students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

Essential Supports in the Regular Classroom

The participants were asked if the needs of students with disabilities were being met in the regular education classroom. Most of the responses affirmed that the needs of students with disabilities are being met in the regular education classroom and the participants provided examples of strategies in addition to and in conjunction with inclusion services being implemented to accomplish this task. Ella discussed that teachers at her school were doing well with modifying work for students with disabilities. Nicolette mentioned that the regular education teachers are "very familiar with the students' IEPs" and the accommodations and modifications that should be provided to every child. Hailey indicated that some general education teachers do not provide accommodations to students with disabilities in the regular classroom but instead wait for her (the special education teacher) to do so.

Madison mentioned the occasional need for "modified inclusion" that refers to students with disabilities being pulled out of the regular classroom in order for the special education teacher to reteach a specific concept. Carol stated that the special education teacher is, "free to

take students out of the classroom in a small group or one-on-one setting, if their needs become

greater or more intense than the inclusion setting allows the teachers to address."

Potential Barriers of Inclusion

The participants gave numerous responses regarding their perception of factors that may

hinder the productivity of inclusion. Although the responses varied, there were many replies that

suggested commonalities in the participants' perceptions of hindrances of inclusion. Mutual

responses consistently named the following factors as hindrances of inclusion: lack of

collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher, teacher

attitudes toward inclusion, and a lack of understanding of specific disabilities and inclusion,

itself.

In reference to collaboration and teacher attitudes Nicolette expressed the significance of

teachers working together as a team and taking ownership of all kids; teachers must stop

separating kids into the categories of special education and regular education. Samantha

discussed the importance of teacher attitudes toward inclusion and keeping the focus on students'

needs. She stated,

> Attitude toward inclusion can be a big roadblock; when others are not willing to
> work together, it is a problem. You have to want to do it. You need a good
> attitude about co-teaching and consider students' needs as your first priority.

All participants mentioned that a lack of collaboration and coplanning between the

general education and regular education teacher can hinder the success of inclusion. Brittany

indicated that constant collaboration is imperative to the success of inclusion classrooms. She

went on to say that inclusion is; "about being proactive instead of reactive to our students, having

discussions regularly" impacts the results of the inclusion classroom. Carol shared an experience from her individual school and stated,

> In the classroom where it is not working as well, co-planning and co-teaching is not happening as regularly. The regular education teacher has never had experience in giving up control of her classroom, and is therefore having a hard time allowing other specialists to interact simultaneously in the delivery and discussion of instruction. I will say that the level of confidence of the regular education teacher is getting better, but she often changes her plans midstream, with limited communication to the inclusion team, making it very difficult for the others to come to class prepared for the instruction of the day.

Some participants discussed the need for professional development for educators regarding specific disabilities and appropriate inclusion models. Samantha expressed that there is "not a lot of training for general education teachers on what inclusion should look like." Nicolette indicated that her staff "definitely needs professional development on inclusion" and that in order to continue building a successful inclusion program, "we need a way of sending both general education teachers and special education teachers to workshops together to allow them to develop their skills." Brittany mentioned that special education is constantly changing and that all teachers need updated information about specific disabilities and strategies to reach students in regard to their needs.

<u>Summary</u>

Chapter 4 includes the research data obtained from the demographics of the participants and the structured, open-ended interviews conducted with the 12 participants of this study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of elementary educators, teachers, and administrators who are currently involved in an inclusion program in their school

or classroom towards inclusion in the elementary setting. Purposeful sampling was used to determine the participants of the study.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher or the IRB approved research assistant. The interview transcripts were first coded and then categories were established from the emerging patterns in the responses. The established categories from the data analysis are perceptions about inclusion, necessary elements of inclusion classrooms, essential supports in the regular classroom, and possible barriers to inclusion.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of 12 elementary educators which included four general education teachers, four special education teachers, and four building level administrators, regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The 12 participants responded to 10 interview questions that allowed them to present their opinions regarding the practice of inclusion the necessary elements of inclusion, potential barriers to inclusion, and whether or not the needs of students with disabilities are being met in the regular classroom setting by both the general education teacher and the special education teacher.

This study allowed the participants to express their viewpoints regarding inclusion based on their individual experiences. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses may provide insight into the school division's inclusion practices in elementary school settings. As a former education teacher and practicing elementary school administrator, I plan to use the findings to reflect upon the practices in my school. The information collected from this study can be used to reflect upon the current inclusion practices found in four of the seven elementary schools in the Washington County Virginia Public School system.

The 12 participants were interviewed using a structured one-on-one interview model. Prior to answering the open-ended interview questions, the participant completed a demographic form. The interview questions provided the participants with the opportunity to share their personal experiences with inclusion in an elementary setting.

The interview responses were first transcribed and then open coding was used to examine, break down, and categorize the data; this required a detailed examination of the participants' responses and began with coding separate pieces of data or segments (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Following the open coding process, the data were categorized by the emerging patterns that are defined as relationships among the categories; the patterns supported the theoretical framework of the study (McMillan &Schumacher, 2010). The patterns found in the data were: perceptions of inclusion, necessary elements of inclusion, essential supports in the regular classroom, and potential hindrances to inclusion. A summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research, as related to the research questions are found in this chapter.

<div align="center">Discussions and Conclusions</div>

The findings from Chapter 4 are included in this section. The two research questions were addressed based on the data collected from the interview questions. Conclusions were also made after reviewing the data and provide implications for future practice and research.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of general and special education teachers and building level administrators regarding inclusion in the elementary setting?

Previous research has indicated that educators' attitudes toward inclusion impact the success of inclusion classrooms and programs (Cook et al., 1999; Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Praisner, 2003). Numerous responses were given by the 12 participants in the study regarding their perceptions of inclusion in the elementary setting. Several of the participants expressed that inclusion is not appropriate for all students and that some students need pullout services in order to be successful and to make progress. To support their view on the subject, participants gave

specific example of students who have multiple needs related to behavior, attention, and severe cognitive impairments.

Participants also mentioned the need for increased instructional time with students with disabilities, citing that both the general education teacher and the special education teacher need more time with students with disabilities. In order to provide additional instructional time for students with disabilities, the participants acknowledged that more manpower is needed. Based on the participants' responses, the special education teachers have heavy caseloads that limit the amount of time during the day they are available to provide inclusion services. Other factors that affect the amount of instructional time available include the student-teacher ratios in the regular classroom.

Research Question 2

What are the necessary elements of an effective inclusion program in the elementary setting?

Amerman and Fleres (2003) found that the following factors influenced the success of inclusion classrooms and programs: pairing of the teachers, lesson planning, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each teacher. Responses related to the necessary elements of an inclusion program in the elementary setting consistently repeated the significance of coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching. The participants indicated that communication between the general education teacher and the special education teacher is essential to the success of inclusion classrooms or programs. Some of the participants' responses went on to mention that both teachers should share data and use the same assessment results to develop their lesson plans. The lack of a common planning time for regular education teachers and special education teachers was mentioned by several participants as being a stumbling block to the implementation of a successful inclusion program.

Elliot and McKenney (1998) noted that team teaching is considered to be one of four successful inclusion models. Working together as a team in which both teachers are viewed as being equal in the classroom was mentioned as being a necessary element of an effective inclusion classroom. The responses indicated that inclusion works best when both the general education teacher and the special education teacher are teaching and interacting with all of the students in the classroom. Inclusion does not work as well when the special education teacher takes on the role of an instructional aide and does not have the flexibility to actually instruct students.

Conclusions

This study was conducted in order to examine the perceptions of elementary educators regarding inclusion in the Washington County Virginia School System. The results of the study provide the opportunity for reflection regarding the current inclusion practices in elementary schools in this school division and may lead to changes in an attempt to improve inclusion in the elementary settings. After gathering and examining the data, I found that the educators' perception of inclusion was that it may not be an appropriate way to address the needs of all students with disabilities. The educators in this study noted the necessary elements of an inclusion classroom as being coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching between the general education teacher and the special education teacher.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Practice</div>

Based on the findings of the study, I, along with other elementary educators in the school division, may plan on-going professional development opportunities for all staff regarding inclusion and the elements that comprise successful inclusion classrooms and programs. A portion of the professional development sessions may address updates in special education

categories and provide strategies to meet the needs of students based upon their specific disability category. Participants of the professional development sessions would also be afforded the opportunity to observe in classrooms where inclusion is working in order to offer a more hands-on approach to their learning.

Administrators, including myself, may review the existing scheduling and attempt to create a common planning period for general education teachers and special education teachers. Although attempting to create a common planning period for those teachers involved in inclusion presents a challenge for administrators, the goal of a common planning period could be accomplished by adjusting the scheduling and tedious planning of the special education teacher's instructional schedule. Time could also be set aside before or after school to ensure that coplanning is taking place; however, the ultimate goal would be that the common planning takes place on a daily basis, not just one day a week before or after school.

Attempts may be made to increase the amount of instructional time that both the general education teacher and the special education teacher have to teach students with disabilities. Due to factors beyond the control of school administration, including budget constraints, building level administrators could appeal to central office personnel regarding the need for additional instructional time in order for students with disabilities to make measurable academic progress. central office personnel may be willing to make some adjustments that would allow increased instructional time for students with disabilities, considering the possible sanctions that individual schools and school divisions could face is students with disabilities are not making measureable progress. Giangreco (2010) discussed the hiring of instructional aides in order to meet the increasing need for instructional time for students with disabilities; however, his findings indicate that student outcomes are not improved by this practice.

Recommendations for Research

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of general education teachers, special education teachers, and building level administrators toward inclusion in the elementary setting in one rural school division. Additional qualitative and quantitative research studies regarding the perceptions of educators toward inclusion would not only increase the existing narrow body of research on this topic but would strengthen the findings of the existing studies and provide opportunities for generalization of the results. Recommendations for future studies include:

1. A comprehensive study of inclusion practices and the educators' perception of such practices in all school settings, elementary, middle, and secondary, in the same school division may provide opportunities for division-wide improvement in the area of inclusion. Documenting best practices and hindrances to inclusion could lead to more success in the regular classroom for students with disabilities.

2. A mixed methods study examining the possible correlation between teacher perceptions of inclusion and student outcomes could add to the significance of improving inclusion practices. This study could be expanded to school divisions within a region in order to provide more opportunities for generalization of the outcomes.

3. Expanding the study to include students and their parents would allow a thorough examination of all stakeholders' perceptions. By including the perceptions of parents and students, the results could possibly provide significant implications regarding inclusion practices.

Summary

The findings from this study document the participants' perceptions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom in an elementary setting based

upon the research questions. The research questions were concentrated on the perceptions of inclusion, necessary elements of an inclusion classroom, and potential barriers to inclusion. The results of the study indicate that the participants' perception is that inclusion is not appropriate for all students with disabilities. The necessary elements of an inclusion classroom include coplanning, collaboration, and coteaching. Potential barriers of inclusion include: lack of collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher, teacher attitudes toward inclusion, and a lack of understanding of specific disabilities and inclusion, itself.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Verification

EAST TENNESSEE STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

February 9, 2015

Laurel Stanley

Re: Elementary Educators' Perceptions of Inclusion
IRB#: c0215.2s
ORSPA #: n/a

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:
- xform New Protocol Submission; External Site Permission; Informed Consent Document (version 1/27/15, stamped approved 2/9/15); Email Script (stamped approved 2/9/15); Interview Questions; Demographic Sheet; References; CV

On **February 9, 2015**, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on **February 8, 2016**. The expedited approval of the study will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Informed Consent Documents** have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and these documents must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Informed Consent Document (version 1/27/2015, stamped approved 2/9/2015)

Federal regulations require that the original copy of the participant's consent be maintained in the principal investigator's files and that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.

Projects involving Mountain States Health Alliance must also be approved by MSHA following IRB approval prior to initiating the study.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Accredited Since December 2005

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,
Stacey Williams, PhD
Chair, ETSU Campus IRB

Appendix B

Research Protocol

1. What is your definition of inclusion?

2. How do you define an effective inclusion classroom?

3. Is inclusion working in this school? If yes, why? If no, why not?

4. Are the needs of students with disabilities met in the regular education classroom? If yes, how? If no, what needs to change?

5. What is the role of the special education teacher in the regular education classroom?

6. Do special education teachers meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom? If yes, how? If no, why not?

7. Do regular education teachers meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom? If yes, how? If no, why not?

8. What do special education teachers need in order to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom?

9. What do regular education teachers need in order to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom?

10. What issues can affect the success of inclusion classrooms?

VITA

LAUREL MARIE STANLEY

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	Radford University, Radford, Virginia; Master of Arts in Educational Leadership, 2003
	The University of Virginia's College at Wise, Wise, Virginia; Bachelor of Science in Psychology, 1996
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