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A Qualitative Analysis of a Teacher Support Program for Educating Students with
Emotional Disturbance in an Inclusive Setting

by

Crystal Williams Harmon

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
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Dedication

To Pastors Lyle and Deborah Dukes

Without your teaching, training, and equipping I would have never considered that

“mustard seed” and I definitely would not have had the courage to

“do this afraid.”

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Thanks to my husband Jay for not only wiping away my tears, but for understanding each one of them over the last year and a half. I'll make it up to you, I promise.

Last but not least, a spirit of appreciation goes to my mother, Veronica Williams, for a lifetime of support in my educational endeavors. Because of you, Mom, as my favorite gospel song says, "I'm stronger; I'm wiser; I'm better, so much better!"

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A Qualitative Analysis of a Teacher Support Program for Educating Students with Emotional Disturbance in an Inclusive Setting

Crystal Williams Harmon

ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of teachers who included students identified as having emotional disturbance in their classes while participating in a teacher support program. A secondary analysis of data collected throughout the duration of the support program was conducted to identify core issues teachers faced as they included students with emotional disturbance in their classes. The first stage of analysis involved pre-existing data from the support program. Data were organized into four periods which chronologically represented the teachers' experiences. From this data eight core themes were identified: concerns about the lack of instructional adaptations made for students with emotional disturbance; appropriate consequences for disruptive behavior in general education; type of additional student information teachers wanted; student readiness for inclusion; the need for a supportive environment; training needs for inclusion; class size pertaining to the number of students with ED in general education classes; and teacher feedback about the support program. To provide clarification and elaboration of these core issues, stage two consisted of a focus group of eight teachers who participated in the program.

Identified strengths that contributed to the success of the support program included the role of the coordinator as support person for both students and teachers and the benefits of having a supportive environment for students with emotional disturbance to return to for extra assistance. Major conclusions from this study suggest that student readiness for inclusion, teacher support needed during inclusion, and teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusion are critical components to the inclusion process. Implications for future research include identifying skills needed by students with emotional disturbance to transition to inclusive settings, examining the setting demands of the general education classroom, exploring students' perceptions of inclusion, and identifying effective practices for preparing teachers to work with students in inclusive settings.

Chapter One

Educating students with emotional disturbance (ED) represents one of the greatest challenges to educators today (Carran, Nemerofsky, Rock, & Kerins, 1996; Nickerson & Brosof, 2003; Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill, & Handler, 1999). Researchers agree that the challenges revolve around the unique needs of these students (Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002). In the classroom, students with ED tend to display patterns of behaviors which include aggression, noncompliance, withdrawal, tantrums, and inappropriate social skills (Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Their educational outcomes are also problematic. Students with ED typically earn lower grades (Gunter, et al., 2002), have the lowest graduation rate compared to all disability groups (Bullock & Gable, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005), and are less likely to attend post-secondary schooling (Kutash, Duchnowski, Sumi, Rudo, & Harris, 2002).

Historically, students with ED have been served in restrictive or segregated settings (Gunter, et al., 2002). However, over the past decade the trend toward more inclusionary practices has increased the presence of these students in general education (GE) classrooms (Austin, 2001; Simpson, 2004). Findings from national data on the inclusion of students with ED indicate that 52 percent of these students spend between 61 percent and 100 percent of their school day in special education classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This represents an increase in their presence in GE classrooms; however, for the most part, students with ED remain in segregated

placements and experience less successful outcomes in comparison to students from other disability categories (Nickerson & Brosop, 2003).

Statement of Problem

Although including students with disabilities in general education settings has increased dramatically across all disability categories (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Guetzloe, 1999), research is lacking regarding the outcomes of students with ED once they are placed in inclusive settings (Simpson, 2004). Some studies have reported that if and when students with ED are included, they are among the least successful of students in all disability categories (Meadows, Neel, Scott, & Parker, 1994).

While many variables are reported to contribute to the poor outcomes for students with ED in general education, one area of research pertains to the role of the general education teacher in inclusion efforts. The literature is replete with how critical teacher support is to the success of inclusion programs (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). When general education teachers are not given appropriate support and training, they are typically ill-equipped to handle the needs of students with ED (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Simpson, 2004).

Much of what has been studied regarding teachers of students with ED has reflected an examination of the perceptions of educators and staff working with these students (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum (2000) report that teacher attitudinal studies represent the largest area of research on inclusion.

The popularity of these studies is due to the belief that when perceptions are obtained by those facilitating the change, results can give insight to the program's development and implementation (Harvey, 1996). One example is in a study by Leyser & Tappendorf (2001) in which they obtained the perceptions of teachers regarding adaptations and modifications to instruction made in mainstream classrooms intended to accommodate students with disabilities. The results of this study suggested that general education teachers prefer practices that are geared toward large group instruction. This study further notes that teachers do not tend to adapt or modify their instruction to accommodate students with challenging educational needs. This kind of information can help practitioners' refine policies to enhance inclusive practices.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of teachers who participated in a teacher support program regarding the inclusion of students with emotional disturbance. The Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP), a school-based program, was created to assist students and teachers in the inclusion process. The researcher, who was also the coordinator of the program, spent a year and a half supporting them through the process. Initially, I was not offering this support for research purposes. During this time my intent was to gather as much information as I could about this program so that our school could remain on the cutting edge of inclusive practices. Since my school district was promoting greater inclusion at the time, my principal allowed me to create a program that would include more students with ED in

general education classes. Now, as a researcher I analyzed the data I gathered from the teachers' perspective of including students with ED. I systematically examined previously gathered information to reveal teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of students with ED and explored how their perceptions developed. The following preliminary research questions guided the study.

Research Questions

1. What were the perceptions of general education teachers who participated in a teacher support program regarding the inclusion of students with ED?
2. From the perspective of the participatory teachers, what factors contributed to the successful inclusion of students with ED?

Theoretical Orientation

The theory used to guide the current research was Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism posits that human beings act towards other things and themselves on the basis of the meanings they have for them (Schwandt, 1994). From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, objects, people, situations, and events do not have their own meaning; rather meaning is conferred on them through their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and the nature and reason for their behavior is based on the new experiences they encounter over time (Mead, 1929). For the current study, the researcher was interested in analyzing the meaning teachers gave to their experiences as they included students with ED. This approach assisted in understanding the perceived

processes of what goes on for teachers involved in inclusion; how it was experienced by the teachers and students; the different perspectives they brought to the table; and how emerging conflicts were perceived to have been resolved during the process (Schwandt, 1994). In understanding what inclusion meant to general education teachers, the data gathered may assist practitioners in effectively designing and implementing successful inclusive programs.

Using an emergent design, qualitative methods were used for this study. A qualitative design was selected because of the current lack of clarity and consensus on inclusion, and because the research questions were not directed at a phenomenon with the characteristics needed for a controlled investigation. By gathering information about the process of inclusion from the perspectives of general education teachers and students with ED, the researcher was able to describe their experiences both individually and collectively to uncover the multiple interrelationships among them that emerged from the data (Patton, 2002). Transcripts of conversations with students and teachers were used along with field notes that were generated throughout the entire year and a half of the program.

Significance of Study

The most significant contribution of this study is to add to the growing body of literature regarding the inclusion of students with emotional disturbance in general education settings. While some school districts have managed to successfully meet the needs of students with ED in general education (Visser & Stokes, 2003), others have

struggled to make it work (Mamlin, 1999). The goal of this research was to provide insight into the inner workings of the inclusion process from teachers' perspectives and hopefully shed light into the issues that affect developing and implementing effective strategies for inclusion (Shapiro, et al. 1999). With these kinds of data, practitioners may be able to identify and intervene earlier in a student's enrollment in inclusive settings in order to better their chances of success. It may also help educators identify the critical issues that can serve as barriers to inclusion.

A further contribution of this study may be towards current reform efforts in special education. With new legislative provisions in school reform, the optimal goal is to ensure access for students with disabilities in the general education curriculum (Fisher & Frey, 2001; Pugach, 2001). If students with ED are to be able to meet increasingly stringent higher standards in education set forth by individual school districts, it becomes critical that they access and are successful in inclusive environments (Fisher & Frey, 2001). Data from this research will, hopefully, add to the research on the types of supports, modifications, and accommodations needed in general education for students with ED to be successful.

Limitations of Study

One limitation of studying inclusion is failure to take into account the many variations of the definition itself (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). Kaufman (2005) says inclusion is defined based on the person who is defining it and for what purpose (Kauffman, 2005).

How inclusion is defined and used in a particular study may not be the same for another school attempting to replicate it.

Another possible limitation revolves around gaining entry. The researcher had a pre-existing rapport with the majority of the general education teachers prior to the study. Not only have I known most of them for a period of three to five years, I also worked with quite a few on major school projects and in mainstreaming students into their classroom. Therefore, laying the groundwork for this relationship, something that is needed in qualitative methodology, was already established. However, rapport across existing social relations may not facilitate a change toward a research relationship which is a different kind of social relationship. This previous rapport allowed for ease of dialogue and disclosure from teachers. Janesick (1994) notes that establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of a study allows the researcher to capture nuances and meaning of a participant's life from the way they see the world. However, pre-existing relationships that allow for rapport may also bias a study, or blind the researcher to alternative understandings. Finally, this study was limited in that it mainly involves the use of information that was collected for another purpose and not as part of a research project. Consequently, there may be times when further elaboration would be beneficial, but was not possible.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the study, the following terms are used. A definition of each follows:

1. Emotional Disturbance (ED) – refers to "...a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance by:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems." [Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.7(c)(4)(i)]

2. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - this term refers to public schools ensuring that students with disabilities are educated with their same age peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Any removal from general education should only occur when the nature of the disability is such that education in general classes with supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (CFR 121a. 550).

3. Individual Education Plan (IEP) – refers to a written education plan developed annually for all students with disabilities who are receiving special education services.
4. Mainstreaming – refers to an instructional process in which students with disabilities spend a portion of their school day in the general education program and a portion in a separate special education program (Idol, 2006).
5. Inclusion - refers to students with disabilities receiving their entire academic curriculum with the general education program (Idol, 2006). For the purposes of this study, inclusion is defined as students with disabilities being educated in general education classes for at least half of their day. The literature refers to this type of inclusion as partial inclusion (Idol, 2002) or a continuum of inclusion (Guetzloe,1999); however, most researchers find both terms contradictory because they do not suggest 100 percent time spent in general education which is what inclusion suggests (Idol, 2006).
6. Center School – a school specifically designed for students with emotional disturbance.

Organization of Chapters

The remainder of the chapters are organized as follows: Chapter two is a review of the literature related to the study. It highlights the historical events of special education, the evolution of inclusion, students with emotional disturbance in inclusive schooling, and critical factors related to successful inclusive practices. Chapter three presents a personal narrative as a way to explain the passion behind working with students with emotional disturbance. The chapter also includes the design of the study, a brief discussion of symbolic interactionism, and how the data were analyzed. Chapter four presents the findings from the analysis of pre-existing data and the results from the focus group. Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings along with implications from the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

School districts around the country are implementing inclusion programs for students with emotional disturbance (Duhaney, Laurel, & Salend, 2000). Historically educated in segregated classrooms and facilitates, an increasing number of students with ED are being educated in general education programs (Simpson, 2004). Known for their dismal academic and social outcomes (Lingo, Slaton, & Joliveete, 2006), students with emotional disturbance offer challenges to schools that are struggling to provide them with appropriate educational services in inclusive settings (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004). Although many schools are successful in including students with ED, little is known about how schools move toward inclusive practices or about the factors that support and facilitate this process (Burstein, et al., 2004). Much of the research investigating this population has examined the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and staff who work with students with ED (Leyser & Tappendolf, 2001). In such studies results typically highlight the difficulty in working with them (Harvey, 1996) and the insufficient skills of general education (GE) teachers as key barriers to successful inclusion (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Burstein, et al., 2004; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). The following section reviews the literature on students with ED, the evolution of inclusion and its impact on these students, and the importance of the role of the general education teacher in facilitating effective inclusionary practices for students with ED.

Students with Emotional Disturbances: A Description

To better serve students with emotional disturbance, it is important to understand the complexity of their behaviors and experiences in and out of school (Kaufman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002; Wagner, et al., 2005). Students with emotional disturbance are more likely to experience a host of negative outcomes both in and out of school (Lane, Wehby, & Barton-Arwood, 2005; Wagner, et al., 2005). Studies have reported that students with ED have the lowest grade point averages, are retained more often, are twice as likely to drop out of school, are more likely to use many child-serving agencies simultaneously, are less likely to attend post-secondary schooling, and suffer to a greater degree than average from unemployment and incarceration (Coutinho, Oswald, & Forness, 2002; Kaufman, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2002). In school they are generally educated in segregated or more restrictive environments, mainly self-contained classrooms or specialized schools (Gunter, et al. 2002; Simpson, 2004) and are disproportionately black males (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Cartledge, 1999; Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004).

There is also an association between poverty and the identification of ED (Coutinho, et al., 2002). In examining the literature on the impact of poverty on children with disabilities, Park, Turnbull, and Turnbull (2002) in their study found that 28 percent of children with disabilities live in families who are living below the federal poverty level. They conclude that students with ED living in poverty are more likely to experience dismal outcomes in every aspect of family life such as health, productivity, and emotional well being. Because these problems often require comprehensive services,

mental health services as a part of a system of care become a critical piece in meeting the needs of these students and their families (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Harvey, 1996).

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, students with ED come to school with unique past experiences of schooling and other services that have helped shape their current performance (Wagner, et al., 2005). These experiences include but are not limited to the onset of support services and their parents' involvement in their education and service experiences. Once in school, two-thirds of these students are reported as having Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and one-fourth are diagnosed as having a learning disability in addition to being labeled ED (Wagner, et al., 2005). A combination of behavior problems and academic difficulties create a cycle in which each problem exacerbates the other (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004).

Historical Perspective on Education Reform

A national effort to reform public education has been a recurrent theme throughout the history of public education (Cuban, 1996). Since the publication of "A Nation at Risk," which brought attention to the supposed dismal state of public education, a number of major reports declared education in a state of crisis and in need of drastic change (Slavin, 2000). Citing numerous societal, political, economic, and changing demographics, stakeholders in and out of education vowed to make sweeping changes in public education (Evans & Harris, 1995).

The dominant strategy for these changes continues to consist of systematic reform aimed at improving the nature and overall quality of general education (Evans &

Panacek-Howell, 1995). In 1991, America 2000, a national education strategy, represented a set of national goals intended to improve the quality of education in America by the year 2000 (Evans & Panacek-Howell, 1995). The focus of America 2000 was to emphasize a readiness to start school, increasing student completion, increasing student performance, creating safer schools, and a focus on adult literacy and life long learning (Evans, Harris, Adeigbola, Houston, & Argott, 1993). With other notable publications and mandates such as the current, “No Child Left Behind,” the education arena is striving toward increased educational accountability for learners, particularly students with disabilities.

Special Education Reform

Over the past several decades, special education reform has paralleled general education reform. As changes in public education continued to unfold, comparable changes in special education occurred as well (Evans, et al., 1993). Since the enactment of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (currently reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act –IDEA), educating students with disabilities became the responsibility of public education (McLaughlin & Warren, 1994). PL 94-142, and subsequently IDEA created a set of guidelines to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004).

A key feature of this legislation is the emphasis placed on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) which mandates that students with disabilities be educated to the

maximum extent possible within the general education population (Cawley, Hayden, & Cade, & Baker-Kroczyński, 2002). LRE has prompted an ongoing debate over the years in the field of special education because despite guidance from IDEA, determining the appropriate placement for some students with disabilities has been difficult (McLaughlin & Warren, 1992). Over time, discussions concerning where students with disabilities should be served have become one source of debate. While some feel that LRE is full inclusion in general education classrooms, others prefer to preserve a continuum of placement options ranging from least restrictive to restrictive (Kaufman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002).

The Regular Education Initiative

The Regular Education Initiative, or REI, was a series of loosely connected proposals suggesting general education should share in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities (Hocutt & McKinney, 1995). Madeline Will (1986), then Assistant Secretary of Education for the U.S. Department of Education, criticized the “pull-out” approach to educating students with disabilities as failing to adequately meet the needs of these students and for bypassing the training needs of mainstream teachers (Evans, et al., 1993). It was also suggested that special education had become a “dumping ground” (Gersten & Woodward, 1990) and was viewed as “disjointed and inconsistent in classifying students with special needs” (Wang, Reynolds & Walberg, 1988). There was also criticism regarding (a) too much time being wasted traveling to and from resource rooms, (b) no link to the regular curriculum; and (c) seldom an attempt

to integrate the learning that takes place in both settings (Gersten & Woodard, 1990). The general consensus was that special education was “not working” (Kauffman & Loyd, 1993) and its failure was due to its organization, physical, and psychological separation from general education (Skrtic, 1986). Notable for the variation that exists in its meaning REI became a movement that prompted much debate regarding appropriate service delivery for students with disabilities (Paul & Roselli, 1995). It sparked a national interest in the exploration of integrated services (Evans, et al. 1993).

While many endorsed REI, it was not without critics. The first major criticism came from a position paper by the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995). The paper criticized REI for being too complex in its implications and included a number of concerns regarding its effect on educational practice and on students. It also drew attention to the research base relevant to REI (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995). Proponents of REI were accused of having a flawed data base (MacMillian, Gresham, & Forness, 1996) and of appearing contradictory in their statements (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995). Keogh (1988) felt “differences in perspectives, in beliefs, and in professional investments had resulted in serious polarization that has left special educators defensive” (p.19).

As the debate over the feasibility of REI continued, it soon became framed in terms of a cascade of services model, which currently represents a continuum of placements. The underlying question became whether this continuum should be upheld or abolished (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The debate was also characterized as a movement that had two major players--the abolitionists who desired the elimination or dismantling

of special education altogether, and the conservationists who wanted to preserve it (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The authors further noted that REI proponents were “disillusioned and devitalized” by the lack of interest in special education by general education. These supporters, often members of The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH), were presumably advocating in the best interest of all students, but their initial intent was to advocate exclusively for students with severe disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The goal of TASH was to jettison the continuum (Gersten & Woodward, 1990). Their phrase “all children” was misleading and reflected little interest in others’ points of view (Kaufman & Loyd, 1993).

Inclusion

As the number of critiques of special education’s effectiveness continued and was soon deemed unproductive, REI was soon replaced by inclusion (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995). Often viewed as the successor to REI, the intent of inclusion was to suggest the merger of special and general education (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995). The other goal was to increase dramatically the number of students with disabilities within general education (Slavin & Stevens, 1991). For some this meant inclusion meant educating all students with disabilities within the context of general education (Houcutt & McKinney, 1995; Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1985), often referred to as full inclusion. To others it meant the inclusion of only a few (Kaufman & Hallahan, 1993).

Those that supported full inclusion were convinced that a dual system of education was unacceptable (Harvey, 1996; Lipsky, Gartner & Forness, 1989). They felt general education classrooms were the only viable option in educating students with disabilities (Heflin and Bullock, 1999). While full inclusionists (formerly abolitionists according to Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994) highlighted benefits such as greater friendships, improved learning opportunities, improved grades, better work habits, less aggression, and improved social skills (Gibb, Allred, Ingram, Young, & Egan, 1999; Harvey, 1996), others saw inherent flaws in the data. Most basically, inclusion was based on moral reasons, not on empirical research (Gibb, et al., 1999). The “one size fits all” ideology was too risky because the student’s individual needs may be lost (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Mills, Cole, Jenkins, & Dale, 1998). The one facet that opponents and proponents seemed to agree on was that most research on inclusion had been relatively broad including all disabilities, not specific populations of children with unique needs (Gibb, et al., 1999). In Guetzloe’s opinion (1999), only knowledgeable professionals understood that the regular classroom was not appropriate for every student.

Currently, no operational definition of inclusion exists. Fuchs & Fuchs (1994) have characterized inclusion as a “loosely interpreted movement” that is often implemented in a variety of ways depending on who is using it and for what purpose (McLaughlin & Warren, 1994). Kaufman (1999) calls the term “virtually meaningless” due to its variation in meaning. For some, inclusion means 100 percent of the time in general education, while others may view it in terms of partial inclusion where students are included for only a portion of their day (Idol, 2002).

Students with Emotional Disturbances and Inclusion

One group that lacks research related to inclusion is students with emotional disturbance (Simpson, 2004). This group represents one of the most challenging populations within the field of special education to include (Carran, et al., 1996; Simpson, 1999). Due to the variety of negative behavioral patterns that are characteristic of students with ED, they are more likely to be educated in restrictive settings than any other disability group (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Nickerson & Brosol, 2003). When included, students with ED have acute difficulties in gaining adaptive relationships with teachers and other students (Lane, et al., 2005) and tend to display patterns of behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, withdrawal, tantrums, and inappropriate social skills (Tobin & Sugai, 1999; Wood, 2001). These behaviors are typically offensive to their peers and classroom teachers, which often leads to referrals for exclusion from the general education classroom (Simpson, 1999).

Despite their overall negative outcomes, many school districts are managing to include students with emotional disturbances (Simpson, 2004) by utilizing various strategies to promote collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers. In conjunction with inclusive practices, collaborative teaching as a model of instruction has evolved into a major strategy used to ameliorate the problems of special education students in inclusive classrooms (Austin, 2001; Noell & Witt, 1999). Collaborative teaching in the context of special education involves special education and general education teachers sharing all of the teaching responsibilities in educating students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom (Austin, 2001).

Teachers' Lack of Preparedness

One critical aspect that are often overlooked and evokes numerous questions are the effects of inclusion on the roles and responsibilities of school personnel (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Landrum, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Despite the overall favorable attitudes toward inclusion, teachers report they not only lack the time to do inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri 1996), but also lack the specific knowledge and skills needed to ensure its effectiveness (Scott, Vitale, & Masten, 1998; Simpson, 2004). The mere placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is often overemphasized, while ignoring other critical aspects such as the preparation of teachers (Voltz, et al., 2001). Surveys addressing teacher attitudes and self perceptions of competencies needed to educate students with ED have reported that teachers often felt ill-prepared to educate students with disabilities (Burstein, et al., 2004; Shapiro, et al., 1999). With the expanded roles and responsibilities that inclusion demands on them (McLaughlin & Warren, 1992), GE teachers are experiencing many challenges in successfully including students with disabilities.

Another area of great concern is the lack of preparation teachers feel in addressing the myriad of behavior problems exhibited by students with ED (Wehby, Lane, & Falk, 2003). Since students with ED have the potential to be disruptive or even dangerous, many teachers are concerned that these behaviors may jeopardize the education or safety of the child or his non-disabled peers in the classroom (Blenk, 1995; Nickerson & Brosos, 2003). Students with ED have persistent problems that tend to disrupt the entire

classroom and impede learning (Wehby, et al., 2003). When this happens, teachers may terminate instruction with a misbehaving child by placing the students in timeout or by removing him or her from the classroom (Wehby, et al., 2003).

Adaptations/Modifications

Research has also reported that teachers rarely make accommodations for students with special needs (Burstein, et al., 2004; Shapiro, et al., 1999). Because teachers often do not receive the pre-service training needed to educate students with disabilities, they are not knowledgeable or skilled in implementing individualized instruction for them (Scott, et al., 1998; Wehby, et al. 2003). General education teachers also feel they lack the necessary time needed to make major modifications (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). However, when modifications are made for students with disabilities, teachers report using classroom accommodations that are geared towards the entire class (Wehby, et al., 2003). Allowing students extra time to complete assignments, repeating or simplifying directions, or administering tests orally are very common accommodations used for all students, not just those with disabilities (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). More sustainable modifications, such as altering the criteria for grading and modifying assignments are frequently not used (Scott, et al., 1998).

Teacher Support

As teachers attempt to serve students with disabilities without the necessary training, research reports that lack of support in educating these students is the key barrier

to successful inclusion (Burstein, et al., 2004). Ongoing support in the form of staff development and frequent consultation from special education teachers is an essential element in successfully meeting the needs of general education teachers (Shapiro, et al., 1999). Cheney and Barringer (1995) note that a consultative service to general education teachers is the key component in effective inclusionary practices for students with ED.

Conclusion

Many studies investigating the inclusion of students with ED have reflected an examination of the perceptions of educators and staff working with these students (Harvey, 1996; Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). Results of these studies note the difficult nature of working with these students (Harvey, 1996; Wehby, et al., 2003) and the limited training and experience general education teachers have in integrating them into classrooms (Burstein, et al., 2004; Simpson, 2004). Studies have been consistent in reporting that overall teachers feel unprepared to teach students with ED (Cheney & Muscott, 1996; Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Visser & Stokes, 2003) and that their beliefs and comfort levels in working with these students decreases as the severity of the child's disability increases (Buysse, Wesley, Keys, & Bailey, 1996).

Overall findings from numerous research studies have suggested caution in implementing inclusion until the requisite attitudes, accommodation, and adaptations for students with disabilities are in place (Burstein, et al., 2004). Although there is much emphasis on academic outcomes for all students, students with ED need interventions

that address their social and emotional needs so that they are able to profit from academic instruction (Nickerson & Brosow, 2003).

Given the complexity of designing and implementing quality inclusion models for students with disabilities, we cannot expect appropriate educational programming without teachers who have an understanding of ED and who have acquired the necessary skills to plan and implement effective instructional strategies that meet the individual needs of these students (Bullock & Gable, 2006). The consensus is that inclusion of students with ED must be carefully planned and individually determined. (Heflin & Bullock, 1999).

As noted earlier, one way to examine the inclusion process is to obtain the perceptions of staff regarding the effectiveness of inclusion models (Harvey, 1996). The results may provide insight into a program's effect on educators and are useful in refining policies and improving programs (Harvey, 1996). Research supports the fact that teachers' expectations influence student achievement, behavior, and self esteem in the classroom (Daane, et al., 2000). If teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities in inclusive settings are negative, then including such students may not result in a beneficial experience for students. Examining teachers' perceptions of inclusion and addressing their challenges as they go through the process may have a great impact on the overall success of these students with any disability (Daane, et al., 2000).

Chapter Three

Research Method

“How my mother knew a chalkboard as a Christmas gift would be the catalyst for a career in special education, I don’t know, but her hunch was correct.”

Personal Narrative

My training to become a special education teacher began at the tender age of eight. One Christmas my mother gave me a five by seven chalkboard to “play school” on our back porch. Other than the infamous Barbie townhouse (a toy every little girl dreamed of), I thought this was the best Christmas gift I ever received. I really liked this chalkboard because “playing school” was my favorite pastime when I grew tired of playing with dolls. I “played school” before going to church every Sunday morning, every afternoon after school, and sometimes till late at night (providing the back porch light was working properly and the washer machine was not in use--as it served as the stand for my chalkboard). It did not bother me at all that my neighbors and friends thought I was a little odd because I was frequently heard teaching or talking to myself. All I cared about was my perfect imaginary classroom of twenty well-behaved all on grade level students sitting in their chairs eagerly listening to every word I had to say.

As years went by “playing school” came to a screeching halt once I entered middle school. I abruptly traded in my imaginary classroom for more teenage pastimes-- talking on the telephone, hanging out with friends, and attending school dances. It was as if it all happened over night. I no longer desired that the smiles I received from my

students on the back porch. Overtime it seemed as if my imaginary classroom was gone forever, I thought, until one day during my junior year in high school.

I can recall this day's events as if it happened yesterday. Before going to lunch I somehow found myself walking down a deserted hallway enroute to the front office. This was unfamiliar territory for me because I typically took a much shorter route to most destinations around school. Although I cannot remember how I ever stumbled upon this hallway that was closed off by two double doors, I do know that the events behind those doors changed my life forever.

As I peeked through the doors, something seemed different. The hall was desolate, which I found odd for an overcrowded inner city high school close to lunchtime on a Friday afternoon. The familiar scenes I was accustomed to such as students visiting their lockers and the occasional "What's up" from passersby was non-existent. While trying to decide whether I should turn around because I had an eerie feeling about it all, within seconds I heard screams, doors slamming, furniture moving, and other loud noises I couldn't decipher. Scared to death because I thought the worst, I ran back towards the double doors for safety.

Once I regained my composure on the other side of the doors, I asked myself, "What were those screams? Why wasn't security summoned to help?" It just seemed odd that no adults were responding to what I thought was going on--someone was hurting, a possible fight of some sort. Looking distressed, a friend of mine walking by at the time noticed my curiosity and asked what was wrong. Amid laughter at my explanation he said,

“Girl, you went down the Awchie Hall.”

“The Awchie hall, what’s that?” I asked.

“It’s the hall where they keep the Awchie kids, you know, the weird kids that have all kinds of crazy problems.”

With a bewildered look on my face, I honestly did not know who he was referring to. Sure, I had heard of the “weird or crazy kids,” but in hindsight I guess those terms meant something different for me. I always thought “weird or crazy” meant “normal, but slightly off.” I was knowledgeable of the physically handicapped, but that’s all I knew about differences in people other than race. And the term *Awchie*, well, I had never heard of such a word. I could sense it meant something negative or strange about a group of people, but that was all I could surmise at the time.

As my friend walked away and promised to finish our discussion later, my mind continued to focus on “*It’s the hall where they keep...*” I could not get that sentence out of my mind. I kept feeling as if I was missing out on something, wondering why I was the last to know about this hall tucked away for a certain group of people.

When I saw my friend again during lunch he promised to give me a tour of the *Awchie* hall near the end of the school day if I was able to sneak away. I don’t know how I did it, but I remember thinking nothing was going to stop me from going, not even a test.

Once we arrived at the double doors and peeked in, the first thing I noticed this time was that the hall had come alive. Students and teachers were walking back and forth between classrooms, kids were at their lockers, and although I still heard faint screams

and a student yelling obscenities, everyone seemed to ignore the sounds and functioned normally.

As we continued walking further down the hall, I got a chance to look into a couple of classrooms to view first hand what an "*Awchie*" student looked like. I wanted to see if there were any features that stood out that made these students look or act differently.

Although I never saw any distinct features like deformities or wheelchairs, what shocked me was the presence of a couple of students I never imagined would ever be labeled, *Awchie*. "All this time I thought they were normal," I thought to myself. To add insult to injury, one of my associates, Michelle, who was a very nice, quiet girl I walked home with sometimes, turned her head away when she saw me. A couple of other students I recognized turned their heads away as well. The "head turning" was rather odd, but I didn't read too much into it because I figured they were embarrassed. "I would have been embarrassed too if I was an *Awchie*," I thought. When I arrived home that evening, I don't know why the *Awchie* hall bothered me so much, but it did. I became transfixed by these kids. How this happened in such a short period of time I don't know. I remember asking God, "Why wasn't I born an *Awchie*? What made me so special? What made them so different?" At the time I wondered if being from a middle class family with educated parents had anything to do with it. I started equating the root cause of being an *Awchie* to poverty, drugs, and alcoholism. I remember going to bed that night wanting to be around "them" to see first hand what "their world" looked like.

Reflecting back to the embarrassment I thought Michelle and others felt, I interpreted their response as not wanting to be there. Therefore, I was determined to find out why.

Upon return to school the next day, I made an appointment with my guidance counselor to inquire about possibly volunteering in the *Awchie* hall. Since I was already a school volunteer I didn't think the transition would be difficult. After a short period of strange looks while I stated my rationale, my counselor granted permission but with much caution. In five minutes she introduced me to the world of special education. She explained that although I should not be afraid, there were sophisticated terms to replace the childhood names such as *Awchie* to describe people with disabilities. *Awchie* was now replaced with ED and SED (Emotionally Disturbed and Seriously Emotionally Disturbed). She also explained the screams I heard--adults restraining enraged students. The more she talked about the differences in special education, the more I wanted to understand it all and immerse myself in this world. As a result of our conversation I was granted a three week visit in the special education wing as long as I promised not to go anywhere near the SED classrooms. It was a very difficult promise to keep but I promised.

Although I was only allowed to visit 30 minutes a day I gained not only insight into the world of students with ED but a quick appreciation for the field of special education. The opportunity to sit down and listen to students and teachers talk about their everyday experiences in special education was very telling. I remember one student saying something like "I get mad easily" to explain why he was there, and Michelle (mentioned earlier) said, "I use to be bad at my other school" to explain why she was

placed in ED classes. I grew to love Mrs. Pollard, the ED teacher in whose class I volunteered because she had a heart for her students, constantly saying, “I just love these kids” to explain why she chose the profession. After hearing her admiration for these students day in and day out, I could not help but love them too.

Each afternoon upon leaving the special education wing I recall feeling a sense of pride in my volunteerism. As I grew more and more intrigued with students with emotional disturbance, I started to feel a sense of humility for I now understood much more than I did before. This experience had a profound impact on me because it served as the impetus to a life of advocacy. In years to come I became a volunteer for the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) immediately after this experience; during my college years I volunteered in alternative schools for at-risk students; majored in special education for all of my degrees obtained thus far; and have become an advocate for students with ED in my school district.

Years ago, when my colleagues asked me where all of the passion for students with emotional disturbance comes from, I used to say “I don’t know.” Now, since engaging in this dissertation process and writing this personal narrative, I feel its origin lies in the imaginary classroom and the volunteerism in the special education wing I just described. As silly as it may sound, there is something significant about the Awchie Hall and its students—did the screams and the students’ personal testimonies affect my current vision of schools and the placement of students with emotional disturbances? To a great degree I think it did, which is why this study means so much to me. After much reflection over the last year and a half, I believe those screams are the reason why I have

devoted my career to educating and advocating for students with ED. This qualitative study has aided in that discovery.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has the uncanny potential to take researchers beyond the original scope of their research (Anzul, Evans, King, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001). Surprisingly, this is how my dissertation emerged. As a school coordinator assigned to work with students with emotional disturbance (ED), I spent one and a half years monitoring their progress in inclusive classrooms. Borrowing from qualitative methods, I sought to implement a school-based program that intended to discover ways to help with retention of these students in general education (GE) settings. However, during the course of this program my focus changed unexpectedly. Six weeks into the program what began as simple research to maximize the benefits of a mentoring program for students with ED suddenly emerged into a much needed support program for teachers as they include students with ED in their classrooms.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionists seek to enter the world of the people being studied to learn how social experience is created and given meaning (Schwandt, 1994). It is essential to take into account how people being studied interpret the situations they face since this will shape how they act (Hammersley, 1990). For the current study, the researcher was interested in analyzing the meaning teachers gave to their experiences as

they included students with ED. Using symbolic interactionism as the theoretical orientation assisted in understanding the perceived processes of what goes on for teachers involved in inclusion; how it was experienced by the teachers and students; the different perspectives they brought to the table; and how emerging conflicts were perceived to have been resolved during the process (Schwandt, 1994). As a researcher, my role in discovering the meaning teachers gave to their experiences was not to test or prove a certain theory but to identify themes and construct hypotheses as they are suggested by the data and to try to demonstrate support for each (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

The following narrative is a descriptive study of the teachers in the support program. The study attempts to explore the attitudes and experiences of these teachers as they move towards more inclusive practices for effectively teaching students with ED. It also seeks to understand the factors that support and facilitate the inclusion process for these students, as well as document the limiting factors.

The schools and names used throughout this study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. Quotes followed by the words: teacher interactions, reflective notes, student rap session, or email in parentheses represent a direct quote made by students, staff, or parents from the identified source. Each source will be discussed further later on in this chapter.

Research Site

The research site for this study is Lakes Middle School in a suburban school district outside of Washington, DC. The school district in which Lakes is located serves

approximately 180,000 students in grades K-12. In many respects it resembles a district similar in size and composition to other large city school districts. In general education the district was exemplary in achieving high marks in accreditation in all curriculum standards of learning. In special education, although the district was experimenting with inclusive practices for all students with disabilities, it did not have a long history of inclusion of students with emotional disturbance into general education. It was not until the year 2000 that the district began a very aggressive adoption of a policy for inclusion as the result of a district target aimed at enforcing programs to reflect greater inclusion of all students with disabilities including those with emotional disturbances. The rationale for this target was the result of the school board deciding to serve a broader range of students with disabilities at their base school (neighborhood school). The district believed that this would eliminate duplication of services that were done in the central and area offices. This would also lead to more site-based management.

As one enters the school site, the physical layout of the building appears to be one large building. Upon entrance into the building and the passing through of a common walkway, the school is divided into a center school for students with ED (Lakes Center) on the left, the general education building on the right (Lakes Middle), and straight ahead is the general education main office. Although both schools share a cafeteria, clinic, gymnasium, and a parking lot, the two schools function separately.

The concept of center schooling in this district is to segregate students with ED that are moderately/severely aggressive in order to ameliorate inappropriate behaviors. Once targeted behaviors had been mastered, students were allowed to “mainstream”

within the general education building. At that point, “mainstreaming” was construed as the permission for students with disabilities to be educated in general education for a class or two. Students who attend Lakes Center were described as students whose behaviors warranted smaller class sizes, a smaller school where transitioning between classes was heavily monitored by support staff, a school-wide behavior modification system, and crisis counseling for those students who would benefit from it on an as needed basis. The Center was designed to serve 70 students with a staff of 10 teachers, 8 para-professionals, 2 team leaders, a psychologist, a social worker, a behavior management specialist, and a principal. Lakes Center is one of three center schools in the district.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 33 teachers: 21 general education teachers, 8 elective teachers, and 4 LD teachers. All were certified in different content areas with varying years of teaching experience. Only one teacher was dually certified in general and special education. Teachers chosen from the GE pod for the school-based program titled the MMP (Mainstream Mentoring Program--discussed later in this chapter) were selected based on the inclusion classes each student in the program needed. The courses represented included: Math, Language Arts, Science, History, Civics, Music, Band, Home Economics, Physical Education, Art, Woodshop, Music, and Technology. The LD teachers were in inclusion classes primarily to work with students with LD who were assigned to core classes (Language Arts, Math, History/Civics, and Science) only.

All teachers had some co-teaching or mainstreaming experience varying from one to five years. Except for three new GE teachers, I had some degree of rapport with all of them.

There were 48 seventh and eighth graders classified as ED; some had dual labels consisting of Other Health Impaired (OHI) or Learning Disabilities (LD). All of these students were also characterized as being mildly or moderately aggressive by former teachers and their parents. All were bused from different physical locations within the district. Boys comprised 97 percent of the sample and girls 3 percent; 50 percent were Caucasian, 20 percent African American, and the remaining 30 percent were Asian, Hispanic, or from multiracial backgrounds. Students ranged in age from 13-14. All were enrolled in one or more of the following courses: Math, Language Arts, Science, History, Civics, Music, Band, Home Economics, Physical Education, Art, Woodshop, Music, and Technology. Ninety five percent of the students at the Center qualified for free or reduced-price lunches.

The Center's Mainstreaming Program

In my position as a newly hired team leader at Lakes Center, one of my many responsibilities was to monitor students who were mainstreamed in general education (GE) settings. After studying the center's mainstream data from the previous year, I learned that these students were rarely mainstreamed and for those who were, their retention rate in GE classes was dismal. According to the data, 10 percent of the total population of Center students (65-70 students) was mainstreamed per year, and by the end of each year, more than half of these mainstreamed students were removed from GE

classes due to the severity of their behaviors as reported by their mainstream teachers. This data was not surprising to me because during my first semester I had watched how students with ED were returned from GE for reasons I thought were unjust. For example, with an angry look on her face and yelling, a GE teacher said to me, “He ripped his homework and threw the paper at another student; I just want him out.” In this quote the teacher felt the behavior warranted the student’s total removal from her mainstream class, in spite of the fact that the action was what I might have considered normal teenage behavior. On many occasions throughout that year this example was one of many that served as the reason why students were removed from GE.

As time passed during my first year, I relentlessly tried to educate GE teachers about students with ED. Overall however, GE teachers became increasingly resistant to working with Center students because they believed most were “bad” and therefore should be separated from general education. Some parents in the GE community (none were parents of students with ED) echoed the teachers’ attitudes as well. When GE parents would come to pick up their children for early dismissal, I often heard comments like “How can you all (referring to Center teachers) teach these kids? They’re awful!” (e.g., parent interaction).

The following summer as the school district started promoting greater inclusion of students with disabilities in GE, Lakes Middle began using the co-teaching model to facilitate the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The co-teaching model consisted of two teachers, one general and one special education teacher, sharing in the instructional process to educate students with and without disabilities. All classrooms

using this model were called inclusive and the LD students assigned to them were labeled as having mild learning disabilities. Students with ED were excluded because of the nature of the severity of their behavior and the lack of training of GE and LD teachers to work with them. Since ED teachers were assigned to the Center, they were never considered for this model.

Initially stunned by the news that they would be required to teach LD students, some GE teachers were skeptical of inclusion because they felt unprepared to teach any student with disabilities. To add, although students with ED were not allowed to participate in inclusion as of yet, most GE teachers felt it would be “too many special ed students in one class” (e.g., teacher interaction) if they were ever allowed.

By the beginning of the second year of the co-teaching model, during a faculty meeting GE teachers were told by the Center principal that students with ED would now be placed in their inclusion classrooms along with their current list of LD students. Initially, this news caused much commotion because many teachers were concerned about their safety and their lack of training to work with these students. “I can’t believe they’re going to put *Center* kids in my class,” stated one teacher (e.g., teacher interaction). This teacher was very uncomfortable with the idea because she felt the more restrictive the previous special education placement, the worse the student would be behaviorally in GE. Many GE teachers felt this way and wanted reassurance from administration that they would be given assistance when needed. On the other hand, LD teachers assigned to inclusion classrooms did not share the same sentiments as their GE colleagues. “I don’t mind working with these kids, although I agree that they need a

place to go and calm down when they get crazy” (e.g., teacher interaction). This teacher felt comfortable working with these students but understood that some may need brief periods of timeout due to the nature of the severity of their disability.

Another important reaction was that of the Center staff. The consensus from staff members was that the inclusion of students with ED was long overdue and that many of the Center students were appropriate for this new placement. Center staff also felt that the co-teaching model would be the key factor that would make inclusion work for these students. It was thought that having two teachers in the classroom would help in the management of behaviors that may surface.

In the beginning stages of planning the inclusive classes for students with ED, I was approached by one of the GE counselors to select four center students to participate in the co-teaching model. Initially, we (Center staff) thought the counselor meant full inclusion because anything different from that perspective represented the mainstream model, which we currently used. However, he stated he wanted to “try us out” in inclusion by allowing our most capable students to participate by starting with one GE class. To add, he and Ms. Smith, the GE principal, defined inclusion by the co-teaching model only; therefore, they felt our students would hopefully benefit from having two teachers in a classroom.

Once we identified four of our “best behaved” students, they started the year in an inclusive co-taught science class. Although I was team leader at the time with many responsibilities, I was told to try to fit in time to monitor their progress. To assist me in monitoring them because of my many responsibilities, the Center science teachers kept

me abreast of the students' progress periodically (especially whenever they were returned to the Center for being disruptive), and I also occasionally observed the class and talked to those students whenever they were returned to the Center for being too disruptive.

By the end of the second nine weeks, to our dismay, two of the students were removed from the inclusion class due to consistently disruptive behavior. A short time later, the third student was removed as well. He felt the GE teacher disliked him so he wanted to return to a Center science class because he considered Center teachers to be more understanding. Although I tried to convince him to stay in his inclusion class, after a couple of weeks he began to sabotage his placement by purposely being disruptive. He was keenly aware, just like other students with ED, that if you are disruptive in a GE class you would eventually be removed by administration whether you wanted to be or not. To our surprise, the fourth student remained in the class the entire year. He was also given two other inclusion classes because, in spite of his behavior in these classes at times, he continued to remain on the honor roll the entire school year. His inclusion teachers felt he was a perfect match for inclusion since he was never purposefully disrespectful, had supportive parents, and had consistent help from Center staff whenever he had a problem.

Conceptualizing MMP

Towards the end of the school year, I spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on how to make inclusion work for Center students. As I started reviewing my reflective notes (personal notes) I kept throughout my tenure as team leader and began

engaging in dialogue with both GE and special education teachers, I realized that the key to these students' survival was for me to provide GE teachers with a great deal of support. After sharing my concerns with the Center principal, Mrs. Lundy, she agreed with me and suggested that we needed something in place to help provide the much needed support I was referring to. Acknowledging my personal reading of content related to students with ED in inclusive settings, I shared with her an idea I had of developing a school-based initiative specifically designed to identify, assist, and intervene early in a student's enrollment in inclusive classrooms. After granting permission to create a program, we discussed the idea and possible components of the program. Since the district recently allotted Mrs. Lundy, an extra teaching position with which she could be creative with, she gave me total autonomy in the creation of this program and made my role in it a full-time position. I was given control over students' schedule, scheduling Center staff meetings as needed, ordering supplies, utilizing the Center's administrative assistant, and removing students from class for "Rap Sessions" (20 minute discussion sessions with students). She also sent me to a three-day workshop sponsored by Stetson and Associates (1995) to help me acquire any additional skills needed for the program.

Getting Started

Before actual implementation of the program Mrs. Lundy and I had to decide how we were going to define inclusion. Although abreast of a plethora of inclusion models, we were not quite sure how to define inclusion in our model because Center students

overall were not typically included in GE at generous rates. Due to the severity of their behaviors, these students were often excluded because they were deemed far from being able to handle an inclusive environment. Ultimately, because we could not realistically imagine our students not needing some form of special education support, we decided inclusion would be defined as “partial inclusion” (Idol, 2002), meaning that students with ED were to be regarded as full members of GE even though they were still enrolled in one or more special education classes. Although we knew some would view partial inclusion as simply another mainstreaming initiative, the difference in this model would be the level of commitment to encourage as much inclusion of these students as possible. We knew full inclusion was more of a long-term goal for most and maybe even unrealistic for others; however, we wanted students and parents to know that if full inclusion was a goal, we would support them in that endeavor as long as they could handle the classes with our support. We were fully aware that emotional disturbance is often a life-long problem; however, we were more concerned about their current quality of life and their potential to experience success with the program’s support.

The Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP)

MMP was designed to serve as a support mechanism for students with ED as they experienced the inclusion process. The components of the program were developed as I reflected on the challenges I experienced in past years trying to mainstream these students and the distinguishing important features I thought would contribute to their success. Starting with a careful process of identifying students who were appropriate for

inclusion, I realized two salient points: that inclusion was not a one-size-fits-all approach (Kaufman, et al. 2002) and that the program required careful planning and individually determined goal setting as a part of the process (Bullock & Gable, 1994; Downing, Simpson & Myles, 1990).

The program was guided by two premises. The first premise was that membership in the program was seen as beneficial. All students would be monitored closely and their mainstream teacher and parents would be contacted on a regular basis to discuss their progress. The second premise was the establishment of a caring community or place where these students could go and feel “accepted, valued, and safe” (Kaufman, 2001) when faced with many challenges. Since students were frequently being returned from general education classes, the latter premise was definitely a necessity since students needed a place to go if they had difficulty in their GE classes.

Components of MMP

The components of the program were created based on the personal challenges I experienced over the years in attempting to successfully include students with ED in general education. After encountering many challenges in determining who to include, how to include, and discovering the factors that would influence a successful transition for these students, I came up with the following list to hopefully combat many of these issues:

Screening. Once MMP was underway, the first step was to identify students for the program. All Center teachers (eight core and three elective teachers) were told to identify those students in their classes who they thought would be successful in an inclusive class. The eligibility requirements, listed below, were given to each teacher prior to a general meeting to discuss all candidates. Once a combined list was composed, we met as a team to discuss each candidate's strengths and weaknesses, academically and behaviorally. Each team meeting began with a discussion of the student's strengths in order to set a positive tone for the meeting. After a discussion of "positives," we engaged in dialogue to discuss each student's weaknesses that might hinder the student's ability to be successful in a general education class. Although there was no limit to the number of students in the program, a careful screening process was needed because we did not want to send students prematurely, nor did we want to deal with the repercussions from general education if we did not implement the program properly.

Eligibility requirements were as follows:

- a. Voluntary participation in the program – Voluntary participation was deemed important because students who showed a vested interest in inclusion typically did better than those who did not. Many of the candidates from the initial list adamantly refused to be in the program because they preferred self-contained classrooms for all of their classes.

b. An overall “C” or better average in all classes – Because some students with ED struggle academically (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001), I wanted students to start their class with passing grades.

c. Two teacher recommendations (at least one from the referring Center teacher) – Because of the unique needs of students with disabilities, I wanted to make sure that more than one teacher felt the student had the skills needed to be successful in inclusion. Both teachers were important because they also served as supportive personnel the student could go to for assistance.

d. Minimal disciplinary infractions during the previous quarter (previous nine weeks). Many students were not ready for the transition; therefore, we did not want to send anyone who had a history of physical aggression or extreme noncompliance because they posed a threat to themselves and others (Kaufman, et al., 2002). GE teachers were not trained to deal with these behaviors and we did not want to exacerbate them by not sending our least disruptive students.

e. Parental support – Parental support was encouraged because we felt student achievement is influenced by many people, especially parents. Their participation in the program would help motivate their child academically and behaviorally.

Placement. Once students were eligible they were automatically in the program. After informing the student and his/her parents of the decision, I met with each student individually to first find out what kind of teacher they felt they needed. I knew to do this because in my past experience with mainstreaming, students would often share with me their impressions of their teacher and why. As a result, during these meetings most students either had special requests for certain teachers or they were very descriptive in the characteristics they thought were needed in a teacher for them to be successful. After this conversation and informing parents, they were placed in a classroom according to what I, as the coordinator, felt was a “good match” between the prospective teacher and student. To do this, I deliberately sought out teachers who I thought were warm, flexible, comfortable working with our students, and able to foster a sense of belonging in their classroom. I sought out the opinions of center teachers because they not only knew the students better than I did, but they also had a rapport with many of the GE teachers. For example, if a student was known by Center teachers to be regularly unprepared for class and could function in a class with less structure, I chose a general education teacher who was known by the Center teachers to be very organized and exemplary of good classroom management. Once a match was made, I scheduled a meeting for the students and the teachers.

In preparing students for the transition, I scheduled individual conferences to discuss the academic demands and behavioral expectations while in GE. I also presented them with different scenarios of possible situations they may encounter

around the school. An example of a scenario is how to respond to an unfamiliar adult who is reprimanding you. I explained to students that not all GE adults were as tolerant of certain behaviors as Center staff was. This was a reoccurring problem because GE staff would frequently complain about how rude and disrespectful some of our students were when reprimanded in the hallway. “When I told him to stop running he said “F--- you” (e.g., teacher interaction). In this case, the GE staff member became irate and demanded that I suspend the student.

Another important piece of preparation was to take the student on a personal tour of the mainstream building to familiarize them with the GE building. This tour also served as a way to acquaint students with GE procedures. During this time I took them to meet their inclusion teachers to ease any anxiety they could possibly have. For students who suffered from anxiety on a regular basis, as documented in their IEP, they were given a “Having a Bad Day” pass to use if they needed to return to the Center for counseling or a pep talk. They were cautioned about abusing the pass and were warned that it could possibly be taken away if that occurred.

Individualized Behavior and Academic Plan. For those students not eligible for MMP, but were conditionally accepted because teachers felt that with more support they could make it in inclusion, were placed on a behavior plan to address the targeted behavior of concern. For example, students who had good grades and no prior suspensions but had periodic “meltdowns” (crying or yelling episodes) were potential candidates. Although “meltdowns” were taken very seriously, teachers felt that most of

these students were able to remove themselves from a general education setting before the onset of a meltdown episode. In such cases a behavior plan, which the student helped develop, detailed the plan of action in managing the behavior at the onset. Students were also given a social/emotional goal added to their IEP if needed.

The only drawback of this plan and the Mainstream Mentoring Program as a whole was a lack of counseling or mental health services which is critical for students with ED (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004). Although the Center provided counseling, it was only on an as needed or emergency basis; therefore, the mental health needs of students were not regularly addressed. For included students, when they experienced challenges in inclusion they were immediately sent to me to resolve their issue. In most cases, unless the student requested to see a counselor or if I felt they needed a more therapeutic discussion, they were returned to class and expected to function normally. This is consistent with research that says if students with ED do not receive mental health services in school, they will probably never receive any (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004).

All students were given an academic plan that consisted of required after-school tutoring, daily study hall times, and scheduled notebook checks if necessary. These sessions were mandatory for students who lacked study skills or needed extra assistance in a given academic area. Students were also advised that I, as Mainstream Coordinator, would monitor their academic progress on a bi-weekly basis.

Maintenance. Viewed as critical to the success of the program, the maintenance component provided students with the continued support they needed once placed in the inclusion model. Maintenance consisted of any task that helped students stay in their inclusion class. Discussed further in the next paragraph, the role of the coordinator was instrumental in this component because she was the facilitator of all activities related to inclusion.

My role as coordinator of the Mainstream Mentoring Program was vital to the maintenance phase because I was responsible for securing all components of the program. Because it was my belief that students with ED require generous levels of support in order to survive in inclusive settings, my responsibilities included, but were not limited to: monitoring students' progress (emailing teachers, observing in the classroom, conferring with parents) on a regular basis to establish procedures in inclusive classrooms and to enforcing rules for behavior; consulting with general education teachers to adapt and modify curriculum and instruction; managing behaviors (pep talks with students, assigning consequences to replace suspension, and scheduling conferences), arranging and conducting after-school tutoring; and counseling (having a listening ear for teachers and students, advocating for students).

One area in particular that was important in my role as coordinator was when I had to act as a mediator or buffer between students and teachers. This role was critical to students' survival in inclusion especially when they were returned to my office for timeout purposes. Teachers saw me as the "go to person" to resolve all inclusion related matters, especially those involving behavioral issues. Since my office represented a

supportive environment, I soon became the “place” that not only students relied upon for assistance but teachers as well. Being known as the “place” made my role as mediator extremely important because I provided counsel to students which seemingly permitted them to function appropriately when their behavior would have otherwise deteriorated and prompted teachers to ask for the student’s removal from class (Gibb, et al., 1999).

When students were not allowed to return to their inclusion class without a lengthy timeout period, the first item on my agenda was to discuss the infraction. Discussing the events leading up to what happened gave students a chance to speak freely about what occurred from their perspectives. Their perception was always valuable to me because their experiences were just as important to me as the teacher’s. It was also a time to offer suggestions of ways the incident could have been prevented and a time for those students who were obviously out of control to return to a more self-controlled level of functioning. After our discussion, if the infraction only warranted a pep talk, students were immediately sent back to class so that too much instructional time would not be lost. If the infraction warranted discipline, I gave a suitable consequence that was administered the same day or anytime prior to the student’s return to their GE classroom. Since both programs were on a block schedule, which meant specific classes met every other day I usually had time to administer a consequence and follow-up with the GE teacher before the student’s return to class.

Before returning students to their class it was important to ensure a consequence because GE teachers needed to feel validated in order to move on from the incident especially if the infraction was disrespectful in nature. “If he comes back to my class

without something being done, I will walk out of this class; he was very disrespectful to me in front of the other kids” (e.g., teacher interaction). Whenever comments like this one were made, I made it a priority to follow-up with a consequence that was commensurate with the behavior. I learned early in the program that incidences involving disrespect warranted at least two periods of suspension from that class, a call home, and a follow-up conference with the student and teacher prior to his/her return to that class. As one teacher commented, “Just points taken off his point sheet won’t do” (e.g., teacher interaction). I did not administer consequences just to appease teachers; however, I developed a systematic consequence code I used to determine how I would handle certain infractions. For example, if a teacher was irate or overwhelmed by a student’s behavior, I would suspend the student from that class for one session to give the teacher a break. Another example is what would happen if students came to school without taking their medication. Although they were sent to class anyway, I warned the teacher, as well as carried my walkie-talkie just in case I had to remove the student from class due to an inability to handle the classroom environment without being medicated.

Another important responsibility was in providing academic support to included students. Students were allowed to come to me for extra assistance especially when major projects were assigned or when they needed help with difficult content areas such as math. Although most students with Ed enjoyed math, as the level of difficulty increased it became very challenging to most included students. In many cases, after school tutorials became mandatory for students who were behind in their work, which

was a commonality among most students in inclusion. During these sessions I kept a log of every student's visit to document time and date served and for which GE teacher.

Launching Program

During a combined faculty meeting the week before the new school year, Mrs. Lundy (the Center principal) introduced MMP and stated that the program would offer teachers the much needed support they required with inclusion. Although Center teachers enthusiastically embraced the program, I got the impression that GE teachers were not so convinced. Their gestures to one another during the meeting and subsequent comments that entire week were very telling: "I already don't know what I'm doing with LD students without any help. Now you want to put ED students in here too--boy this is going to be a tough year" (e.g., teacher interaction). I understood what she meant by this comment because when the district started promoting greater inclusion the previous year, teachers were promised support from school and district administrators but never received the level of support they thought they needed. "Sending a cadre of staff members to training does not help me in the classroom with my kids; I didn't go so what do they expect" (e.g., teacher interaction). For teachers who did not attend the training like this teacher, they were promised ongoing technical support but felt what they did receive was not at the level of what they expected. Instead, they were expected to include students with disabilities through knowledge obtained from handouts and from quarterly meetings with cadre members who did attend the initial training. Typical meetings with cadre members were often viewed by teachers as short venting sessions for those who

were experiencing difficulties in their classrooms. Teachers felt these meetings were a waste of time because their concerns were never really addressed.

During the launch meeting it was also important to communicate to the GE teachers the difference between MMP and the previously mentioned LD model of inclusion. Mrs. Lundy explained that the LD model was primarily for LD students and that there was limited support for students with ED who were in that experimental Science class. MMP was also presented as a program that would offer the extra support students with ED needed in order to be successful in school. Briefly, because she knew teachers were starting to feel some anxiety about ED students being included, she mentioned the program's components described earlier and emphasized my role as an essential piece of support that had been missing from the LD model. She concluded her discussion by referring teachers to me if they had any further questions or concerns.

Program Underway

During the first week of MMP, my initial plan was to spend each day conducting classroom observations and coaching students through Rap Sessions (20 minute discussion periods with students) to discover the challenges associated with inclusion from their perspective. However, this "perfect plan" was dismantled rather quickly once the honeymoon period (a cliché often used among Center teachers to reflect that the student's disability has now surfaced) in their GE class was over. Within weeks, GE teachers started complaining about included students. Initially their complaints were about students not being prepared for class and not completing homework. However,

after teachers started to share more of their concerns, it soon became evident that they were getting frustrated with students, and their hostility started to show even through emails such as, “Come get this kid out of here!” When I received emails like this I knew I had to do something before matters escalated.

After a pattern of several requests for students’ temporary removal from certain teachers’ classrooms, I began keeping a journal again and taking notes of these incidences to help me discover why including these students was not working. I knew the removal of some students was appropriate due to their aggressive behaviors and forthright comments about not wanting to be in inclusive classrooms but that was not the case for all students. I knew there were students that honestly wanted to be inclusion and was doing all they could to survive in their classes. After two weeks of ongoing analysis of incidences, students’ discussions with me, and my reflective notes, I discovered that something was going on that wasn’t just kid specific. What started to dominate my analyses were problems stemming from teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. At this point, I decided to reevaluate the program’s course of action because I could no longer just focus on students. I had to incorporate a significant amount of attention to teachers as well. Almost overnight I started spending more time with teachers discussing their concerns and conducting teacher-requested observations because they wanted me to see what they saw. During one observation a teacher said, “I know he’s not doing it now, but when he acts up every now and then, it just makes my life miserable. You have to see him in action” (e.g., teacher interaction). I felt this teacher, to a great extent, was calling out for help. After hearing similar comments from other teachers, I

decided to focus on the everyday experiences of teachers and use their own words and observable behaviors as a basis of my ongoing assessment. Although it was difficult at first because of my commitment to students with ED, changing my course midstream because interesting circumstances were emerging merited taking a sidetrack from my original plans (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingerner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). I surmised teachers had preconceived notions about inclusion and they started to respond to students based on the meaning inclusion had for them (Patton, 2002).

Areas of Needed Support

As I began to spend more time with teachers listening to their challenges and fears, I noticed what they needed was more support in very specific areas. The following four areas are summarized below:

Entry Conferences. Because the cooperation of GE teachers is so vital to the success of inclusive programs (Salend & Duhaney, 1999), my goal was to not overwhelm them with the inclusion of students with ED. One way to accomplish this goal was to have what I called an “entry conference” with teachers prior to placement of students in their classes. The purpose of this conference was to allow teachers a voice into the placement of the inclusion students with ED into the preferred class period they wanted the students in and to discuss anything else on their minds related to this process. A typical conference began with a brief discussion of the background of the student followed by the proposed class period I had in mind. “Please don’t put him in my

second, third, or fifth period classes--those classes are filled with LD students who have behavioral issues as well” (e.g., teacher interaction). Since teachers already felt overwhelmed with the inclusion of students with LD, they felt entry conferences were extremely helpful in not making a bad situation worse.

Entry conferences also served as an opportunity for teachers to vent about their fears related to their lack of training and adequate support needed to do inclusion, their past negative experiences with these students in the hallway or in a previous mainstream class, and their general questions about my role and how I could help them. During a typical conference my posture was one of validating their concerns and offering as much support as I could. At times, I felt like a candidate running for a political office because of the many promises I made to teachers in order for them to feel supported. One statement I found myself using rather frequently was, “Don’t worry, I’ll address it (referring to the problem) before the week is out,” or in some cases that same day. Whenever presented with a problem it became a mission, a quest, to address it. No matter what was involved or required, I was determined to solve the problem so that the inclusion of our students would succeed for both the students and the GE teachers.

Keeping Students. In the earlier stages of the program, monitoring students after being returned from their inclusion class for punitive reasons was a daily occurrence. As students and teachers adjusted to inclusion, one to three students per hour were returned to my office for various reasons: going to class unprepared, being inattentive in class, “having a smart mouth,” unexcused tardies, or being disrespectful towards their inclusion

teacher. For the most part, many teachers felt like this teacher--“When they act up it’s time for them to go. I don’t have time to deal with them when I have 30 other students to worry about” (e.g., teacher interaction).

When students were returned for reasons I determined only required a pep talk in order to return to class, I focused on addressing these students first so that they would not miss much instructional time. For other students with more serious offenses, I kept them in my office 15 to 45 minutes depending on the time remaining in the class period. Students disliked these lengthy sessions because I not only lectured them but also called home on occasion to schedule a teacher-parent conference if I noticed a pattern of behavior developing. Once we discussed the infraction and came up with a plan of action for the student’s next steps, they were given the class work they missed that period to be completed then or after school. On many occasions, the inclusion teacher would come to my office during this time to discuss what occurred. “Curtis, I asked you to leave because your disrespect was getting out of control. I have to always think about how your behavior is going to affect other students” (e.g., teacher interaction). As the teacher and I discussed this situation she whispered in my ear, “If you didn’t keep him I was going to lose my job.” This meant she was losing her tolerance with the student.

By the third month of the program, I started to notice a pattern among the GE physical education (PE) teachers. Whenever their lesson for the day required students to run laps, dance (part of an exercise unit), or complete a lengthy written assignment, a handful of our students (four to six) were consistently sent back to the Center for refusal to participate in these activities. Initially, teachers sent back students with an alternate

book assignment to complete for a grade of “D” instead of an “F” for the assignment they refused to do. However, after a couple of weeks teachers stopped sending students with work, which eventually created a problem for the Center because students became disruptive when they did not have anything to do. The Center also had problems with finding space because if my room was already crowded with students, all that was left were the timeout and conference rooms, which were invariably occupied with students who were not in inclusion classes.

When I spoke to a general education PE teacher about the problems we were experiencing in the Center as a result of the students being sent back, she stated, “If they are going to be in inclusion, they have to participate like everyone else does or get a “D.” I’m being nice by giving them a “D” because they should earn an “F”; they’re not doing anything” (e.g., teacher interaction). Another teacher added, “When your kids don’t want to do something, they get wild and mess up the entire lesson, so we send them back before the lesson even starts” (e.g., teacher interaction). As I reflected on what to do next, I decided to spend some time in PE classes to see if there was anything I could do to make the situation better. For the next month I spent several 90 minute periods a week observing and participating in PE classes as a teacher assistant to better understand what was going on. The only pattern I noticed among classes was the lack of accommodations being made to assist our students. Students with low self-esteem issues, which are the majority of our students in these classes, were expected to perform at or near the same as their non-disabled students. This seemed to be a major problem throughout all classes because students with ED kept referring to feeling embarrassed when they had to perform

certain activities in front of their non-disabled peers. They were constantly worried about perception, thus did not care about the consequences that followed.

After I completed my observations, I decided to work more closely with the PE department to help them accommodate our students. The first task was to teach them how to differentiate written assignments to target all students and levels. I also convinced teachers to allow our students to walk instead of run around the track until the Center counselor had the chance to address the self-esteem and peer pressure issues students with ED mentioned as the reason why they did not participate in certain activities. For the dance unit I told students I would learn the routine so that I could help them perfect the moves. I used this approach provided they were willing to stay in their PE class for the entire period instead of returning to the Center. Students who complied with the above changes were given incentives such as candy, fast food, and free time during their elective classes based on a schedule of reinforcement. As a result, within a month of the changes most students were more compliant in some way or another.

Checking on Students. Emailing the teachers bi-weekly to check on students' progress was a high priority. Communicating with teachers helped me not only keep abreast of any emerging patterns of students' behaviors before they escalated, but it allowed me to identify the areas of need of the GE teachers. As I analyzed their emails, I discovered emerging themes such as teachers' unwillingness to adapt instruction to assist students with ED, individual teacher temperaments, and the kinds of support that they needed on a daily basis. Students in jeopardy of failing, those who had a history of

disrespect towards adults, those who were off their medication for a variety of reasons, and those who periodically were not turning in their assignments were the ones I checked on more frequently than other students.

Adapting the Curriculum and Assignments. Providing teachers with assistance in adapting and modifying assignments was always available but rarely used. Except for the PE department, most teachers preferred not changing their method of instruction for a few students although the district was promoting differentiated instruction for all learners. “Your students should come to us ready” (e.g., teacher interaction). Comments like this meant these students should only be included once they have mastered the appropriate academic skills needed in a general education classroom. Teachers were always concerned about the students with ED being able to keep up with the pace of the classroom instruction.

Data Sources

Notes from the Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP) used as data for this study relied on a combination of pre-existing staff interactions, staff emails, rap sessions, and participant observations. Notes were defined as “a written account of what I saw, heard, experienced, and thought about in the course of collection and reflection on the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.107).

Throughout the course of the project I collected as much information as I could to determine the needs of teachers as they functioned daily. Typically, after writing up my

notes I tried to formulate a working hypothesis about what was going on. Coding my notes helped in this area because it served as a guide to my next steps. The next day I would review my assumptions to see if I was on the right track (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by meeting with the teacher, staff member, or student.

Teacher Interactions

Interactions or brief informal discussions with participants occurred frequently throughout the project and included administrators, other school staff members, and parents. These discussions were often opportunities for teachers to voice their opinion about students or a situation without a formal scheduled meeting. Scheduling a meeting with teachers was often difficult due to time constraints, whereas interactions occurred in the hallway, lunchroom while on duty, during field trips, and in the school parking lot.

Emails

Emails were the primary source of communication with teachers. On a daily basis teachers used this format to inquire about students' class work, report behavior, notify me of infractions, schedule meetings or observations, address resources needed, and inquire about students' absences. From the start of the program, over a 190 day period, I received approximately 400 emails directly related to the program and students. In the beginning days of the program, approximately 80 percent of the emails from teachers were direct complaints or concerns about student behaviors and academic progress.

Participant Observations

Participant observations consisted of typical school day activities, such as large and small groups in classrooms, lunch room interactions, hall transitions, PE classes, library periods, and timeout/support instances. Since I was an active part of the school it was very easy to roam around the school observing activities. Each observation captured detailed descriptions of any gestures, direct quotes, and facial expressions that could possibly convey some form of meaning to what I was observing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Scheduled observations varied between 10 and 20 minutes because I tried not to be away from my office for prolonged periods of time. Immediately upon my return from an observation I attempted to transcribe my notes and validate what I observed with the teacher during follow-up conferences. Following up for clarity purposes was important because GE teachers wanted expeditious resolution to the problems I was observing.

One example of how notes gathered from an observation were helpful was when I did an unannounced observation of a particular classroom. The teacher never questioned my presence in her room because I was an active participant in the school and had been in her classroom several times before. After observing a small group activity for the third time in a week, I noticed she had students with ED in the same group each time. Later on that day when I met with one of the students from that group during his scheduled rap session, I asked him how he liked the group activity. He mentioned how he disliked being in that group because GE students often referred to the group as the “dumb group.” When I shared the “dumb group” comment with the teacher, she replied, “I put all of the

ED kids together” (e.g., teacher interaction). Her response clearly suggested surveillance; in fact, she stated if they are in the same group she could watch them better. As a result of our discussion about the need to group students heterogeneously, she assigned this student to a different group that was a little more diverse. The other two students decided to stay in the “dumb group” because they were not bothered by this perception. “I want to be with Aaron because I don’t know those other kids’ (e.g., student rap session). Mario and Aaron were both Center kids who had developed a rapport since their placement in inclusion.

Student Rap Sessions

Rap sessions were 20 minute discussions I had with students to address a variety of student concerns. These sessions were designed to provide an opportunity for students to discuss their current experiences in inclusion. Hearing in their own words, their experiences, beliefs, opinions, preferences, and viewpoints of inclusion helped me gather more information about the inner workings of the process from all involved. To ensure their voices were heard, I met with students biweekly during their elective classes. These sessions turned out to be very helpful especially in addressing student concerns that needed immediate adult intervention. For example, “Mr. Johnson always tells me to go back to the Center for little things that regular education students do too--it’s just not fair. It’s also embarrassing (referring to the teacher’s reference to the Center) because I didn’t want my friends to know I was from the Center. So that’s why I cussed him out *in front of the class* (e.g., student rap session). Although the student’s response was inappropriate,

our discussion helped identify a common problem that many inclusion students shared. Many inclusion students told me that reference to the Center is indeed embarrassing and that when it occurs, it serves as the reason why they skip class, refuse to attend the next class session, or shut down during class. “When that happened to me last week I just stopped doing my work because I stopped caring for a minute; I don’t want to be in the Center and when they say that in front of GE students I don’t like so I shut down (e.g., student rap session). Another example was when a student revealed that he didn’t like the way his teacher teaches. “Mr. Berges doesn’t care whether you get it or not. I don’t like him because all he does is lecture and make us take notes. I like the Center’s tests” (e.g., student rap session). This comment was one of many I investigated as I found out that teachers were not modifying or adapting their assignments to accommodate special education students, whether LD or ED. As I met with teachers, for those who admitted they did not change their instruction, they felt they didn’t have to. “I don’t have time to change every assignment for a few. Your kids need to come ready” (e.g., teacher interaction). When I spoke with another teacher who was making great strides with our students, she mentioned how she used a variety of strategies to target all learning styles in her room. “I noticed your kids required a lot of structure, so I started giving everyone a graphic organizer; it helped the entire class which was surprising” (e.g., teacher interaction).

During rap sessions my posture was always the key to whether or not, and how much, students exposed themselves and others. Initially, students saw me in a teacher role which made it very difficult at times getting them to open up to me about things that

bothered them. Many students felt if they shared something negative about a teacher and I told that teacher it would probably make their inclusion experience somewhat strained. “If you say something she’ll put me out because she’ll be mad I talked about her” (e.g., student rap session). Recognizing the need to build trust, I told students our sessions would be confidential unless the content involved them hurting themselves or others. I also told them I would ask their permission first before sharing information discussed during our confidential sessions with their GE teacher. These two promises, along with a listening ear, were helpful in removing the teacher role that once hindered our dialogue.

Principal Support

A principal’s leadership is very vital in inclusive schools (Guetzloe, 1999). Since the conception of the program, Mrs. Lundy, the principal of the Center, played a very supportive role in the overall development and success of the program. We met bi-weekly so that I could keep her abreast of my challenges and any resources I needed. She was also good at handling fires that rose in the name of inclusion. For example, in the GE side of the building, the timeout room policy indicated that all students with ED should be sent to the Center if in need of timeout services. Initially, I understood why the policy was in place--Center staff is better trained to deal with the behaviors. However, I did not agree that the policy should be the norm for all students regardless of the degree of the infraction. In my opinion, most students in need of timeout services did not need a more restrictive environment to cool down. After sharing my concern with Mrs. Lundy, she understood my point and said she would discuss the matter with the general education

principal at a later date. After their meeting the policy was revised to reflect students being sent to the GE timeout room first before being sent to the Center. Determining what behaviors warranted Center intervention would now be made on a case by case basis by me or the behavior specialist.

Mrs. Lundy was also very instrumental in providing necessary resources such as common planning times, and staff development activities that are known to support inclusive programs (Daane, et al et al., 2000; McLesky & Waldron, 2000). During one of our many conversations, she felt teachers needed more time to collaborate with one another in order to meet the unique needs of students with all disabilities. One way she made this possible was to suggest to the GE principal, Ms. Turner, to organize her staff into four teams consisting of different teachers representing each core subject. She told Ms. Turner that teaming would help students with disabilities because it allowed for easy monitoring and problem solving among all adults who interact with the child. After giving permission to work with the GE guidance director, Mrs. Lundy created not only teams but also common planning times for all teachers including Center teachers. Teachers welcomed this new concept because it gave them the opportunity to work closely with their colleagues and to compare notes on students' behavior across a variety of settings.

Her ingenuity also created after-school workshops for teachers who desired to learn additional skills and strategies needed to teach diverse students. She offered four workshops scheduled throughout the first semester of the school year. Mrs. Lundy and the Center's behavior specialist, Mr. Anderson, were responsible for teaching all

workshops. The workshop topics included classroom management, student opposition, the child with ED, and differentiated instruction strategies. There were no teacher incentives planned for attending these workshops other than the snacks that were provided.

The first workshop, “The ED Child,” did not have many participants. In fact, only 3 out of 33 invited teachers participated in this session. After the second workshop, which no one attended, the remaining classes were postponed until further notice due to low attendance. When asked why they did not attend, most teachers said they either did not need the workshop or just did not have the extra time.

Mainstream Teacher Luncheon

Each year I wrote a grant that I submitted to the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) requesting financial support for a Mainstream Teacher Appreciation Luncheon at the end of the school year. This culminating event would be my way of showing appreciation to GE teachers for working so hard to help our students to be successful in inclusion. In some regards, I saw it as a form of reciprocity since they allowed me to invade or be noisy in their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In my eyes it was an even exchange for a small price.

This event also served as a way to ascertain information about the meaning inclusion had for them. During the luncheon, teachers often shared their pitfalls and successes concerning the students with ED placed in their classrooms. “Until you put Mike in my room, I never thought these kids had any hope. Mike did well this year”

(e.g., teacher interaction). This event also prompted dialogue about next year regarding ideas they wanted to implement in their inclusion classrooms if given students with ED. “Next year, I’m going to have your kids sign a tardy log because they always said they were late because you wanted to talk to them” (e.g., teacher interaction). This quote was referring to students using me as a scapegoat for their frequent unexcused tardies. I noted this comment on a post-it to discuss with students during their next rap session. Another comment was in the need to work more closely with colleagues in terms of sharing strategies that worked and the need to problem solving complex situations as a team. “If we had done that Crystal your job would have been a little smoother.” (e.g., teacher interaction).

Surveys

At the end of the year and a half of the MMP, a survey (see appendix A) was disseminated to all teachers and student participants (33 teachers and 28 students) to gather their thoughts on the overall effectiveness of the program. Mrs. Lundy and I decided to do this survey because we wanted to see if the program was effective and she wanted to be accountable to the district if needed. The teacher survey consisted of six open-ended questions that pertained to the areas of the program I felt were valuable to future support. Teachers were asked to indicate the degree in which they felt supported in certain aspects of the program. The student survey consisted of five questions that were in a yes/no format.

Teacher surveys were put in the teachers' mailboxes or hand delivered by myself. A cover letter was sent via email. Students' surveys were given during their scheduled rap session time so that they would not be interrupted. To guarantee return, teachers were told the survey would be their ticket to an Inclusion Teacher Appreciation Luncheon that I sponsored yearly to thank general education teachers for working with the Center students. Students were given a soda upon their completion. Although both surveys were analyzed, they were never shared with anyone outside of a few teachers due to the dismantling of the program.

Reflective Notes

Reflective field notes emerged again during the MMP because it allowed me to be more reflective of the process of inclusion as I strived to support, secure, and legitimize the program. As I walked around everyday speculating about what I was theorizing and planning for the next day (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), reflective notes helped me be objective because I was able to keep account of my personal position and value orientation about what I was observing or experiencing (Peshkin, 1998).

An example of when this technique was helpful was when I decided to change the focus of the program to reflect the everyday experiences of teachers. "Why does Ms. Johnson keep saying inclusion doesn't work when she's not trying to make it work? I'm always in her class providing support in any way I can and she's still not happy. I even gave her good kids that I know aren't aggressive; and she says it doesn't work because they don't do well on tests; some GE kids don't pass either. Something is not right here."

Another example is when I ran into a teacher in the hallway who was obviously disgusted with one of our students: “Maybe they’re trying to make inclusion work and I’m just missing something (referring to GE teachers). What am I overlooking?”

As I wrote these notes to myself and started to ponder my next move, I appreciated being able to reflect on my own way of thinking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I knew something was going on but just could not put my finger on it. My reflective notes helped me stay objective and reevaluate when needed.

Storage of Data Sets

Because of the massive amount of notes collected through qualitative research methods, it was important to have a system to keep track of the constant interactions with teachers and students. With several data sources, I needed a system that allowed for easy access because data was emerging rapidly each day.

All emails were stored on my computer and placed in chronological order in a folder under its respective category name (teachers, staff member, and principal). Field notes from participant observations, rap sessions, and interactions were typed and saved on my computer in a folder labeled as well. I always made two copies - one was to be written on when I was speculating on patterns, emerging themes and relationships, and to examine my role in the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and the other served as a hardcopy just in case I could not retrieve a copy from my computer file.

Daily I relied on post-it notes, which surrounded my computer, and scribbles on sheets of paper to remind me of things I needed to do. At the end of each day I had to

remain after work in order to make sense of the mounds of paper stacked on my desk. When working with a file, I placed the folder in a bin labeled “open file” to reflect as such. Post-it notes on these files were helpful for they served as ways to jot down quick notes to myself to elaborate on a certain topic later on. I occasionally used a flash drive to take project data home for further analysis when needed.

Closing the Project

By the close of the school year, even though I had not analyzed the data from the surveys with a critical eye, it was determined that the second year of the program was successful and should be continued for a third. However, amid budget shortfalls all Center schools had to reduce their staff by two or more teachers. This impacted the MMP because my position was originally created when my principal had an extra position with which to be creative. As of the new calendar year, the MMP would no longer be available until further notice. Because I was a veteran employee I was guaranteed another position in the school. However, I decided to transfer to another school that had heard of the success of the MMP and wanted to implement the program there.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, the initial intent of the data collected for a work-related project was not intended to be used for dissertation purposes. I collected the data to inform daily decisions for the Mainstream Mentoring Program. This dissertation emerged as I

discovered from the massive amount of information gathered that everything I read about in journals about the inclusion of students with ED and that which was lacking was what I experienced in the everyday life of trying to forward inclusion.

What I hoped to ascertain from this study was to understand, now as a researcher, how teachers understood their roles. To do this with researcher eyes, I systematically looked at pre-existing data obtained from the project and compared it to the literature and developed focus group questions from themes that emerged. With the use of a focus group to foster a discussion of the core issues identified during the course of the MMP, the ultimate goal was to further understand why teachers feel the way they do and the subsequent changes that are experienced during the process of inclusion. The focus group was comprised of former program participants that served as informants to validate my perceptions as derived from the data.

The goal of analysis of this data was to better understand the meaning of the role of teachers as they experienced the process of including students with ED. This in-depth understanding assisted in the development and implementation of strategies for inclusion. To do this, data analysis occurred in three steps. The first step was an ongoing discovery stage that involved identifying themes. The second step involved analysis of the focus group data, and the final step involved the researcher's attempt to understand the data in the context in which they were collected (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984). A more thorough discussion of the analysis process will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Findings

The present study was designed to explore the core issues faced by teachers in a teacher support program, The Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP), which was developed to assist the teachers as they went through the process of including students with emotional disturbance (ED) in their classrooms. Guided by the research questions established for this study, this chapter includes an analysis of pre-existing data that was used to identify the core issues faced, along with the findings from a focus group session by teachers in the program to discuss and validate these issues. The findings from the focus group will be presented and organized by the questions generated from the pre-existing data.

The following research questions guided the analysis of data:

1. What were the perceptions of general education teachers who participated in a teacher support intervention program regarding the inclusion of students with ED?
2. From the perspective of the participatory teachers, what factors contributed to the successful inclusion of students with ED?

Segmenting Data into Periods

As stated in Chapter 3, prior to this study I had collected a great deal of information from a teacher support program designed to support teachers as they went through the process of inclusion. Subsequently, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to examine this information as pre-existing data. The period during which this data was collected extended from 2004 to 2005. Data from this period consisted of

408 emails, 98 pages of notes that I reworded from students' rap sessions, 14 pages of observation notes of students with ED in general education classes, 21 pages of teacher survey results, 4 pages of notes I recorded at the Mainstream Teacher Luncheon, 12 pages of reworded discussion notes from conferences with the principal, 76 pages of reflective notes, and 21 pages of notes I reworded from adult interactions. After the data were organized chronologically and by category, it was typed doubled spaced along with the date of occurrence.

As I began to examine the data, it was apparent that it needed to be segmented into periods first before a more thorough analysis could take place. All teachers' responses coincided consistently with a specific time or period of occurrence. After much reflection of the data, the following four periods of time emerged. The breakdown of these periods is organized by months of a school year.

September – December (“A Hectic Time”)

During this period teachers were bombarded with the many tasks associated with opening a new school year. Since this is typically a hectic time for all teachers, many inclusion teachers felt even more overwhelmed because they had to adjust to including students with ED in their classrooms for the first time. Many inclusion teachers felt students with ED would be an extra burden because of the behaviors often associated with them such as defiance and disrespect. “Those kids are often disruptive and inappropriate,” a statement shared by a teacher that summarizes how most teachers felt. Although teachers were promised technical support by way of the program, only a

handful of teachers welcomed the support. For the most part, when students with ED became disruptive or inappropriate, general education teachers demanded that they be removed immediately. To add, teachers were quite annoyed by the fact that these students were not only frequently unprepared for class, but often lacked basic social skills. "I don't have time to teach the basics," commented an inclusion teacher.

Most of the teacher complaints I received during this time were either via email or through teacher interactions in the hallway. These complaints consisted of demands that I "do something" about what they perceived was inappropriate and intolerable behavior. The consensus at this time was that if students were not showing the appropriate behavior needed for an inclusive setting from the onset, then "they weren't ready for a general education classroom."

Around mid-October, although there were some classrooms that were working rather smoothly, most teachers were still a little uncomfortable with inclusion. Teachers who felt this way needed constant reassurance from me that I would be there to help them.

There were also classrooms struggling a great deal to make inclusion work. This situation was evident by not only teachers saying to me "this is not going to work," even though the student had only been in the class two or three days, but also the teachers' refusal to fully cooperate with recommended behavioral interventions. For this group I began the process of removing selected students I felt were not showing much improvement and not amenable to wanting to stay in their inclusion class. Removing disruptive students was an inevitable process because teachers would become irate about

how the behavior was impacting the entire class. When I received student referrals on a daily basis to have certain students removed from their inclusion class for timeout purposes or when I received frequent emails with comments like the following all written in caps, “HE NEEDS TO GET OUT OF MY CLASS because he doesn’t even know how to come in the classroom without disturbing the class,” or “Come get him because he’s obviously not ready!”, I had no other choice but to oblige because some teachers would become indignant and adamant about the removal of their “problem” student. I was also concerned about the effects of teachers’ attitudes on these students. During student rap sessions they would confide their thoughts about why the placement was not successful especially if it was for behavioral reasons. Most students would start off with “I didn’t want to leave, but...” and end with a statement that reflected the teacher’s dislike for them as their reason. If the removal was more academically based, then the student would say, “She goes too fast.”

During this period I also noticed an increase in my level of support to help teachers. My reflective journal entries during this time reflected ways I could help teachers feel more supported and confident in their present role. The one area I focused on was to become more visible around the building. I started walking around doing tardy sweeps between classes, and making surprise visits to struggling inclusive classrooms to conduct observations of students. I made it a point to answer every email promptly and followed up on every question or concern expressed by all teachers. As reflected by my entries, this was the busiest time of the year for me because I realized that my focus on

students in inclusion had to be redirected to a focus on helping the GE teachers get through the process.

Throughout the month of November and early December, although more inclusion success stories were trickling in, there were still quite a few teachers who were grappling with how to make inclusion work academically. During this time I received many emails and notes in my mailbox from teachers requesting that I stop by their classroom to offer some suggestions on how to help students academically pass their inclusion class. Most of my feedback to teachers was in the form of strategies proven to work well with students with ED in inclusive settings. Several of my entries were speculative of whether or not teachers were adhering to the instructional strategies I suggested because teachers often commented about how they did not have time to “differentiate every lesson for just a few kids.”

January – February (“The Cool Down”)

After Christmas vacation, the mayhem that existed in the previous period calmed down dramatically. General education teachers started to adjust to their new role as teachers of students with emotional disturbance. The first sign that teachers were adjusting was the decrease in timeout referrals to my classroom size office. During the “Hectic Time” stage, I had anywhere from one to five students per period to deal with or counsel. For the most part, these students were with me for either half or the entire class period. Now, in this “Cool Down” stage, students who were sent back had hall passes from their teachers who stated, for example, “please send back in 15 minutes,” or “a brief

cooling off period is needed; send back after you talk to him.” I also started to receive more positive feedback that reflected hope instead of the usual gloomy reports I received in the Hectic Stage. Teachers also started to deal with some of their students’ behaviors within their classroom. For example, I sent inclusion teachers a list of names of students whom I felt could handle the general education’s timeout room instead of being sent to me for timeout. This list reflected students who rarely needed extra assistance for academic or behavioral reasons. I told teachers these students would probably only require a 10-15 minute timeout period with no extra assistance needed from consultation with me or Center staff. To my surprise, a couple of teachers felt this option was better for their particular student with ED.

This stage was also a good time for me to be more reflective on the program. I began conducting more observations on all classrooms. As alluded to earlier, classrooms that were not working successfully consisted of unhappy teachers and unhappy students. Classrooms that were successful had teachers and students, along with my assistance, working together to problem solve every challenge. In this stage I was also able to spend time developing closer relationships with teachers, suggest and demonstrate classroom strategies, and offer tutoring after school.

March – April (“Back to the Drawing Board”)

After two months of relative calmness, teacher anxiety slowly emerged due to worries regarding school-wide standardized testing. Virginia’s standardized testing, the Standards of Learning (SOLs), is often a very stressful time for all staff involved. Each

year around this same time teachers begin to focus more on student learning and preparation for these tests. This year the stakes were higher than normal because administration emphasized the importance of raising our passing rate among all students, including students with disabilities. This was a challenging time for all teachers especially inclusion teachers because everyone was told individual classroom scores will be looked at with a fine tooth comb, with data disaggregated by classrooms. For some inclusion teachers, this brought about a great deal of fear because they did not want to destroy the passing rate that they were achieving to due to the expected low test scores that are often associated with students with disabilities. A couple of inclusion teachers expressed concern about the possibility of “looking bad,” if students with ED who were low academically took the SOL test with their assigned inclusion class. In this example, the solution one teacher suggested to remedy this problem was to “let him take the SOLs with the Center.” She felt this was the best option for both her and the student. Her rationale, “Michael said he feels more comfortable taking the test with you guys, plus now I don’t have to worry about him bringing down my scores.”

Due to this preoccupation with testing, it seemed as if overnight the number of student referrals to my office sky rocketed. Teachers started complaining about an array of problems ranging from academic to behavioral. They felt particular students needed to either be returned to the Center for the rest of the year or be sent to me whenever their behavior became disruptive because the teacher had no time to deal with behavior problems during this crucial time. Teachers felt that a shorter length of timeout in my

office to be best suited for the student with ED if they were going to survive in an inclusive setting.

After conferencing with Center administration, we all agreed that this recent surge in behaviors was probably due to the increased academic demands placed on all students to pass the SOLs. This was also a stressful time for me because I was constantly trying to support teachers and students in any way I could to help them get through this period. Most of my support consisted of contacting parents to inform them of the seriousness of the SOLs, making changes to students' IEPs to reflect extra needed accommodations, scheduling more frequent rap sessions with students to help them manage everyday stresses (more words of encouragement), and providing after school tutoring along with other Center teachers who volunteered to help me.

May – June – (“Signs of Growth”)

With the stress of SOLs behind us and the school year coming to a close, both schools returned to normal. Referrals and email complaints decreased dramatically and both teachers and students seemed happy that they made it through the school year. Students were still sent to my office for a “cooling off period,” but for those who were sent I knew they were just responding to the excitement of the school year ending. The last week of school I sponsored a teacher luncheon, the Mainstream Teacher Appreciation Luncheon, to honor teachers for their perseverance and support of the program during this time as well. During the luncheon particular gains were noted by teachers regarding students' ability to work together along side their nondisabled peers,

and an overall improvement in social skills by most students with ED over the course of the school. I also disseminated teacher surveys to give teachers a platform to discuss the process of inclusion, their successes and challenges, and to determine what their needs were for the program the following school year. The general consensus from teachers was that the inclusion process was “not that bad as long as the Coordinator provided ongoing support,” stated one teacher, but agreed that there were some important issues that needed to be addressed to make the process even smoother. Teachers also stated in surveys that they attributed much of their increased tolerance for students with ED to me because of my continued support through their challenging times with inclusion. It appeared that teachers appreciated my role as liaison between the Center and general education.

Analysis of Pre-existing Data

After segmenting the data into periods as described above, the process of analysis began with analyzing the data from a symbolic interactionist perspective. To do this, I examined all data for articulation of images, motivations for action, perceptions and interpretations from all participants in the study. By understanding how the participants made sense of their experience helped me understand their roles better. It was my belief that such understanding was essential to taking into account how teachers being studied interpreted the situations they faced, since these situations shaped how they acted (Hammersley, 1990).

Next, I indexed each individual line of pre-existing data with a word phrase that best described the nature of the discussion. I did so by sorting through the data to look for repeated words, phrases, and subjects. All data at this point were placed under category codes that represented the patterns and topics that emerged from the sorting.

The coding categories I used were:

1. Setting /content – refers to general information on the setting.
2. Definition of the situation – how individuals see themselves in relations to the setting.
3. Perspectives held by subjects – codes oriented toward ways of thinking.
4. Ways of thinking about people and objects – understandings of each other, of outsiders, and of the objects that make up their world.
5. Activity codes – regularly occurring kinds of behavior.
6. Events - relates to specific activities that occur in the setting.
7. Strategies – refers to the tactics, methods, techniques, and other conscious ways people accomplish various things. (Bogan and Biklen, 2003).

Once coding categories had been established, I physically sorted the data on the floor of my home office. This was accomplished by cutting the coded field notes and reflective notes into piles that correspond to the coding categories. A constant comparison method of analysis was employed to compare each emerging category with

previous incidences in the same category. These category codes included highlighted quotes and examples that supported each category.

The last step was to create a data display of the categories, themes, and patterns gathered from the data. I made a visual format that represented the data systematically so that valid conclusions could be drawn. Using my home office, I made a physical arrangement on the floor to display categories and subheadings so that I could see all of the data at once. After another round of sorting, I conferred with another doctoral student to narrow further the categories because I felt the latest list could be shortened. With more sorting and re-sorting, and disagreeing on three additional categories which we eventually included in the following list of categories, we finally agreed on eight categories that emerged from the data. The categories are presented below with a discussion of each.

Adaptations and Accommodations for Students. Classroom accommodations refer to the instructional supports and services that students with disabilities may require in order to successfully process through the general education curriculum. In the Mainstream Mentoring Program, one of the challenges I faced daily was how to convince general education teachers that making these accommodations were critical to assisting students with ED be successful in inclusive settings. This was a difficult sell to some teachers because although they frequently requested assistance in creating meaningful lessons, they often were not interested in investing the time to learn new strategies. If I recommended a strategy that was viewed as “too much work,” there was the possibility

that the strategy would not be used. Teachers as a whole wanted what I termed “everyday strategies”--those that were quick and easy and did not require a change in their usual teaching practices. Strategies of this nature included altering the grading scale, shortening assignments, extending time to complete assignments, and submitting parts of an assignment at a time. These everyday strategies became the most widely-used strategies among inclusion teachers because as one teacher stated, “I can’t spend all of my planning time being creative for two or three kids.”

Teachers who seemed unwilling to try new strategies did not do so for one of two reasons. First, teachers were already bombarded with county-wide strategies that they were mandated to implement; thus accommodations for students with ED were seen as an extra burden. In the previous quote about not being able to spend her planning time being creative, this teacher later told me that she would use them if she was not overwhelmed with paperwork and different initiatives that administration expected her to do. Secondly, since many teachers felt they were not sufficiently trained to work with these students, they were very hesitant about accepting this new role as teacher of students with disabilities. As one teacher commented, “I realize the importance (referring to the needed accommodations), but how do you help kids when you have no idea what you’re doing?” In this discussion she further expressed that she felt she was doing students with ED an injustice by not being prepared to teach them.

Another concern under accommodating students was the general education teachers’ reliance on me to assist them with implementing accommodations. Throughout the program, I received many requests from GE teachers, who were not in co-taught

situations, with questions such as: “Can you give Eddie the test because he needs it read to him?” and “Michael requires extended time to take his test, so can he sit in your office?” Questions like these were common in classrooms where there was no special education co-teacher to help in these areas. In co-taught classes, occasionally implementing accommodations was still a problem because of the concern for the other students in the class who did not need accommodations but benefited from the presence of two teachers. If the special education teacher had to leave the room for a substantial amount of time to work with one student, then the GE teacher had to attempt to handle the other students alone. This was difficult at times for some GE teachers because they did not have the skills to manage the behaviors of students with ED effectively without the special education teacher’s assistance. In these scenarios, m

In non-co-taught classes, a few GE teachers expressed their desire to “get help with teaching students with ED,” commented one teacher. In this same discussion this teacher stated that she “needed an ED teacher to not only help with behaviors, but to help with academics.” In providing an example of how beneficial it would be to have an extra teacher, this teacher further stated that “these kids need someone to be on them so that they don’t have to be removed from class.” In this example she was referring to students with ED benefiting from the extra support that a special education teacher can give them. Teachers felt this support consisted of reminding students of deadlines, helping them take notes, cueing them with regard to appropriate classroom behavior, assisting with homework assignments, and dealing with parents when needed.

My reflective journal was another area where issues of accommodations were raised. I often documented how difficult it was to communicate to teachers when a student's inappropriate behavior could be the direct result of the difficulty of an instructional task that they did not know how to deal with. I frequently explained to teachers that students with ED may "act out," referring to behaviors exhibited when avoiding or frustrated with a task. I knew this was the case because in rap sessions with students when they were sent back to the Center they would often admit that their timeout stemmed from anger or frustration with a required task. Most of the time, their inappropriate behaviors were related to some academic task they did not understand or did not complete for some reason. Illustrative of this point was when a LD co-teacher explained to me what happened when a student with ED was frustrated because he did not understand the directions to a task. "I know Sam was upset when she (referring to GE teacher) refused to repeat the directions. He responded by walking out of the class and standing outside." In this example, the GE teacher responded to his behavior by sending him to my office for disrespect and disruption. When I spoke to the GE teacher later on that day about this incident, she told me, "I was not repeating the directions because I had already done it twice before." My reflective notes that day stated the following:

"Some teachers actually think students with ED should come to class ready to learn the same content in the same way as other students. Address this at next meeting." (e.g. reflective notes, 9-30-05).

Another accommodation concerned teachers who grappled with was how IEP goals which, were often inconsistent with the actual classroom goals and objectives set forth by the district. Teachers found it difficult to address IEP goals that were often written very differently from the broader district curriculum goals that were grade-level specific. It was equally challenging for teachers to monitor IEP goals because this was a process that had to be completed by a special education teacher. For co-taught classrooms, monitoring IEP objectives was easy to enforce, but for classes where the GE teacher was the sole provider of instruction, my assistance was needed because all inclusion students were assigned to my case load.

In summary, when asked what accommodations were made for students with ED while in inclusive classrooms, general education teachers felt that although they realized the importance of them, ease of the accommodation to implement was the determining factor of whether or not any changes in instruction or support services were used. Accommodations such as allowing students extra time to complete a given task and shortening assignments were viewed as strategies that do not require any major changes to their current instructional practices. Teachers overwhelmingly felt that their current pedagogy was sufficient enough for students with ED.

Co-teaching with a special education teacher was seen as a valuable alternative to the present model of inclusion. For those GE teachers who were accustomed to working alone, they found it difficult to vary instruction and implement accommodations to students with ED effectively. GE teachers felt that having another teacher in the classroom, especially one who was knowledgeable about students with ED and the types

of accommodations they require, would be a tremendous help in educating these students. GE teachers felt that a special education co-teacher would be able to assist students in getting organized and staying focused. They saw the latter as a key to helping students with ED be successful in inclusive settings.

Consequences and Student Accountability. One area that dominated much discussion each day was the subject of consequences. Whenever GE teachers sent a disruptive or disrespectful student back to my office for timeout purposes, teachers were always concerned about what consequence the student was going to receive for the infraction. In earlier months of the MMP, I received numerous emails and drop-in visits from GE teachers wanting to know how the Center was going to handle disruptive behaviors that occurred in general education. To an even greater extent, if the consequence did not meet their satisfaction or at least match the behavior according to their standards, some teachers would become visibly upset about how it was being handled. For example, as a consequence, when I told a student who was disruptive in his inclusion class that he would not be allowed to participate in the School Store (an incentive program used in the Center to reward students for appropriate behavior), the GE teacher's response to me was, "Not sending him to the School Store is no big deal. That's what's wrong with these kids. You all baby them too much." This teacher later expressed that the student's consequence was not severe enough. In another example, the GE teacher's response to me giving a disruptive student a lunch detention was, "He needs to be in In-School Suspension (ISS)." This teacher continued to say that because she felt

disrespected when the student threw his books down after she reprimanded him for being tardy, she said, “We can’t let students get away with disrespect.”

The other area I constantly thought about, noted on many occasions in my reflective notes, was the need to keep in mind therapeutic interventions when dealing with students with ED. Trying to help GE teachers understand the nature of the disability and that sometimes problems may be better resolved through therapeutic measures was difficult. The following teacher’s comment summarizes how many GE teachers felt about therapeutic interventions: “I know they need counseling and things like that, but if they require that much therapy, then maybe they are not ready for inclusion. When they get ready, we are more than happy to have them.” This teacher was referring to very aggressive behaviors that many students with ED were capable, especially those on medication. Her concern, like other teachers’, was what would happen if the student forgot to take his medication a particular day. This was a common concern by many teachers because they were scared of the possibility of violence if a student was un-medicated. This teacher had first-hand experience in how important medication is for some students. After witnessing a student being restrained by trained Center staff, the previously mentioned teacher felt the student was “probably not ready” for inclusion although he had been a model inclusion student in her class before this incident.

Another problem that GE teachers discussed with me was their disgust when I allowed a student to return to their inclusion classroom the day after a major incident even though I administered a consequence I thought suited the infraction. “It’s not fair that Dwayne can cuss me out in front of general education students and then return to

class the next day. General education kids will start to think they can do that too,” said one teacher. This teacher’s comment reflected how many general education teachers felt about students returning to their classes the next day. Teachers wanted me to help them save face in front of the other well-behaving students in the classroom who witnessed the inappropriate behavior by the student with ED.

In honoring their request, I had to be creative with the consequences because ISS and Suspension were not always an option as dictated by my principal. For example, when an inclusion student committed an offense that may have warranted an in-school suspension if he/she were a general education student, to help teachers save face I would keep the student within the parameters of the Center building and allow him to complete his work for the period he was missing from his inclusion class. The GE teacher was told that the student was in ISS but serving it in my office as opposed to the centrally located ISS room where all general education students served their time.

In summary, GE teachers felt that regardless of the nature of the disability, students with ED must be held accountable for the infractions they commit in their inclusion classrooms. Although these students were given consequences for their behaviors, most teachers did not agree with the type of consequence that was deemed appropriate by me and other Center staff members.

Teachers were also concerned about the impact of the disruptive behavior on other students in the classroom. When students with ED displayed inappropriate behaviors, GE teachers wanted the behavior dealt with in the same fashion as a general education student would be dealt with.

Additional Information on Students with ED. Although each GE teacher participated in an entry conference and received a student information sheet that detailed the student's academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses, many GE teachers wanted to know more about their assigned students. "I need to know what they're capable of, what additional problems they have," stated a teacher. Questions about the student's past school history, medication the student was currently taking, and parental background--whether or not the parents were on drugs--were questions I was frequently asked whenever teachers were concerned about a certain behavior. Some teachers stated that this was crucial information that could help them understand the student's disability better and to hopefully enable them to respond better to their student's behavior. This is illustrated in an incident where a general education teacher called to inform me that one of our students was having a rough day, "When he refused to do his work and appeared agitated, I knew something was wrong. There was no way he had his meds," she said. She later told me that if she did not know he was on medication, her response to his behavior would have been different. I knew that meant if the student's behavior would have escalated, he would have gotten a referral.

In another example, the following quote was from a teacher who shared her thoughts with me on drug addicted parents, "My heart goes out to kids who have parents like this; they just can't help the way they act." After this teacher was told the information about the student by his parent, I noticed she became a little more tolerant of certain behaviors from the inclusion student. In another example, a teacher shared with me that she had called her student's previous school about his past behavior there, "I

called his former school. They said Travis has always been hyper.” She told me this was helpful information because she wanted to know how that school handled him. She was looking for ideas that were proven to work.

From conversations with LD co-teachers about this subject, they stated that their GE co-teachers were never interested in knowing any additional information on students except for when the student acted totally out of character. GE teachers in co-taught classrooms typically relied on the special education teacher to handle most problems related to these students. Although LD teachers in the program were assigned to work within the LD inclusion model mentioned in Chapter Three, they were fine working with students with ED. The only information they requested was a student information sheet.

In summary, GE teachers wanted to know as much additional information about their included student as possible. Most teachers felt the entry conferences and the student information sheets were helpful, but they wanted to know more personal student information in order to help better educate students with ED. Teachers understood student confidentiality but felt some information was necessary in order to work with students more efficiently.

Defining “Ready.” Prior to placement of a student with ED in an inclusion classroom, one of many questions I was frequently asked by GE teachers was whether a student was “ready” for inclusion. Although this was teacher jargon that we never defined, but understood what it implied, I understood “ready” to mean a student had

enough social, behavioral, and academic skills to successfully function in a general education classroom. Although it was never stated, general education teachers shared the same definition because they basically wanted to know two things prior to a student with ED being placed in their class: whether or not the student was on grade level academically and how was the student's overall behavior in class? In other words, "Is this student a constant disruption in class?" stated one teacher during an entry conference.

Disruptive behavior was seen as the primary indicator of whether or not a student was "ready" for inclusion. GE teachers felt if the student lacked respect for adults, regardless of how smart and capable he is in a given subject, he is not "ready" for inclusion. "Having respect for adults is just plain basic," stated one teacher. "General education represents the real world, so if they (referring to students with ED) can't handle the basics, they're definitely not ready," replied another.

Teachers were also very concerned about the use of profanity. Most teachers felt profanity was another indicator that a student with ED was not ready for inclusion. "Your kids cuss all the time and when you reprimand them, they continue cussing." This teacher was one of a group of teachers I sat down with to discuss this issue one day. "I'm ok with a slip of the tongue every now and then but when it's everyday all day I just can't take it. I know they don't cuss like this around their parents," a teacher in the group stated. These teachers had many testimonials of their personal run-ins with students with ED that involved a litany of expletives. Although none of the students they were referring were ever candidates for inclusion, their behaviors left a negative impression on

the minds of these teachers. In the words of one teacher, “I just want students who are respectful--no more, no less!”

The other area under being “ready” was teachers’ concern of the impact of not being ready on the other students in the inclusion classes. Teachers were worried that their (students with ED) behaviors would “rub off on the well-behaved students in the classroom,” said one teacher, referring to an incident when I prematurely placed a student in a GE Math class. Although my gut feeling was that this student was not ready, I wanted to give him a chance because he had been working very hard to be in inclusion. After the three weeks the student was included in the GE Math class, his GE teacher said, “Get this child out of here! He has turned my classroom into a circus and the other students are starting to act just like him.” As it turned out, a GE parent of one of the students in this class contacted the GE principal because her daughter had come home complaining about how offensive the behavior was of the students with ED. Since the parent represented the community, administration wanted me to investigate this complaint because we did not want any backlash from the other parents. This incident caused me to become more stringent in the screening process to properly determine if a student was really “ready.”

I also received many questions from GE teachers desiring to know how a student qualified for placement in inclusion, which was a little different than “ready.” Initially, I found this question bothersome because all teachers knew the eligibility process, as outlined in Chapter three, and these qualifications were discussed in detail during each entry conference. After much reflection I finally realized that this question was only

asked when teachers felt disrespected or when a student was suspended. “I don’t know how he made it here. He is terrible!” This statement came from a teacher after she had a very challenging week with one of her included students. When describing his behavior to me, she stated she had to speak to him too many times this week about staying on task and being tardy to class. She felt that since students with ED have “bad weeks” instead of a “bad days” like everyone else, this was a definite indication that he may not be ready for inclusion. Teachers felt that the severity and type of disability was the key factor in deciding whether a student was ready.

In summary, in order to progress to an inclusion class, all teachers wanted to know if the student was ready prior to the actual placement. “Ready” seemed to symbolize whether or not a student had the skills needed to be considered for inclusion. Although there was no set criterion to determine if a student is ready set forth by the MMP, teachers felt that outside the eligibility process, “ready” was an additional indicator that must be considered prior to placement. Current grade level functioning of a student and knowledge of basic social skills, which included the understanding that profanity was prohibited, were seen as additional indicators to determine if the student was ready.

Defining a Supportive Environment. The evolution of my oversized office becoming a “supportive environment” seemed to emerge after the first couple of weeks of the program. As soon as teachers began sending students to my office in great numbers

for periods of timeout, I soon discovered that my office was going to be more than a place where I reside during the school day.

A “supportive environment,” a term I started using because it implied exactly what my office became, was a place that provided support to students by allowing them the opportunity to solve their problems effectively and to address their more immediate frustrations and everyday challenges in inclusion. What was also interesting about this supportive environment was that very few teachers knew it had a name. This was an amazing discovery I stumbled across while reading the teacher surveys I disseminated at the end of the school year. One teacher wrote in the comment section of the survey, “Is that what it was called?” She later apologized and said, “Since the program was located in the Center I automatically affiliated it with the Center.” Referring to my office, she continued to say she knew it was “a place to come and get assistance with students with ED.”

Teachers defined this supportive environment as a place to get help. “These kids need a place to go to let off steam; to talk to someone; to get help with their emotional issues in the classroom so that they can survive in inclusion,” stated one teacher. An example of how the supportive environment was used is when an inclusion student was sent to my office because he was experiencing difficulty trying to calm down from a previous very explosive confrontation with another student in his inclusion class. His GE teacher referred him to me because she noticed he was still upset over the incident and as a result, could not focus on the tasks before him. During class she emailed me, “Demontre needs to come talk to you for a few minutes because it’s obvious he’s not

himself today.” In this scenario the MMP was seen as a “supportive environment” because the teacher realized the student would benefit from someone taking to him about what was bothering him. Sending him to me became an effective strategy because after the student and I talked about how the situation could have been avoided, he felt better and returned to class. As one teacher stated, “I can’t stop teaching to give Matt individual attention when he’s in a crisis. If I can send him somewhere to get help for 15 minutes, that’s better than my lesson being disrupted or him being referred to the office for ISS.

Although the latter statement was the consensus among most teachers, some teachers expressed concern about the types of assistance students were receiving while in this supportive environment. For example, after a student was removed from his inclusion class for disrespecting his GE teacher, the teacher expected me to counsel him, contact his parents to inform them of the infraction, and thereafter administer a consequence. Although this was my typical protocol, I elected to counsel him and suspend some of the privileges he had around the school. I felt this approach was a more effective consequence because I knew the student cherished these privileges more than being concerned about what his parents were going to say. Later that day the teacher expressed how she was not pleased with my consequence because, “If it had been a general education student he would have received a detention.”

Another example of a teacher not in agreement with how I handled a situation was when an inclusion student was sent back to my office for profanity. His teacher stopped by my office to say, “When I sent Bob back to you for cussing in class, I later heard him tell another student that he had been in your office on the computer for the rest of the

day.” This teacher was very upset with me because she felt the student should not have been on the computer because a computer is considered “fun.” Later that day, in spite of telling her the assignment was computer-based instruction she walked away from me with an unpleasant look on her face. This incident and others like it were common examples of teachers wanting to dictate how I should handle situations.

My office also emerged into a supportive environment for teachers. They wanted a place to go and vent without the possibility of being reprimanded by the principal or designee. Teachers on many occasions told me they wanted to feel comfortable in expressing their challenges with inclusion without worrying about losing their job or the principal not liking them. “When these kids walk off the PE field I don’t know what to do!” said a PE teacher about her struggles.... she continues, “administration would write me up if they knew I just don’t know how to respond to stuff these kid do sometimes.”

For teachers in co-taught situations, the supportive environment was used as a back up plan for when a student with ED had a behavioral problem that the special education teacher in the class did not have time to deal with. An example is when an included student became angry because he received a low score on his science test. Although he did not become a disruption, he was so overwhelmed with emotion that both teachers felt that he should come to me because the class was about to start a science project that required both teachers to introduce the lesson. As soon as the GE teacher had an opportunity to leave the lesson she came to my office to check on the student. She said, “Crystal, we did not know what to do. We had to start the project on time.”

Teachers also felt that this supportive environment would be a place that continued the instructional process. “After 30 minutes with you, he missed classroom instruction, so now he’s behind.” Teachers welcomed my services but wanted me to provide quick fixes to most problems. They wanted me to help students with missed work so that the instruction for that day would not be interrupted. “I know he has a problem, but the assignment is still due Friday.” This teacher does not reflect how most teachers felt. Many were flexible but stressed the importance of the student being in class as much as possible. Those students who required too much time out of the room to deal with personal issues were said to be not ready because the bulk of instruction should not occur outside the classroom.

In summary, a “supportive environment” was seen as a place where students could retreat to that would provide them with the extra support students with ED often needed. Teachers felt the inclusion of these students would have been impossible if such a place did not exist to provide students with the support services students with ED needed to survive in general education. One problem associated with such a place was teachers’ concern about the loss of instructional time when a student was being supported. Teachers felt that although the time students spent at this alternative place was important, if a student required too much time on a regular basis in this place then maybe this was a sign that the student was not “ready” for inclusion.

Teachers saw this supportive environment as a place for support for themselves as well. Many teachers appreciated having a place to go to express their struggles with inclusion without the fear of being reprimanded for having such feelings especially when

their sentiments were not very positive. This place served as a platform to “release” their true feelings and to hopefully get some guidance on how to put these feelings in the right perspective.

Training Needs for Teachers. Instructionally, most teachers felt they were prepared to teach students with ED. Teachers were content with their current instructional practices and felt no major changes were needed. “All of my kids always do a good job on their tests, so I guess I’m doing something right,” said one teacher. This example represents how many teachers felt. They did not mind being abreast of new strategies but did not want to be forced to use strategies to “fix something that was not broke.” If their current practices were working, they did not feel a need to change anything.

However, there were some teachers who did feel they could benefit from additional training. “Do you have any suggestions?” or “What are we going to do about so-and-so?” are just some of the types of questions I received regularly. These teachers wanted to attend workshops that would help them with differentiating instruction for all students in their classroom. For these teachers not only did I consult with them to brainstorm solutions to their concerns, but with the help of my principal, I created a small library in my office that showcased information on inclusion practices. These resources consisted of pamphlets, books, and how-to-kits available for teachers to check out whenever needed.

One area all teachers agreed upon was their lack of preparation to handle the behavioral issues often associated with students with ED. “I have classroom management, but your kids need a more therapeutic classroom with perhaps fewer kids.” This teacher, by my observation, had excellent classroom management and was an overall good teacher; however she did not feel comfortable working with students with ED. “I have nothing against students with special needs, but I didn’t go to school for this. I have no clue what to do in certain situations.” Many teachers felt like she did. Some teachers wanted an actual in-service or class to address their concerns, while others just wanted someone to tell them what to do when a student with ED became a problem in class.

In summary, overall most teachers felt they did not need any additional training in instructional practices to educate students with ED. They felt their current practices were sufficient enough for any student to benefit from. Teachers who did welcome training wanted to learn how to differentiate instruction so that they could work more efficiently with all students.

The one area both groups of teachers agreed upon was their need for assistance in managing behaviors in the classroom. Many teachers were not knowledgeable of behavior strategies to use in the classroom that would benefit not just students with ED, but the classroom as a whole. Some teachers requested workshops that would train them in these strategies. Other teachers just wanted someone to tell them what to do.

The Ideal Number of Students with ED to Include. The number of students with ED placed in inclusive classrooms was an important topic that was frequently mentioned by teachers especially during the “Hectic Stage” of the program. Teachers felt having a limit on the number of students with ED placed in GE classes was important because having too many was viewed as “a disaster waiting to happen,” commented one teacher. GE teachers felt that the severity of the disability was a key determinant in how many students with ED should be placed in an inclusive class. “Having too many would be frustrating because there would be too many behaviors to address,” said one teacher.

Although I never discussed a particular number of students I would place in a given inclusive classroom, my prior experience in working with students with ED necessitated the need for this determination to be individualized based on the type of class. Because of the nature of their disability I did not want to set teachers or students up for failure especially if there was going to be too many potentially aggressive behaviors in one class. For example, I never put more than three students in a science inclusion class that did not have a special education co-teacher. My concern was the amount of moving around students would have to do and the handling of dangerous equipment and materials due to lab activities. If the classroom was not a co-taught situation I only placed one or two students in the class because I did not want the teacher to be bombarded with too many potentially disruptive behaviors all at one time. “It’s too many in here especially with Kyle. He’s the worst. He gets everyone else started up,” commented one teacher who emailed me several times that week about this group of students.

This problem also existed in GE physical education classes because the average class size was 30, excluding students with ED. To add, these classes did not have teacher assistants to help with management, so I frequently volunteered to help out with some activities because it became clearly obvious that the PE teacher would require assistance with so many students.

On the average I placed six to eight students in a given PE class because I had no choice due to budget shortfalls. In the surveys I disseminated at the end of the school year, one respondent stated, “When your kids don’t want to participate in class for God-knows-why, they just don’t--and some will even walk off the field. I can’t be responsible for them and the other 29 in the class.” Another teacher’s comment was, “It didn’t happen all the time, but when a kid walked off I would send one of my reliable students to get help or I would use a walkie-talkie to let someone know.”

Since PE teachers were always concerned about safety especially since the inclusion of students with ED, I had to put something in place to address the problem, so I had a meeting with the PE department to address their safety concerns and to brainstorm possible solutions. At the conclusion of this meeting, one of the solutions was to give each PE class a Center assistant due to the number of students with ED placed in them. PE teachers felt eight students were too many to handle alone.

Some teachers also felt it was important to monitor the number of students with ED in a classroom because they felt it was difficult to establish rapport with students due to the many behaviors. “If I’m always dealing with Calvin’s behaviors, I can’t get to know the other kids in the classroom.” Another said, “When I’m constantly distracted by

behavior problems, I have no energy left to give anyone any more personal attention.”

This last quote reflected how most teachers felt. They really wanted to get to know the students in their classroom but felt too many students with ED would prevent that from happening due to their constant need for attention.

In summary, teachers felt that the number of students with ED in a class was an important topic because too many students with a behavioral problem could be detrimental to the overall learning environment. Teachers felt determining how many students to include should be a collaborative decision representing all adults who will work with these students. Teachers were also concerned about the number of students and its impact on academic instruction. Teachers felt too many students with ED could alter instruction resulting in the teacher not being able to deliver the kind of closeness to secure acquisition of the skill.

Equally important was the severity level of the student’s disability. Teachers felt this was also an important factor to consider in how many students to include in inclusion. In the teacher surveys I disseminated at the end of the school year, one respondent stated, “students who lack organization or are somewhat passive aggressive, lets say two or three of them (this number varied but the concept was heavily mentioned) is a good number in a class. However, if you have one that is aggressive--you know, uses profanity and is oppositional sometimes—that one may be all you need in a class.”

Teachers’ Impression of the Mainstream Mentoring Program. At the beginning of the school year teachers were very skeptical of the Mainstream Mentoring Program

because they felt it was another district-sponsored initiative that they would be forced to do without a great deal of support. Therefore, many teachers functioned in their classrooms with uncertainty, evident by the following comment, “How long are you all going to have this program? It’s great but I don’t want to get use to it.” Although I thought this teacher was probably one of few teachers who questioned the duration of the program, as it turned out, I was wrong. Through teacher gossip I learned most teachers felt this way. “They don’t know what to do with these kids. They’re just dumping them on us. After they get us acclimated, this program will be gone and we’ll be stuck,” a teacher said to me in the hallway.

After easing everyone’s fears that the program would exist for at least a year, teachers started became more trusting of me. The side conversations I received in the preceding paragraph began to dissipate after the program was still in tact after the Winter Break. Some teachers that thought the program would only last a semester were shocked. What also helped teachers relax some was seeing my principal’s involvement in the program. When she sponsored workshops that we decided were needed based on the needs of the teachers, although only a handful participated, teachers were still impressed that the thought was extended. “Wow, Mrs. Lundy is really into this.” This teacher concluded with, “We’ve never had anyone show interest in our struggles.”

After the announcement of workshops I started to notice more teacher commitment to inclusion efforts. This was demonstrated by an increase in teachers’ level of acceptance and tolerance of students with ED in their classroom. This change in attitude was also evident in the tone of their emails and the fewer number of teacher visits

and complaints received. These changes were well documented in the teacher surveys given at the end of the year and during the Mainstream Teacher Appreciation Luncheon.

This was also a time where teachers started to become more reflective of how helpful the MMP was in the inclusion process. Teachers felt my role as coordinator was critical to the program's success. They appreciated the fact that I tailored strategies to the needs of students and helped them develop habits of successful school behavior. They valued the presence of a support system because they oftentimes did not know what to do in many cases especially when it came to behavioral interventions.

As teachers reflected on the program so did I. The MMP was a place where I learned about teacher needs and how they challenges with inclusion. Many expressed how their dependence on this program was pivotal to their overall sanity each day especially when they did not have a legitimate reason to have a student removed from their classroom. My office turned into a place where students and teachers were allowed to vent and work collaboratively with me to problem solve answers to often very difficult questions about inclusion.

In summary, The MMP was seen as a vital component to the inclusion of students with ED. It was a place where not only students received assistance with their everyday challenges, but teachers as well. Teachers also felt that the role of the coordinator was essential to the program. Having a trained special educator as a support system was deemed a necessity in helping students with ED be successful in inclusion.

Development of Focus Group Questions

After including quotes from the data as supporting evidence in each of the preceding categories, the focus group questions were created based on constant reflection of the data under the categories described above. They became questions by analyzing the themes and figuring out what was needed, what was not clear, or misunderstood. For example, I knew more typical adaptations and accommodations were being used by all teachers but was not quite sure how many were using other strategies that required more planning such as differentiation of a task. The following semi-structured questions were developed representing each category and was used in the 90 minute focus group session:

1. What, if any, adaptations and accommodations were made for students with emotional disturbances (ED) in your classroom?
2. When students with ED were assigned a consequence for inappropriate behavior, some inclusion teachers were not satisfied with the consequence given. What was your experience with consequences that were assigned to students you referred for disciplinary actions?
3. After reading the teacher surveys given at the end of the year, many teachers requested additional information on students. What kind of information would be helpful?
4. Some teachers felt that students with ED must be "ready" before being placed in an inclusive classroom? How do you feel about that? What does "ready" mean to you?

5. How important is having a supportive environment for students with ED to return to when they need time to let off steam? How would you describe such supportive environments? What are the pros and cons of such a place?
6. What type of training do you think you need to better educate/manage students with ED in your classroom?
7. What is an ideal number of students with ED in an inclusive classroom? How does having more than that number of students impact your classroom?
8. What is your overall impression of the Mainstream Mentoring Program?

After the development of the questions each participant was asked via telephone to participate in a focus group about the MMP. The scheduling of the session was arranged as dictated by each teacher's schedule. After an agreed-upon date and time, I called each participant one week prior to the focus group session and the night before just as a reminder. Unfortunately, on the day of the event two participants called to say they could not make it but emphasized their desire to still participate. For these participants I scheduled a phone conference. The actual focus group session occurred at the local library near my home. I reserved a small conference room that accommodate at least ten people at a large table. Although neither I nor the participants invited any outside guests, the librarian explained that since this was a public facility, onlookers could come and observe the session. Therefore, I positioned five extra chairs in the back of the room just in case there were any visitors. I also provided soft drinks and potato chips for focus group participants to snack on before and during the session. I did this because I wanted

them to feel comfortable especially since I knew our session was taking place near lunch time. For taping purposes, I placed In the middle of the table two tape recorders to record the focus group. I also gave each participant a pen and a copy of the questions so they could jot down notes if needed. I kept a pad to take notes as well.

Focus Group Members Selection Process

In selecting teachers for the focus group, several considerations were made. First, I preferred teachers who participated in the program for an entire year. This factor was important because I wanted teachers who could reflect on their own growth, if any, from the beginning of the year to the end. Second, I wanted teachers who were outspoken about all components of the program. I selected department chairs to serve as representatives of their individual departments, and teachers who I knew were outspoken about core issues experienced by the majority of their teammates. Having a well balanced group to address all domains of the program, no matter how critical their perspective, was important to me to keep an objective mindset.

Focus group participants consisted of a total of eight teachers. Three teachers had twenty plus years of experience and five had between seven to nine years of experience. There were five general education teachers representing grades sixth and seventh in Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies and PE.

Focus Group Participants

Table 1

Focus Group Participants

Name	General Education	Special Education	Total Years Teaching
	Teacher	Teacher	Experience
Lisa*	Science		9
Stephanie	Math		8
Karen	PE		26
David	Math		23
Andrea	Language Arts		20
Zina		History	8
Benita		Language Arts	7
Helen		History	8

*Dual certified in Special Education but working as a general education teacher.

Participants' Narratives

After identifying focus group participants, as shown in Table 1, I scheduled a telephone conference with each participant to garner their thoughts about students with ED and inclusion. Below is a summation of this discussion along with a brief description of each participant's teaching background.

Lisa. Lisa is a general education teacher who is dual certified in Science, Emotional Disturbance, and Learning Disabilities. She has been teaching for nine years. This was her first year teaching in an inclusive environment. Her thoughts on the

inclusion of students with ED can be summed up in one phrase, “a total disruption to the educational environment,” a statement she demanded I include in my dissertation. Lisa supports inclusion but was equally supportive of self-contained classrooms for students with ED. She feels students with ED often come to general education lacking preparedness and basic social skills, which can hinder their progress in inclusion. She also states that students with ED should be served in a smaller classroom setting until they are “ready,” a phrase that will be discussed later on in this chapter. She recommended a careful screening process that includes time for students to learn appropriate behavior.

Stephanie. Stephanie is a general education teacher certified in Math and has been an inclusion teacher for three years. She is very supportive of all students with disabilities in an inclusion setting as long as they could make passing grades and act appropriately. Although she understands the value of proven instructional strategies that work well with students with ED, she felt it is unrealistic to expect inclusion teachers to differentiate every lesson. In her words, “It’s just too hard to adapt or tailor instruction for every child in your classroom when you have 30 kids.” She felt this requirement was the only downfall of inclusive practices.

Karen. Karen is a general education teacher certified in Physical Education. She had been teaching 26 years and has received many accolades from administration for her excellence in the field. Supportive of inclusion, she felt students with ED must be “ready” to handle a general education setting. “In PE, students with ED must be able to practice

self control because we're outside and occasionally use dangerous equipment.” She felt demanding respect and making sure students receive a consequence for inappropriate behavior is critical to the success of inclusion. Karen was adamant about not teaching any student, whether disabled or not, when she was not respected. She credits her success as a teacher to demanding respect from all of her students. She also felt strongly about students with ED having a therapeutic place to return to when struggling behaviorally.

David. David is a general education teacher who had been teaching Math to at-risk students for 22 years. He has taught two inclusion classes every year for the past three years, none of which were co-taught with a special education teacher. David supports inclusion but believes in a continuum of placement options for students with ED. He stated that he “had never had a student with ED who did not know how to behave appropriately.” He also had a great deal of respect for special education teachers and relied on their expertise when a problem developed.

Andrea. Andrea is a general education teacher who has spent the last 20 years teaching Language Arts. At the time of this focus group she was pursuing certification in Emotional Disturbance and Mental Retardation. She supported inclusion but feels a screening process is needed for inclusion to work. She also believed in a continuum of placement options, but felt we, as a profession, should do all we can to keep students in the least restrictive environment. She recommended a strong social skills curriculum for all students with ED and wanted to see more mentorship for these students.

Zina. Zina is a special education teacher of students with Learning Disabilities. She has been teaching for eight years and has been a co-teacher in an inclusion Social Studies class for the last three years. Zina was working on an endorsement in administration. She supports inclusion but felt a student's placement should be based on the level of services they need. "If a student has too many accommodations they should be serviced in a self-contained environment until we teach them coping skills." She felt coping skills were important tools in order for students to be successful in inclusive settings. "They must be able to identify the triggers that 'start them up' because if we don't teach them they will not survive." She felt a supportive classroom along with mandatory counseling was as additional necessity.

Benita. Benita is a special education teacher with seven years of teaching experience. She is certified in Learning Disabilities and Emotional Disturbance. For the past three years she had been serving as a Learning Disabilities co-teacher in an inclusion Language Arts class. She enjoyed teaching students with ED but said she feels sorry for them. Her empathy was due to the low expectations she says many educators, both special and general educators, have for students with ED. She felt that when students with ED were included they often had a GE teacher who did not understand their disability and lacked the instructional and behavioral skills to teach students with ED. She felt without proper behavioral supports and incentives, inclusion of these students will never work because the students would not receive all of the accommodations they need to be successful.

Helen. Helen has been teaching students with LD for eight years. Certified in Learning Disabilities, she is a co-teacher in a Social Studies class. She supports inclusion but felt it was the teacher who made all the difference when a student with ED was placed in inclusive settings. She found that many GE teachers were “without a clue” about how to manage these students. What she found missing from most inclusion programs was the much needed ongoing staff development that addressed “best practices” in inclusive settings. She felt more workshops and seminars were needed to help struggling teachers. Helen also felt that programs like the MMP were needed in all schools because students with ED lack a place to go when they want express themselves. “When students are in inclusion, they are doing all they can to hold it together until that bell rings. The MMP gives them that extra push to press on.”

Focus Group Data

Question one: What, if any, adaptations and accommodations were made for students with emotional disturbances (ED) in your classroom? “When you have a class of 30 kids, including a couple with behavior problems, you don’t have time to individualize or be too creative with lessons,” Karen said. All of the GE participants agreed with this statement. With the already increased demands placed on all teachers, when instructional accommodations were made, GE teachers stated they only made minor changes that would be made for any student such as restating directions, providing a model, guiding practice of the skill to be learned, preferential seating, modifying the grading scale, and providing an alternate location to complete an assignment. Major

changes such as differentiated lessons that required a more in-depth analysis were seen as too time consuming and almost impossible depending on the number of students in your class. All teachers wanted to do more but felt they had insufficient time to do it.

GE teachers also felt most students with ED did not require all of the instructional accommodations as prescribed by their IEP. GE teachers said they were compliant with the law about administering accommodations but felt overwhelmed in doing so. “To be honest, I haven’t looked at that sheet (referring to accommodations in IEP) since you gave it to me. That’s why I ask you to come over and help me out sometimes because sometimes it’s just too hard. I just don’t have time,” Karen said. “An inclusive classroom is not a self-contained classroom where the majority of the students have the same accommodations. It’s not easy sometimes. Sometimes we help keep these kids disabled,” Lisa commented. Lisa’s point reflected her concern about giving students with ED too many accommodations that they oftentimes did not need. The special education teachers agreed with her. “I take kids out to administer accommodations all the time but most of them hate it because they don’t want to seem different from other kids. Taking them out removes the inclusion piece these students work so hard to achieve,” Stephanie said.

In co-taught classrooms, when instructional accommodations were made, special education teachers stated that the most common accommodation was shortening assignments and re-teaching a previously taught skill. “Sometimes I reduced the number of math problems and graded them myself. The general education teacher trusted whatever I did.” The latter was viewed as a common practice for both special and

general education teachers because the special education teacher was seen as the expert in inclusive classrooms. The intention of this statement was to suggest that when the special education teacher graded assignments, effort was always taken into account.

All focus group participants agreed that the most important accommodation that can be made for students with ED were behavioral accommodations. Allowing students to return to a supportive environment for a cooling off period or to receive a pep talk was viewed as key to their survival in inclusion. “ED students need an outlet. Sometimes they need a few minutes just to get it together,” Andrea stated. Stephanie said, “Once he (referring to a student she had) calms down he’s my best student. You would never know he was a special education student. This is why they need time to get it back together.”

Special education teachers also agreed that the behavioral accommodations for students with ED is what made all the difference. “On many occasions I had to take students with ED outside the classroom for brief reminder talks about appropriate behavior because if I didn’t they were going to ‘lose it’ in front of the entire class.” Losing it meant losing control. All special education teachers agreed that they were always trying to teach students with ED how to act in an inclusive setting. “You have to practice self control in GE because we want you to stay included,” Helen said she use to tell her students. Zina stated she sometimes used point sheet to help students practice self control, “They needed something to keep their behavior under control, so at the end of the week I rewarded them for holding it together.” Zina viewed the use of a point sheet as a way of shaping the appropriate behavior. She further stated that “after a couple

of weeks, he did not need it anymore.” All special education teachers agreed that they had to “do what it takes” in order to help students with ED survive in inclusion.

Another example of a behavioral accommodation was the use of student Rap Sessions. Both GE and SE teachers felt the student Rap Sessions I conducted weekly with all students was an important tool in helping students keep it together. “Your kids depended on these sessions so that they could talk with someone about their problems,” said Andrea. Benita also commented, “They trusted you especially when they wanted to say something negative about their GE teacher.” “These kids knew who really cared and who didn’t,” Zina said.

In summary, all focus group participants admitted they did not make any major curricula adaptations for students with ED. Instructional accommodations were given to students only if their IEP prescribed it. The most important classroom accommodations were those that were behavioral in nature. Teachers relied on the use of the MMP and the student Rap Sessions to help students address their challenges. Both strategies were seen as valuable in helping students with ED be successful in inclusion.

Question two: When students with ED were assigned a consequence for inappropriate behavior, some inclusion teachers were not satisfied with the consequence given. What was your experience with consequences that were assigned to students you referred for disciplinary actions? “They’re good kids until they snap,” replied Karen. This comment, mentioned while Karen was walking away to get a glass of water, sparked

a lengthy discussion followed by additional hand gestures, and side discussions. All teachers were passionate about this subject.

All teachers responded unanimously that profanity and holding students accountable for their behaviors was something that could not be compromised. GE teachers particularly viewed profanity as the ultimate form of disrespect. Although special education teachers understood this was a characteristic often associated with students with ED, they viewed profanity as something that could be worked on. Karen said, “Profanity is totally unacceptable in GE. I know you all are ok with that in the Center, but we don’t go for that stuff over here.” GE teachers felt profanity was a behavior that needed to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. They were critical of any behavior that was seen as socially unacceptable, which is why profanity was a major concern. “Anything that damages or belittles a person’s self esteem or self worth is not acceptable,” Andrea said. In a very heated tone Karen continued this discussion by reflecting on a personal incident she remembered very vividly.

“When these kids are cussing you out, calling you a Mother Fucker at the top of their lungs, I took personal offense to that especially in front of my class. You can’t take humanity out of that! I’m still a human being ...being allowed to use a barrage of derogatory words and all you get is a talkin’ to or counseling followed by a lollipop because you didn’t use as many words as you typically do, and then you (referring to Center staff) send him back to class the very next day is ridiculous! That is unfair to the teacher.”

All GE teachers felt when profanity was used, especially when it was a part of an explosive episode (any situation that was filled with anger, screaming, throwing objects, fighting, etc) the incident needed to be followed up with a serious consequence, e.g. suspension. As Lisa stated regarding the need for consequences, “You disrupted the class, no one was able to learn, I wasn’t able to teach, and now you want to come back to class (Lisa appeared very angry –eyes started to tear) the next day as if nothing happened. There needs to be a consequence that everyone can see or the rest of class will start emulating the same behavior. “Come on, that destroys teacher credibility.” Stephanie mentioned her concerns about the effects such incidents have on general education students, “I agree with her. Now, the other kids don’t necessarily know you (referring to the disruptive student) have an emotionally disability, so if you can cuss me out, then I have 39 other students who can cuss me out as well, so I took exception to a child returning the next day as if no consequence was given. They must take ownership for what they did.” In this exchange with the entire focus group, Lisa was expressing her concern about the effects of this behavior on non-disabled students.

In another lengthy discussion about profanity, Benita continues this discussion by describing the difference between the values that are placed on fighting versus the use of profanity: “A fight between two students is different because it doesn’t personally affect others, but profanity obviously affects everyone because we all can hear it.” This comment led to another topic which was the use of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), an individualized written behavior plan that targets behaviors of concern. Both

GE and SE teachers felt the use of a FBA was needed especially when the behavior of concern was affecting the entire classroom.

In summary, GE teachers felt students with ED must be held accountable for inappropriate behavior displayed in an inclusive class. They felt no special treatment should be given to them. Whatever a GE students would receive if the same behavior was displayed, SE students should receive the same consequence as well. Any disruptive behavior that results in the disrespect of adults was viewed as intolerable. Although SE teachers equally agreed that the use of profanity was unacceptable in any classroom, they felt this behavior was associated with their disability therefore, a more creative consequence can be given other than suspension. GE teachers felt the use of profanity was the ultimate form of disrespect therefore, agreed that students with ED will continue to receive referrals.

Question three: After reading the teacher surveys given at the end of the year, many teachers requested additional information on students. What kind of information would be helpful? “Quite frankly I just want the scoop on kids. I need to know that grandma’s crazy, daddy is in incarcerated, and momma is on drugs—now I know why you’re not acting right,” Benita said. Benita and Lisa were the only two teachers who agreed with this quote. Benita continues the discussion, “This helps me understand why you’re (referring to the student) is not going to do anything in class today.” This narrative context was something the focus group participants wanted to have as a reason for why they wanted to give students a chance sometimes. There was also considerable

debate about whether being provided the “scoop” is actually a “good thing” to supply. David replies, “Personally, I never looked at that kind of stuff in their records because I felt as though it would prejudice me against the kid and if he’s mainstreamed I want to treat him like all of the other kids. Certain teachers I know would hold that stuff against students and just feel like, “He’s a waste (not literally) – the parents’ drug use is the reason the student is having problems in school.” For those teachers who were against receiving very personal information as just mentioned, they felt they would prefer information of this kind being communicated only if the coordinator felt it was important enough for them to know for some reason. All I need to know is the basics – academic stuff like their level of functioning. Helen commented, “If I needed to know anything else other than what was on that information sheet, I just relied on o’l Crystal (a comment that was meant to be endearing) to let me know what was really important.” All teachers were opposed to this confidential information being disseminated by hardcopy. GE teachers also were against the idea of being made to read each student’s personal file. “I don’t have time to read special ed files when I have 40 kids in a classroom,” said Karen.

In summary, all teachers agreed that a brief history of the student’s background prior to placement in inclusion is helpful. However, the majority of teachers disagreed on what this history should include. GE and SE teachers agreed that the student’s strengths and weaknesses, current level of academic functioning, and helpful hints about behaviors was sufficient information to share. Discussions about family members, certain medical issues, and so forth should be shared at the discretion of the parents. All teachers agreed

that too much information disseminated up front would be a violation or infringe upon the family's confidentiality.

Question four: Some teachers felt that students with ED must be "ready" before being placed in an inclusive classroom? How do you feel about that? What does "ready" mean to you? "Coming to class with your materials on a consistent basis and then sitting in your seat and doing your work without supervision, without consistent support or attention being drawn to yourself" was a consistent theme from teachers. Andrea said, "Ready means being independent." However, when Karen said, "If you come into my classroom and you don't have a book, paper, and pencil, you're not ready...you obviously don't know that you're coming into a learning environment?" After Karen's comment there was complete silence in the room for several seconds because the other teachers disagreed. Zina commented, "So, don't general ed students show up with no paper, no pencils and can't even spell the name of the class?" Karen responded with "not too many," which set the stage for a lengthy discussion on the differences between general education students and special education students. Although the comparisons continued for some time, most teachers agreed that students with ED "needed to be given a chance to prove they can do it."

In summary, all focus group participants agreed that students must be "ready" for inclusion. Teachers defined "ready" as being prepared for class daily, not requiring consistent supervision or support, and being able to behave in a manner that does not draw attention to oneself. With some exceptions, teachers felt students with ED should

mimic the preparation of a general education student. Teachers felt that students with ED should be able to positively relate to their peers and teachers the majority of the time.

Question five: How important is having a supportive environment for students with ED to return to when they need time to let off steam? How would you describe such supportive environments? What are the pros and cons to such a place? “Those kids need a place to let their hair down – to be themselves. It’s hard trying to keep it together for an entire day.” Helen comments. David replied, “...a place where there is a skilled adult to help them work through it.” When teachers were asked to describe a supportive environment, I began the discussion by using how the MMP was seen as such a place. I included in this discussion who I was and that my role was seen as the facilitator of such a place. With head shakes as if to understand what I was talking about, Zina said, “Ok, well it’s a place where behaviors are addressed, not a baby sitting job.” When I asked Zina to explain the babysitting job comment, she further stated how “some GE teachers just want to use you to house kids they don’t want to deal with; however, when it’s used right it is a great resource.”

The pros of a supportive environment consisted of the utility of such a place so that the student can calm down and return to the classroom. “I want them to get it together and come back to class.” said David. The cons represented the impact of time spent in this place on instruction especially when the student was out of the class for an extended amount of time. “If you’re going to be out of the classroom for a considerable amount of time for academic or emotional reasons, someone needs to re-access whether

this child is ready” (referring to being placed in an inclusion class) said Zina. All teachers agreed that if a student needed to go to a supportive environment during class time, it should not be any more than five minutes. Teachers felt five minutes was a sufficient amount of time because the student would not miss much instructional time on a regular basis. “You’re not ready if you take more than that. Having the Mainstream Mentoring Program told these kids, ok, I have somebody I can go to, somebody I can talk to, someplace I can vent. When you take that away from them, now the student says, now I got to go to class and not turn it out – I have no outlet so I’m going to get suspended and go home,” said Karen. The phrase “turn it out” means causing a ruckus to the point that everyone has to get involved. All teachers felt by not providing a supportive place, such as MMP, was doing students with ED a disservice.

In summary, all teachers felt that a supportive environment was critical to the process of inclusion. Teachers emphasized the need for students to have an outlet during the school day. Providing students with ED a place to go to not only seek assistance with the challenges associated with inclusion but also to get help in managing their disability was viewed as important to the students’ survival in GE. A trained professional to assist students when needed was viewed as important. Overall, not having a supportive environment for students with ED was seen as a disservice to them.

Question six: What type of training do you think you need to better educate/manage students with ED in your classroom? “Most teachers believe it’s not them, so they don’t need the in-service. I know how to teach; teachers want something

done with those kids, and they want it immediately,” Andrea said. Virtually all teachers felt they did not need any formal training. All teachers also recommended that administration provide an orientation at the beginning of the school and continue throughout the year with quick seminars to keep teachers abreast of strategies or important inclusion news.” In continuing her comment, Lisa says, “We’re already bombarded with so much and this is just something extra. The beginning of the year is crazy for us and then you go and put three to four kids with ED in it, come on; we need help!” Some teachers suggested that the district offer sensitivity training to GE teachers, an “understanding students with ED.” Teachers also wanted to see models of inclusion so that they can see what inclusion of these students look like. As a group they also agreed that they would prefer ED teachers conduct all training, not university or district personnel because as Zina put it, “Give me an hour long question-and-answer period with people that are currently experiences what I’m experiencing. I want to give scenarios and you tell me what to do. Tailor everything to what we’re dealing with now in the classroom.”

In summary, GE teachers felt they did not need any specialized training for inclusion. They acknowledged the benefits of additional training but felt their current pedagogy was sufficient for students with disabilities. However, teachers felt that if they ever needed training it should be accomplished through mini-workshops that are facilitated by other practitioners. They felt workshops should be in a question-and-answer format so that actual scenarios can be presented.

Question seven: What is an ideal number of students with ED in an inclusive classroom? How does having more than that number of students impact your classroom?

“You cannot put too many of them in a class. It will not work!” said Lisa. This was the predominant theme throughout the focus group session--whether the ideal number was one or two students with ED in an inclusive classroom. As Stephanie reflected on a previous experience, “I had three kids one time and they drove me crazy. I told Crystal she had to get that one fella out of my class because he was the leader of the pack and you know these kids (referring to students with ED), they feed off of each other. Soon I was going to have all of the class off task.” Both groups of teachers also felt it depends on the individual needs or severity of the behavior. The group recommended no more than one “heavy hitter” in a classroom. Zina said, “If a student with ED is quiet, reserved, or withdrawn, then you can have two of these types of students, but if he’s oppositional or defiant most of the time, then you don’t want no more than one of these students in your class. If you have five students with FBAs in an inclusion class that is a disaster waiting to happen.” There was also a brief discussion of those general education students who have been referred to special education but had not yet gone through the eligibility process yet of being considered for special education services. These students were seen as problematic in the classroom as well. Comments included, “If you have a couple of those, you really can’t have no more than one ED kid because all of the *not yet identified* students will make the situation worse.”

In summary, GE and SE teachers felt the number of students with ED placed in inclusion should be determined on an individual basis. This was viewed as an important factor to consider because too many students with ED in one class was considered detrimental to the class as a whole. The number of students placed in inclusion should be based on the severity level of the student's behavior. Teachers recommended that only one potentially aggressive student be in any given inclusion class. More than three students was viewed as too many behaviors to manage.

Question eight: What is your overall impression of the Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP)? “I thought the program was a big help to us and the kids,” Stephanie commented. Both GE and SE teachers felt the Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP) contributed much to the success of students as well as helped increase GE teachers' tolerance of special education students as a whole. Throughout the focus group teachers emphasized classroom support via the MMP as an important factor for inclusive schools. Andrea said, “See, I was there before this program. Prior to this program, we would not have had this many kids in the mainstream, trust me. We didn't know what to do with them.” Several teachers also mentioned how they noticed quite a bit of improvement in the lives of many students as a result of the program. As Karen reflected on the Mainstream Appreciation Luncheon, “The luncheon was the best part of the program (laughing). Watching those kids walking around so proud and serving us food, and doing their little skit was really nice. We appreciated their hard work. And you actually saw

them in a different environment.” GE teachers also said they were impressed at how well behaved the students were. Karen said, “It makes it all worth it in the end.”

Teachers were also pleased with the screening component of the MMP. “I thought the screening process was ideal. Sitting down with parents, having a general education teacher there, as well as the child so that the GE teacher could state expectations of her classroom was very comforting to me,” Andrea stated.

Another theme was how the coordinator acted as a liaison between the Center and general education. Teachers agreed that the constant involvement of the coordinator made a tremendous difference in their own perceptions of students with ED. “I thought your kids would never pass the dance unit but when you starting coming to class everyday helping them with the dance moves and taking them back to your office to practice, I said to myself – ‘man, they can actually do this stuff and they looked like they enjoyed themselves too. They received “As”, said Karen.

In summary, all teachers felt that the MMP was critical to the process of inclusion. Their overall impressions of the program revolved around the need for students to have a skilled person who is able to help students with ED reach their full potential. Teachers also felt my role as facilitator of the program was an essential piece to the complex world of students with ED. They felt the eventual success of the program would not have been possible without someone to help them through it. An additional topic they felt was important was the screening component of the program. Teachers felt although they were met with many challenges during the course of inclusion, they understood without this component, the inclusion process could have been a lot worse.

Focus Group Analysis

Data were analyzed from a symbolic interactionist perspective. In doing this analysis, I examined all data for articulation of symbols, motivations for action, perceptions and interpretations from all participants in the study. By understanding how the participants made sense of their experiences helped me understand their role better. It was my belief that such an understanding was essential to taking into account how teachers being studied interpreted the situations they faced since these situations shaped how they acted (Hammersley, 1990).

Since the focus group session was audio-taped, data analysis began with transcribing the 90 minute session that were recorded on a standard tape recorder. Included in transcription were additional notes that I took related to the side comments and gestures made during the focus group session that the tape recorder could not catch. The transcript was typed, double spaced, using Microsoft Word, a word processing program. There were a total of 18 pages of transcribed data once I completed the process.

To ensure accuracy of data obtained, member checking was accomplished two days after the session by scheduling follow-up telephone conferences with each participant. Since there was one part of the tape that was unrecognizable because one of the participants spoke softly, member checking was extremely important in this case.

The next step in the analysis process was to analyze the data related to each question separately. I began by reading each line of data per question and indexing it

with a word phrase that best captured what was stated. The findings below are represented in a discussion format per question from the focus group session.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter began with organizing the pre-existing data into four periods of time. Each period represented the experiences teachers faced during that time frame. The first period, “A Hectic Time,” was characterized by chaos and uncertainty. Teachers were not only bombarded with the many tasks associated with opening a school year but were also trying to deal with their personal fears due to lack of preparation and training to educate students with ED. During this time teachers also needed a considerable amount of support from the Mainstream Mentoring Program in managing student behaviors. The “Cool Down” period represented teacher adjustment. More teachers were utilizing suggested behavioral strategies for students with ED and they began working more collaboratively with me and their colleagues to help students be successful in their inclusive classes. “Back to the Drawing Board” represented a period of apprehension. Due to teacher anxiety regarding district-wide standardized testing, teachers’ tolerance levels for students with unique needs diminished considerably. Student referrals to timeout increased and teachers began questioning their commitment to inclusion. The “Signs of Growth” period was a time of renewal and reflection. Teachers seemed happier, student referrals decreased dramatically, their commitment to inclusion resurfaced, and good collegial relationships were formed. This was also a time

when teachers reflected on the inclusion process and its effect on them personally and professionally.

After organizing data into periods, eight categories emerged which represented the core issues teachers faced as they went through the process of inclusion. Supported by evidence from the data, the categories evolved into eight questions. A focus group was conducted with teachers who participated in the support program to give them an opportunity to clarify and elaborate on the issues identified.

Data from the focus group reported the following additional areas as important to the inclusion process. The first area was student readiness for inclusion. Focus group participants felt students with ED must be “ready” for inclusion prior to placement in general education settings. They defined “ready” as being able to demonstrate those skills needed for inclusive settings. Being prepared for class daily and not requiring much teacher support was considered “basic skills” needed for inclusion. The repetitive use of profanity or disrespect towards authority was viewed as examples of when students with ED were not “ready” for inclusion. Teachers felt student readiness and the severity of the student’s disability should be considered very carefully in order to avoid setting up students for failure in inclusive classrooms.

Second, teachers also felt students with ED needed a supportive environment to return to when they needed extra support. Having such a place was considered vital in supporting teachers who were at a loss in how to handle many special education issues that arose in the name of inclusion. The role of the coordinator in this process was extremely important during these times because teachers wanted a trained professional

(someone trained in emotional disturbances) to address students' issues. Teachers also felt this supportive environment was beneficial to them as well because they needed someone to vent their concerns and frustrations about inclusion to. Teachers felt having someone to collaborate with on an as needed basis was important to their personal survival in the inclusion process.

Third, teachers felt they did not need any additional training to do inclusion. Their current practices, which only included adaptations and modifications that required less time to implement, were sufficient for students with ED. However, they did acknowledge the benefits of periodic in-services that taught practical strategies. Teachers felt these in-services should be conducted by teachers or administrators in the field and that these in-services should be in a question/answer format so that "everyday" teacher concerns about inclusion could be addressed.

Finally, as it relates to consequences, teachers felt very strongly about students with ED receiving the same consequences that general education students receive if reprimanded for the same behaviors. An additional concern was the return of these students to their inclusion classroom the day after a major incident. Teachers felt students with ED should not be allowed to return to their inclusion class the day after a major incident because teachers wanted to "save face" in front of the rest of the class that witnessed the disruptive behavior. Class size was also mentioned under the area of consequences for students with ED because teachers felt too many students with ED was detrimental to the instructional process. Teachers felt the severity level of the disability

should be the determining factor in deciding how many students should be placed in inclusion.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This descriptive study explored the process of inclusion as experienced by teachers in a teacher support program designed to facilitate the inclusion of students with Emotional Disturbances (ED). It was guided by the following research questions: (1) What were the perceptions of general education teachers who participated in a teacher support intervention program regarding the inclusion of students with ED? (2) From the perspective of the participatory teachers, what factors contributed to the successful inclusion of students with ED? Through the analysis of pre-existing data and additional focus group data from the teachers in the program, themes were developed and explored.

Upon reflection on the data and its implications, three areas emerged for further discussion: the issue of student “readiness” for inclusion, the need for teacher support for inclusion, and teacher attitudes towards students with ED. Throughout the Mainstream Mentoring Program (MMP) teachers referred to students with ED being “ready” for inclusion when they were able to exhibit the standards of behaviors expected in a less restrictive environment (Nickerson & Brosol, 2003). Identifying skills needed to determine appropriateness for inclusion is significant in the inclusion process because these skills often do not mirror the unique needs of students with Emotional Disturbances (Nickerson & Brosol). Students with ED typically have poor work habits, make less academic progress, and have poor social skills that persist into adulthood (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001). The literature suggests that for students to acquire the needed skills for inclusion they must demonstrate acceptable levels of skill development

and receive social skills training (Simpson, 2004; Nickerson & Brosof, 2003) prior to candidacy for placement in inclusive settings. The results of this current study are consistent with the literature. General education teachers in this study tended to judge student readiness in relation to what a typical student without disabilities is capable of demonstrating. Defining student readiness as having good work habits, positive peer and adult relationships, and appropriate coping skills (Nickerson & Brosof, 2003) does not take into account the limited social and problem solving skills that are often characteristic of the disability.

The second predominant area, teacher support for inclusion, reflects those supports needed by GE teachers to assist them through the process of inclusion. Research reports that teachers have consistently blamed lack of support as the key barrier to successful inclusion (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000). Consistent with the literature, general education teachers in the MMP demanded generous levels of support (Idol, 1994) for the inclusion of students with ED and threatened to blame its failure on the lack thereof.

One form of support is in the management of students' behavior. Having the option to send students to a supportive environment (Heflin and Bullock, 1999) to not only work on their challenges with inclusion but to also work on those social skills that would hopefully transfer back to their inclusive classrooms (Nickerson & Brosof, 2003) is viewed as helpful to successful inclusion. Teachers were willing to accept a student with ED as long as the Center provided them with ongoing support throughout the inclusion process (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Simpson, 2004).

In the Mainstream Mentoring Program the coordinator's role in facilitating the inclusion was also seen as a vital support to the success of inclusion. Consistent with the literature, teachers wanted a trained professional to interact with challenging students and keep their behaviors from escalating (reversing or correcting the problem) as extremely helpful to the inclusion process. Teachers that felt supported by the coordinator, both interpersonally and task related, had more of a positive attitude for inclusion by the end of the program (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Such strategies as providing immediate counseling to students, daily communication with inclusion teachers, instructional and technical support for teachers, and behavioral strategies to help them manage students with ED in their classroom were all seen as the type of support needed for inclusion.

The need to support teachers by assisting them with instructional strategies for teaching students with ED is also essential for inclusion, as suggested by the literature (Idol, 2002). Research has indicated that when teachers demonstrate more competence in implementing instructional strategies, significant academic and social gains have been shown (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Consistent with the literature, teachers in the MMP were reluctant to make substantial modifications to their curriculum (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). They made more typical adaptations that required little to no change in usual teaching practices (Scott, et al., 1998). Teachers were more concerned about adaptations that relate to providing students with social and emotional support (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000) rather than academic support.

Supporting teachers through collaborative efforts is another form of assistance that teachers feel is vital to the process of inclusion (Idol, 2002; Keefe & Moore, 2004).

One way some teachers in this study felt supported was in having a special education co-teacher in their classroom or by being able to seek assistance from the coordinator about a variety of special education related issues. In the classroom teachers want help in the planning, instruction, and evaluation of students with ED. The literature is supportive of this approach because collaboration among general and special education teachers is viewed as vital to sustaining inclusion (Idol, 2002). Teachers in the study wanted to be able to exchange ideas, share knowledge, and gain insight from another's perspective. Teachers' positive perceptions about teaming and consulting with trained personnel seem to impact not only their willingness to support inclusion but also their capacity to communicate openly has been described as imperative to successful collaboration and inclusion (Malone, et al., 2001; Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001).

Training is another form of assistance teachers report as critical to their needs in the inclusion process (Avramidis & Norwich., 2000; Winter, 2006). The majority of teachers in the study felt they did not need any additional training; however, welcomed one-shot training sessions to address their frustrations with the realities of inclusion (Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000; Shade & Stewart, 2001). The literature highlights adequate teacher preparation (Avramidis & Norwich; Titone, 2005) as the key to developing positive attitudes towards inclusion. In order to assist teachers' perception of being able to meet the needs of students with ED, teachers need on-going professional development (Cook, et al., 2000) through in-service support.

The third predominant theme, teacher attitudes, reflects the attitudes held by GE teachers during the process of inclusion. The literature suggests that the success of

inclusion depends largely on the attitudes held by teachers (Lesyer & Tappendorf, 2001; Lambe & Bones, 2006). Since teachers are the key to sustaining inclusion, their beliefs will affect the implementation of inclusion on a daily basis (Avramidis & Norwich, 2000). Consistent with the literature are the views teachers shared in the MMP. Although not explicitly stated, teachers held negative attitudes about inclusion that underscore their lack of preparation and the confidence needed to teach students with special needs (Edmunds, 2003). Studies report that while general educators may philosophically support concepts of inclusion, many have concerns about their ability to implement these programs successfully (Van Reusen, et al., 2001). It becomes not only essential that teachers feel confident about their skills and competencies to effectively teach students, but also feel supported in doing so (Lombardi & Hunka, 2001).

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of teachers as they went through the process of inclusion. Understanding their unique experiences as teachers in a support program is a helpful contribution to the programming needs of students with ED in inclusive education. Much of the current research on inclusion of students with ED focuses on the perceptions of teachers in inclusion (Nickerson & Brosopf, 2003). However, there is also a need to identify successful inclusive delivery arrangements that promote inclusion (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

In this study, themes mentioned represent one school's efforts to identify the issues teachers face and to address them through a school-based program. If efforts to expand inclusive schooling for students with ED are to be successful, it becomes important to understand the issues faced by staff and students and how these issues affect the inclusion process. The results of this investigation reveal that overall there are many factors that must be taken into consideration when doing inclusion. The Mainstream Mentoring Program serves as a building block for expanding inclusion efforts of students with ED.

By the end of the school year, teachers in the Mainstream Mentoring Program became more reflective regarding their practices, felt comfortable discussing the issues faced, and were satisfied in areas in which they needed additional information, resources, or support. Many teachers acknowledged the challenges of teaching in inclusive classes, but generally they felt the themes and problems mentioned and addressed in this study enhanced their overall attitudes about inclusion. They also acknowledged that support received from a trained person in the field of ED such as the coordinator in the program was instrumental in allaying their apprehension about including students with ED in their classes. With only a few exceptions, teachers were firmly committed to inclusion. They saw it as a benefit not only to students but to themselves as well.

Implications from Research

The results of this study have some implications for program development of inclusive schools. Additional research is needed to carefully identify those skills needed

for students with ED to transition to inclusive settings. Research has identified variables that relate to successful inclusion such as good work habits, good peer and adult relationships, and coping skills; however, students with ED are often underrepresented in these studies (Nickerson & Brosol, 2003). If the expectation is to assist students in being “ready” or appropriate for inclusion, then research is needed to identify those skills that are unique to students with ED. Until we identify these skills and teach them accordingly, students with ED will continue to be placed in segregated settings.

Examining the setting demands of the general education classroom is also an essential step in furthering our knowledge of the needed skills for inclusion. Investigating classroom factors that may affect the academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students with ED is essential if we want to identify and teach the skills needed for students with ED to transition to inclusive settings. Examining the behaviors of these students in combination with the setting in which they occur can provide a clear understanding of the demands prior to candidacy.

Additional implications are in the area teacher education. Research suggests that teacher education and training are critical to the success of inclusionary programs (McKeskey, Henry, and Axelrod, 1999). Studies indicate that resistance to inclusion is less when teachers have acquired special education training through pre-service or in-service programs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Winter, 2006). The literature also suggests that when teachers have little or no special education background, they should be provided on-going staff development and training opportunities along with instructional support to offset their anxiety or frustration about inclusion (Van Reusen, et

al., 2001). These researchers further suggest that such training should focus on the expectations and components of inclusive classrooms and provide teachers with demonstrations on specific instructional procedures and tools before and during implementation of inclusive program (Van Reusen, et al., 2001). Research should continue to study designing undergraduate and graduate training programs to ensure that both pre-service and in-service teachers are prepared for inclusive education

Finally, additional research is needed regarding the students' perceptions of inclusion. Their perception of the process of inclusion can be a valuable tool in assisting practitioners to plan better for inclusive education in such areas as curriculum accommodations and "best practices." In combination with what we already know about inclusion, student perceptions may provide insight into changes that might aid in the process.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Survey

1. Did you feel prepared to educate our students?
2. What instructional adaptations did you make to accommodate our students? If so, list.
3. What are the particular challenges you experienced that would help us better support you next year?
4. In order to better educate our students, what areas of training do you need?
5. Overall, did you find MMP useful?
6. Please list any other suggestions that would strengthen MMP.

Appendix B: Student Survey

1. Did you feel MMP helped you be successful in your inclusion class?
2. Did you benefit from bi-weekly rap sessions?
3. Did you feel you “belonged or fit in” in your inclusion class?
4. Did you enjoy your class?
5. Is there anything you would like to add that could help the program for next year?

About the Author

Crystal Williams Harmon has been a teacher/leader of students with emotional disturbance for nearly 20 years. Her research interests include inclusive school development, leadership in inclusive settings, and research and policy for students with emotional disturbance.