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Special Education Teachers' Instructional Practices for High School Students with Developmental Disabilities

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2020

Abstract

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MA, University of New Mexico, 1993

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Students with developmental disabilities (DD) require intensive instruction from special education teachers to obtain functional skills. At the high school level, special education teachers' instructional practices for this significant population have rarely been studied by researchers. Using Vygotsky's social development theory as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD. Participants were 10 public high school special education teachers who had skills and experience implementing instructional practices for students with DD. Data were gathered through open-ended, face-to-face interviews. Analysis of the data revealed instructional practices that could be grouped together in multiple themes. Participants specified numerous instructional practices for the classroom and the community; yet, all 10 special education teachers separately emphasized professional development is vital to gain effective instructional practices. The results from this study promote positive social change by informing high school special education teachers about additional, effective instructional practices for students with DD; consequently, students with DD will increase their learning skills with everyday experiences and the community will obtain positive community contributors.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to special education teachers who work daily with high school students with developmental disabilities. I honor their perseverance, motivation, and steadfast determination to promote the best in every student who crosses their classroom threshold.

Acknowledgments

It is with my sincerest appreciation to acknowledge those who supported me through this doctoral journey. First, I give thanks to God for listening to my cares and concerns when having to make tough choices that often left me out of life's activities for the past nine years. He provided strength to my weak moments and hope to my bleak feelings. I give thanks to my parents, Robie and Maxine, my husband Philip, and my children and their spouses, Nicholaus and Sarah, Terri and Phil. My sister in Christ, Terry Beard, who listened to my endless chatter about my study at all hours. My entire family, without their constant support, love, and acceptance of my choice to study versus share time with them, I reached my goal. A big thanks to my place of employment for their encouragement during my doubts of completion, and thank you Vanessa Bekarciak, my Director, for helping me get to the finish line. A special thanks to Dr. Candice Burke, she has been by my side through this journey as my sounding board, editor, and friend. A big thank you to Pamela Bennett Bardot, a library specialist extraordinaire, I was fortunate to have in my corner. A big thank you to the district administrators and participants who allowed me to borrow their time so I can complete my study. Last, and deserving of full recognition, my doctoral committee. Dr. Gaddy, my mentor and chair, who has been my guiding light for several years and always directed me on what needs to be done and reminded me, without any doubts, that I can and will complete my doctoral journey. I thank you tremendously, Dr. Jameson, for joining my committee at the tail end of the journey. You are a phenomenal methodologist. Dr. Hedegard, my URR, who delivered the expertise that pushed me forward to completion

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Students with developmental disabilities (DD) require intensive instruction from special education teachers to obtain and learn life skills so they may become community contributors (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Sometimes special education teachers are assigned students with DD with complex needs (e.g., nonverbal, behavior, low cognition), and some teachers may not possess effective instructional practices to meet their students' needs in the classroom. Cheryan, Ziegler, Plaut, and Meltzoff (2014) found special education teachers' instructional practices inhibit the progress of students with DD, resulting in a barrier to students' postgraduation success.

In 1996, New Jersey implemented a set of standards called the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), an outline of courses taught by educators to facilitate (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014). The CCCS taught by teachers is a large part of the school curriculum for all students, including students with disabilities (NJDOE, 2017). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, a significant law that is recognized by educators requiring instruction for all students with disabilities, may include the CCCS program and other specific programs implemented by special education teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The IDEA also includes a requirement that local school districts implement specific programs that are outlined in the students' Individualized Education Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Later, in 2004, the IDEA of 1997 was amended to include a requirement that special education services be designed to support students with disabilities by implementing

programs in the school offering job sampling and instruction to obtain relevant skills to encourage independent adulthood for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). An abundance of requirements has triggered special education teachers to adapt their instructional practices to assist students, so the students may obtain equitable opportunities for education.

Not aware of programs and the relevant instructional practices to support students with DD, special education teachers head into a new school predicting problems that may occur (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015). In search of answers, special education teachers may seek advice from other educators. Many special education teachers still do not know various instructional practices to support students with DD and describing how special education teachers implement instructional practices for students with DD is progressive (Ruppar et al., 2015) and will fill a gap in research literature.

This first chapter contains a discussion of the background of the study, problem statement, the purpose of the study, the central research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and the summary.

Background of Study

Some special education teachers are relied upon to instruct high school students with DD using a curriculum with their learned instructional practices (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). Special education teachers select instructional practices and individual programs for their students with DD; however, it is not clear how they choose the programs and how they use their instructional practices to implement the programs

(Ruppar et al., 2015). In a case study, Mirenda (2014) identified multiple challenges for special education teachers in their implementation of instructional practices that may hamper outcomes for students with DD, including not only a lack of awareness of programming, curriculum, and instructional practices, but also minimal knowledge of educational student supports. Special education teachers' implementation of instructional practices to support their students with DD in the classroom is reliant on continued teacher development in several areas, including student supports (Mirenda, 2014).

There is current research available regarding programs and curriculum for students with DD (Ruppar et al., 2015); however, how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD remains unexplored. Many educators know students with DD will benefit from instructional practices from a special education teacher using a functional program and a curriculum; however, to learn how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD remains vital (Bouck, 2012; Plotner & Dymond, 2017). Some special education teachers continue at a disadvantage without the skills and knowledge of how to implement instructional practices for high school students with DD (Plotner & Dymond, 2017). I conducted this qualitative descriptive study to address how special education teachers implemented instructional practices for high school students with DD.

Background research identifying special education teachers' evidence-based instructional practices for students with DD in a high school classroom is sparse. For this study, I located extant literature on instructional practices relating to special education published within the last 5 years. For example, it is beneficial for special education

teachers to use instructional practices to communicate expectations to classroom students, including giving directions for activities, explaining subject matter, and other various ways to connect with students (Nagro, deBettencourt, Rosenberg, Carran, & Weiss, 2017). For 2 years, Vaughn et al. (2015) examined interventions used by teachers to support students' comprehension of classroom literature. These interventions impacted high school students' performance. Hudson, and Browder (2012) also focused on the comprehension of students with mild to moderate DD and the instructional practices implemented. These researchers highlighted instructional practices such as reading aloud to promote literacy along with the use of graphic organizers to encourage questions from students (Mims et al., 2012). Ledford and Wehby (2015) studied students' behavior and learning when instructed in small groups; however, the population did not include high school students with DD. Bechtolt, McLaughlin, Derby, and Belcher (2014) examined direct instruction using strategies such as flashcards with young students. Their study contained valuable instructional practices but did not include students with DD in a high school classroom. Some special education teachers are aware of instructional practices; however, research designed to address how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD has not been addressed in current literature.

The extant, peer-reviewed literature contains considerable emphasis on special education in relation to the topics of focus in this study. An exhaustive review of research revealed some instructional practices but also indicated support for professional development and identified students with DD are exposed to education in one setting

over another (e.g., preschool, elementary, middle, and high school). Nevertheless, research on how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD remains relatively rare. This qualitative descriptive study was needed because special education teachers who know how to instruct this vulnerable population had not yet been studied.

Problem Statement

Researchers have conducted studies on special education teachers' instructional practices in the classroom; however, the setting where the instruction occurs (inclusion, resource room, etc.) for students with DD did not address the research question: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD (Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015). In the literature, the reasons why special education teachers lack instructional practices (e.g., absence of professional development) and inadequate instruction tended to focus on instruction in primary grades (Bechtolt et al., 2014; Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016). The problem remains that some special education teachers who teach high school students with DD do not know how to implement instructional practices for high school students with DD (Breeman et al., 2015; Cheryan et al., 2014; Mirenda, 2014). Instructional practices for high school students with DD have not yet been explored in the literature. The results of this qualitative, descriptive study answered the research question, contributed to research, and promoted positive social change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. A qualitative approach was suitable to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD through interviews, whereas a quantitative methodology would not have allowed for inquisitive flexibility (see Patton, 2015).

Central Research Question

How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework of this qualitative, descriptive study was Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Vygotsky believed learning happens before development. In other words, Vygotsky's theory largely advocates that instructional practices will support the student's development (Clara, 2017). Vygotsky's social development theory heightens a gap between students' preexisting development and learning and student accomplishment when helped by others. This gap is defined as the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky proposed that proper instructional practices raise students' ability through the ZPD and as individuals learn they begin to demonstrate personal development. For example, students with DD may not be able to sort items by color independently, and it would take many attempts, but they may be able to complete the task of sorting due to interaction with a special education teacher's assistance. Through special education teachers' instructional practices, students

might learn and develop skills. Using Vygotsky's social development theory, the development and learning of students with DD takes place within the ZPD and learning advances with special education teachers improved instructional practices for students with DD.

Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory applies to the development and learning of individuals, like special education teachers and their students. Special education teachers assigned to high school students with DD instruct the students with DD by using their own instructional practices to encourage student learning. However, as time progresses, some special education teachers' instructional practices do not positively impact the learning of students with DD, and these special education teachers are at a loss on how to implement new instructional practices (Cheryan et al., 2014). The results of this study present special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD and add to the literature concerning special education teachers' instructional practices in a special education classroom.

The framework of Vygotsky's theory aligned with the research question addressing special education teachers' instructional practices for students with DD. For instance, instructional practices for varied subjects were used in the classroom to encourage small group or individual learning to support high school students with DD in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978). Every student has their ZPD, and special education teachers must plan accordingly to address students' ZPDs by implementing instructional practices.

Nature of Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. There has been recent research conducted on instructional practices for students with DD; however, there is sparse research describing special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD (Mirenda, 2014). Special education teachers benefit from professional development to improve their instructional practices implemented for students with DD who are assigned to their classroom (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Answering the research question of this study will contribute to current literature for future training of special education teachers who work with high school students with DD.

The goal of this qualitative, descriptive study was to determine how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD. I collected data by conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews with participants who instruct high school students with DD. The sample comprised special education teachers employed by a public high school in New Jersey. The interview questions for all participants addressed the central research question in the study (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview occurred in a nonacademic environment to avoid any biases and inspire a supportive conversation between the interviewer and the participant (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Definition of Terms

The following terms and their operational definitions were used in this study.

Developmental disabilities: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013) described a developmental disability as being a severe, long-term disability that may affect cognitive ability, physical functioning, or both.

High school (n.d.): A school setting, especially in United States, usually including Grades 9–12 or 10–12. In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. Retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/high%20school.

Instructional practices: Knirk and Gustafson (1986) asserted the term *instructional* is an activity relating to teaching and learning. The term *practices* refer to an action implemented by special education teachers and implies positive outcomes for students with disabilities (Cook & Odom, 2013, p. 135).

Learning: According to Vygotsky (1978) the definition of learning includes mental developmental stages that become a necessary part of development.

Life skills: These skills, commonly referred to as adaptive skills, include conceptual (literacy, money, and time), social (interpersonal, relationships, and problem solving) and practical skills (personal care, health, safety, and daily activities) as the life skills domains of instruction provided for students with DD (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017).

Professional development: Kauffman and Badar (2014) found that professional development supports the growth of special education teachers' instructional practices, specific to a student with DD.

Self-contained classroom: A specialized setting where a special education teacher practices the most intensive and evidence-based practices in all subject areas to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Bettini, Cumming, Merrill, Brunsting, & Liaupsin, 2017)

Special education: Shyman (2015) described special education being designed and implemented, in many ways, as a subsystem within the greater educational system to ensure the functioning of the real educational environment; however, Kauffman and Badar (2014) noted students with disabilities are entitled to education that affirms their dignity and develops their capabilities.

Zone of proximal development (ZPD): Vygotsky (1978) described the concept of ZPD as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving of a child and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or with peers that are more capable.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included that all potential participants were truthful and sincere when providing answers to the interview questions. I also assumed that all participants had experience instructing high school students with DD. Finally, it was assumed that all participants agreed to be interviewed to help support the research and did not have another reason to do so, such as influencing peers or administration.

Scope and Delimitations

The setting of this qualitative, research study was multiple New Jersey public school districts. The scope of the study addressed special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Terminology applied in this study was specific to the topic of the research and the qualitative, descriptive approach. The results of this study could also be relevant to other populations. Recent research on instructional practices for students with DD had been conducted; however, there is sparse research that explores special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD.

The delimitations for this study were as follows. Participants had to be certified special education teachers instructing students with DD for at least 3 years and their place of instruction had to be in a public high school classroom. The study was conducted in three large, public-school districts in New Jersey; therefore, another delimitation was location. Lastly, I used Vygotsky's social development theory as the conceptual framework.

Limitations

I identified three limitations of this study. The first limitation was the use of the qualitative method to obtain in-depth data through an open-ended, semistructured interview process, which limited the type of data collected. Another limitation was that I was the only coder of the data, which encouraged researcher bias and may limit credibility. The final limitation was the participants' availability and responses to interview questions. This limited the time necessary to conduct the interviews.

Significance of the Study

Recent research on instructional practices for students with DD is available; however, there was sparse research that explored special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. The results from this study contribute to literature, answer the research question, and promote positive social change.

By exploring and describing special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD, the findings of this study may increase and improve special education teachers' instructional practices and increase the access of students with DD to effective instructional practices in high school classrooms. Special education teachers instruct students with DD on daily functional skills, especially life skills (Kauffman & Badar, 2014). The preparation of special education teachers with instructional practices that will help students with DD obtain life skills remains a core issue (Kauffman & Badar, 2014; Kolvoord, Charles, & Purcells, 2014). Additional instructional practices for special education teachers who work with students with DD will enable students with DD to develop life skills necessary to become adult community contributors like their nondisabled peers (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014; Maccini, Gagnon, Mulcahy, & Wright, 2013). The preparation and improvement of special education teachers will increase their efficiency in instruction specifically executed for students with DD by reviewing instructional practices for this significant population (Carter et al., 2014).

For special education teachers to provide instructional practices, opportunities to learn more about instructional practices being offered throughout the year remains

relevant. Instructional practices will support special education teachers who work determinedly with students with DD (Galey, 2016). Understanding what instructional practices are implemented daily to conduct a program for students with DD deserves recognition and credit from administrators.

Special education teachers' skills become obsolete after a couple of years of instruction (Kolvoord et al., 2014). Therefore, exploring special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD is necessary to replace obsolete instructional practices.

Summary

Special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD often lack instructional practices to instruct this vulnerable population of learners (Breeman et al., 2015; Cheryan et al., 2014; Knight, Huber, Kuntz, Carter, & Juarez, 2019; Mirenda, 2014). When teachers in special and general education classrooms receive professional development, their instructional practices may effectively enhance the learning and promote positive postgraduation outcomes for high school students with DD (Breeman et al., 2015; Kauffman & Badar, 2014; Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). The findings of this qualitative, descriptive study revealed instructional practices that can be used to assist high school special education teachers working daily with students with DD as well as contribute to research in the field of special education.

Chapter 2 will include a literature review and synthesis of current information on special education teachers' instructional practices in a classroom for students with DD. I will also provide an analysis of the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's social

development theory and relevant support from key researchers. Chapter 2 will also contain an emphasis on general and special education teachers, instructional practices, classrooms, students with DD, and the learning of students with DD.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Urbach et al. (2015) discussed special education teachers' instructional practices and professional development being crucial to meeting students' needs. Often, special education teachers who teach high school students with DD and diverse needs may not possess instructional practices to support these students in their classroom (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Urbach et al. found elementary and secondary teachers displayed an improved positive attitude after attending a professional development addressing their need.

Williams and Dikes (2015) found most special education teachers who often perceived complications (e g., instructing a life skills program) in their professional assignment for the upcoming year relied on support, such as professional development, to implement daily instructional practices. Some special education teachers quickly develop feelings of strife when they are at a loss on how to teach students with DD daily and may appear ineffective throughout the year; professional development may lessen special education teachers' strife. Pennington and Courtade (2015) emphasized that if students with DD are to learn essential life skills, most special education teachers will benefit from gaining access to information about instructional practices.

The problem under study was some special education teachers do not know various instructional practices for high school students with DD. Special education teachers with instructional practices for high school students with DD will positively

impact this significant population's skill and their learning (Gilson, Carter, & Biggs, 2017).

Current Literature and the Problem

The gap between special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD and special education teachers' knowledge of instructional practices for this significant population was the problem under study (see Urbach et al., 2015). The amount to students with DD who have not established life skills during their educational experience prior to graduation gives support to why the problem is relevant. Through professional development conferring current literature about instructional practices for high school students with DD, special education teachers can help students with DD by implementing new instructional practices that can be generalized to other settings during the day (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014).

Literature Search Strategy

To locate literature for this review, I used the following databases, accessed through the Walden University Library: SAGE, ProQuest Central, Educational Resources Information Center, Journal Storage Digital Library, Elton B. Stephens Company full-text, Springer Open, Taylor and Francis Online. Scholarly books and journals accessible through ELSEVIER and Wiley Online Library were also used. Google Scholar also provided the ability to access scholarly research articles for this study. To conduct an exhaustive search, I used the following key terms and phrases: *special education, special education teacher, instructional practices, high school, developmental disabilities, professional development*, *learning, life skills, self-contained classroom*, *instructional*

practices in high school, developmental disabilities and special education, special education teachers and training, professional development, zone of proximal development, student learning, life skills and high school, and *self-contained classroom and special education classroom*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Vygotsky addressed the development of intelligence in individuals and emphasized that thinking and learning occur with actual relationships between other people. Students with DD working in a proximity to a special education teacher is as paramount as the instructional practices special education teachers use to support the learning of students with DD; however, research revealed that professional development remains a key part to informing special education teachers how to implement instructional practices for students with disabilities, particularly students with DD (Kauffman & Bader, 2014; Urbach et al., 2015). For 40 years, Vygotsky's social development theory has stimulated instructional practices and their implementation by special education teachers. A brief review of these classroom models follows to help support this qualitative study.

In the social development theory, Vygotsky (1978) addressed the development of intelligence and emphasized thinking occurred in everyday experiences that children had with others. Vygotsky described the social development theory as social interactions between a teacher and a student as well as student to student in a setting such as a

classroom. This on-going social interaction encourages students' development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, in the theory of cognitive development, developed before the social development theory in 1978, Vygotsky (1962) noted student development depended upon the student's ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) also included ZPD as another aspect of the social development theory, explaining ZPD as the development of skills portrayed by the student in learning a new task as well as the ability to solve a task under the guidance of a teacher or collaboration with other students.

Students' learning occurs because of their teachers' knowledge and their ability to teach students (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) strongly believed the development of cognition is essential, and learning is a necessity to the human function of students with DD to become productive citizens in the community.

Vygotsky's social development theory aligned with the methodology and the central research question of this qualitative, descriptive study. Throughout life, Vygotsky, as most teachers, continued to advocate for students with disabilities and their learning (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky took an exceptional interest in students with DD and explored and implemented approaches to support students with DD learning (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) believed interacting in learning communities involved the teacher and the students and posited that language was the main tool in the classroom that promoted student thinking, reasoning, and classroom activities. Active learning communities involving student-to-student or teacher-to-student collaboration are critical to promote student learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, when high school students

with DD are engaged in a special education teachers' instructional practice during classroom time, the students will develop skills through social interaction.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD is a level of development reached when children engage in social interaction and learn from this engagement. Initially, ZPD focused on language, learning, and cognitive stimulation; however, later applications of the Vygotsky's framework have been broader (Wertsch, 1985). For Vygotsky's ZPD to develop in all children, communication with each other must happen. For example, an instructional practice implemented by some special education teachers maybe working side by side with a student during math; this collaboration between the teacher and the student near each other would be considered ZPD. Vygotsky developed the idea that the potential for learning in students, particularly students with DD, depends upon the ZPD.

Vygotsky's social development theory was relevant to the current study exploring special education teachers' instructional practices because the theory highlights the fundamental role in the development of learning through instructional practices (see Wertsch, 1985). The exploration of special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD shows the interconnection between the special education teacher and the student with DD. This connection between both individuals surpasses what can be attained when either works alone (Wertsch, 1985).

Because there were research articles containing special education teachers' instructional practices for younger students with DD, a focus on special education teachers' instructional practices for older students with DD was suitable and beneficial for this descriptive, qualitative study (see Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016).

The constructs in the findings of this study contained special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Moreover, I expected that a comprehensive study exploring special education teachers' instructional practices would positively affect the field of special education by contributing to the literature. Next, in the literature review that follows, I discuss teachers, special education teachers, and the learning of students with DD.

Literature Review

Teachers

School administrators and others have to think about considerable improvement in education, such as special education teachers' instructional practices in the classroom (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). Some special education teachers, like their counterparts, have to learn practices and procedures that support students and often are not trained (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). To understand if teachers are prepared for the classroom to implement effective instructional practices, Mitchell (2011) conducted a mixed methods study to determine the outcome of various instructional practices used by special educators and the frequency of their use. Through multiple observations, Mitchell compared instructional practices coupled with response-to-intervention applications by various teachers and discovered the desires of special education teachers in kindergarten to Grade 6: (a) a clear definition when implementing a program such as response to intervention in a classroom; (b) better time management skills; (c) an opportunity to learn how to lead classroom paraprofessionals; and (d) occasions to practice, observe, and give feedback to other staff members on instructional practices.

Since all teachers are charged with the development of skills in all students, instructional practices should be planned and implemented to encourage learning whenever possible (Karvonen, Wakeman, Flowers, & Moody, 2013). Karvonen et al. (2013) found students eligible to take alternate achievement tests were exposed to gaps in academic instruction. These differences occurred in all academic areas (e.g., math, science, and language arts), and ideally, professional development would help teachers instruct pedagogical skills in all academic areas. Despite being 10 years after No Child Left Behind had been implemented, Karvonen et al. noted there remained a need to gather additional instructional practices for special education teachers who work with students with DD.

Despite reigning qualities in a teacher and a stimulating classroom environment, the lack of confidence in instructional practices affects students' classroom learning (Breeman et al., 2015). Breeman et al. (2015) examined associations between teacher characteristics, social relationships, and students' classroom adjustments, specifically students with emotional disturbances. Their findings came from two models regarding student learning and performance and included: (a) student social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment was predicted by teacher-student-peer interactions; (b) student outcomes (i.e., peer interactions and classroom performances) were predicted by teacher well-being and competence; and (c) overall teacher-student-peer interactions were predicted by teacher competence and comfort of student. Despite the study utilizing a quantitative methodology with a questionnaire at the elementary level, the results of their study support the current qualitative study. Breeman et al. discovered teacher well-being

and competence were best predicted by classroom levels of student behavior and performance. Students with DD (e.g., autism spectrum or oppositional defiant disorder) may present psychiatric problems and inhibit special education teachers' well-being and competence, striking a barrier between teacher-student-peer relationships and student performance. The findings from their study provided a comprehensive overview between teachers' characteristics, social relationships, and student performance. Breeman et al. suggested that for special education teachers' well-being and competence to implement classroom practices, improving opportunities to positively impact all teachers, specifically special education teachers, remain vital.

Special education teachers often attend professional development anticipating growth and improvement in their instructional practices; however, training may not be relevant to special education teachers (Ainscow, 2013). Ainscow discussed the removal of self-contained instructional settings for students with disabilities and emphasized learning groups should be together and not separate. Such approaches are commendable; however, the reality remains students with DD often learn in a separate setting; therefore, there remains a need for special education teachers to obtain instructional practices for high school students with DD that are not in the general education setting.

Special Education Teachers

Teacher preparation is significant regardless of the classroom setting, and the administration must continually strive toward preparing special education teachers (Scheeler et al., 2016). Special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD are unique as they work daily with a vulnerable population to produce student

learning. In their research, Scheeler et al. (2016) explored traditional and innovative methods of enhancing knowledge and teaching skills for teachers that depend on evidence-based practice. The gap that they stressed in their research and promoted in their findings accentuated the importance of on-going special education teacher training using evidence-based practice to acquire and implement in their classrooms. Scheeler et al. emphasized in their research the importance of on-going teacher development is vital to the learning of students with DD and requires that special education teachers have access to the most current and operative tools and experiences available.

There is evidence from the past 30 years school systems have struggled to sustain their special education teachers in their schools, particularly special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD (Mason-Williams, Frederick, & Mulcahy, 2015). Kucharczyk et al. (2015) reported during their qualitative study most high school level teachers need to be better prepared for the demands in the classroom through comprehensive interventions. Kucharczyk et al. found in their study of special education teachers across four states many instructional practices implemented to promote students with DD are taught with typical students as well with students with disabilities. Kucharczyk et al. presented themes based on their qualitative research. Some critical themes included absence of administrative support, defined roles of the teachers and para-professionals, access to training and suitable programs for students with DD all ranked high with the participants (Kucharczyk et al., 2015). Some special education teachers, like their counterparts such as other staff members, take on many roles in addition to being a teacher who implements daily instructional practices, and some are

concerned about their skill level (Kucharczyk et al., 2015). Additionally, Kucharczyk et al. highlighted the gap in teacher knowledge regarding instructional practices, awareness of disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder and professional development training maybe barriers for students' learning. This study aligned with this current study based on the recommendations for additional research to understand the experiences of high school special education teachers in classrooms instructing students with DD.

High school students with DD will benefit from special education teachers' instructional practices and a curriculum supporting the state CCCS when taught by a certified special education teacher who focuses on student learning and is equipped with instructional practices. Ruppar, et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore how special education teachers' beliefs and contexts affects their instructional decisions in a literacy program for high school students with DD. Ruppar et al. discovered from more than one secondary special education teachers' viewpoints about curriculum or program establishment varied as much as their use of instructional practices for students with DD in high school programs. Ruppar et al. explained before a discussion is held about a curriculum or a program for students with DD, there remains a need to discuss teachers' viewpoints about their capabilities to instruct any curriculum or program. Ruppar et al. uncovered in their qualitative study that most high school special education teachers who instruct students with DD coordinate their instructional practices for a program to meet the needs of students with DD. The methodology implemented by Ruppar et al. consisted of interviews, documents, and observations, which provided data to analyze what establishes the curriculum or program for special education teachers that

is then supported by their use of instructional practices. Ruppar et al. identified decisions about curriculum and program supported by special education teachers' instructional practices were based upon: (a) context, (b) beliefs about students, teaching, and learning; (c) expectations of students, and (d) teachers' self-efficacy. Professional training and experiences were discussed in depth, and each teachers' instructional practices varied depending upon their years of experience and exposure to professional development. Ruppar et al. purpose of their qualitative study was to examine how special education teachers' beliefs and contexts influence their instructional decisions in a literacy program for high school students with DD.

Cheryan et al. (2014) noted special education teachers' instructional practices might influence student learning, such as attainment of life skills by students with DD. Students' with DD who complete their educational entitlement without life skills, may experience a barrier to opportunities like social, leisure, and career development post-graduation. Cheryan et al. found enhancing student learning with the physical classroom environment (e.g., wall décor, lighting, seat arrangement, proximity to a teacher, and educational objects) will improve student achievement during their learning, especially for the most vulnerable students. In a life skills program, students with DD benefit from having their classroom surroundings reflect everyday life activities which are reinforced through instructional practices. Developing a classroom environment and implementing the instructional practices required to promote the learning of students with DD may indicate a need for special education teachers to receive additional support.

Special Education Teachers' Challenges

Historical trends in curriculum and program identification for students with DD have evolved with consideration of school program ensuring student learning (McLeskey et al., 2014; Ruppar et al., 2015). However, Pennington and Courtade (2015) found many special education teachers, instructing students with DD in a school program, lacked the instructional practices to implement any provided programs, either CCCS or life skills or both, despite access to training and professional development.

Mirenda (2014) affirmed challenges for special education teachers in their instructional practices might affect student learning such as awareness and knowledge about technology. There is an understanding that special education teachers' work is a complex daily endeavor; however, training for special education teachers to acquire instructional practices remains overlooked (Ruppar et al., 2015). Pennington and Courtade (2015) confirmed through observations of self-contained classrooms that more research is needed to describe actual instructional practices in educational contexts for students with DD. Pennington and Courtade found a decrease in literature specifically for self-contained secondary special education teachers who instruct students with DD. Since Pennington and Courtade, as well as, Kurth, Born, and Love (2016) research highlighted concerns regarding secondary classroom practices implemented by special education teachers, this study will specifically recruit secondary special education teachers who instruct students with DD.

The relevance of special education teachers' knowledge of instructional practices for students with DD remains a gap (Kurth et al., 2016). Kurth et al. discovered in their

observation of special education teachers that some were frequently observed engaging in no teaching behavior (e.g., talking to paraprofessionals and working on a computer; 47%) Moreover, Kurth et al. noted special education teachers engaged in limited practices when instructing high school students with DD. Limited instructional practices included read silent, read aloud, watch a topic, listen to an adult or peer, or go on a computer. Kurth et al. conjectured extra time afforded staff the ability to talk to one another (34%) and the talk to one another promoted environmental distractions not only for staff but for the students. The self-contained classrooms were often passive and besieged with distractions affected by few instructional practices (Kurth et al., 2016). Even though teachers who participated in the study claimed, they demonstrated high- quality practices; Kurth et al. described the special education teachers' instructional practices as passive and were often taught by ill-trained classroom paraprofessionals using a curriculum that appeared inadequate. A focus on special education teachers, particularly who remain in special education classrooms such as self-contained classrooms, will alter the course of instructional practices and may support students with DD learning. The evidence continued to indicate there was a need to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD.

Engaged Learners and the Environment

Despite the classroom setting, the learning of students with DD requires daily instructional practices by special education teachers (Scott, Hirn, & Alter, 2014). For instance, Scott et al. (2014) reiterated Rosenshine and Berliner (1978) study, the former researcher's acclaimed student learning happened when the students with DD were

engaged in the full lesson and experienced success. Scott et al. asserted in their research of multigrade levels teachers' instructional practices affect student engagement and student behavior; therefore, comprises student learning in a productive classroom environment. Student's response to the special education teacher's instructional practice will be an indicator of a lesson's success despite the setting highlighted by Scott et al. Thus, Scott et al. concluded instructional practices must be included daily in the classroom setting and not reserved only for lessons to promote student success. For example, special education teachers' instructional practices may include apart from the curriculum, classroom rules, expected manners, and student conduct in and out of the high school classroom may add value to a teacher's performance, as well as, student success (Bacher-Hicks, Chin, Kane, & Staiger, 2017 & Scott et al., 2014)

However, Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, and Born, (2015) from their research concluded classroom practices supporting inclusion and teachers' instructional practices, both components, support students with DD opportunities to progress in and outside their classroom. Morningstar et al. examined six schools that practiced inclusion model in either elementary or middle school environments with students having a wide range of disabilities and backgrounds. Morningstar et al. did not include high schools in their research. In summary, their research results marked classrooms that supported all learners such as teachers and instructional aides, demonstrated instructional practices, on-going peer-to-peer learning, adult engagement with the students, and an academic curricular. Morningstar et al. mentioned special education teachers served as sporadic co-teaching partners with the general education teachers in an inclusion setting and

supported a specific grade level. This researcher's population and environment identified inclusion models in elementary and middle school classroom environments; however, gestured the need for additional instructional practices to support all learners in an inclusion setting.

Conventionally, public schools like high schools contain separate classrooms (resource and self-contained), or inclusive classrooms (general education) to instruct students with disabilities. Despite the push towards inclusive and the presence of self-contained classrooms, both general and special education teachers feel unprepared and lack instructional practices to support the learning of students with DD (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Brownell et al. (2006) discussed all teachers (general and special education) benefit from collaboration to gain instructional practices; however, evidence also demonstrated that special and general education teachers profit differently from the collaboration with each other conferring about improving instructional practices for students with DD. The results from this study contained differences in knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, student management, classroom organization, and instructional practices, and the ability to adapt instruction to assist students with DD. Brownell et al. reinforced this study due to their desire to distinguish what personal role qualities played in teachers' acquisition and use of instructional practices and their collaborative efforts in groups. Brownell et al. implemented a case study approach to study eight general education teachers in various instructional settings in an elementary school. Their study's results, despite not based on a high school setting or students with DD, highlighted teachers' acquisition of skills for

instructional practices depend on professional collaboration and taking risks to try a new instructional practice with the goal to improve classroom practices and student outcomes. Brownell's discussion omitted teachers in a high school setting and their acquisition of skills for instructional practices, specifically special education teachers who instruct students with DD.

Instructional Practices

According to Wehman et al. (2014) various support in the classroom and outside the classroom with a strong emphasis on special education teachers' instructional practices for a specific program, such as life skills exists. The research conducted by Wehman et al. enunciated instructional practices differ in special education and general education classrooms for numerous learners; therefore, professional training differs between special education teachers and general education teachers depending upon the staff's needs. Breeman et al. (2015) and Kurth et al. (2016) uncovered some special education teachers remain unequipped with instructional practices and students were not collaborating or the teachers. Kurth et al. found in their research of nine teachers and 19 students with significant cognitive delays; instructors demonstrated little instructional practices. Additionally, despite training offered for special education teachers, the topics provided can be unsuitable topics such as applied behavior analysis (Cihon, Cihon, & Bedient, 2016). For example, Cihon et al. (2016) presented a case study of educational staff, including behavior analysts, supervisors, and teachers. In their study, Cihon et al. recognized the educational jargon is a barrier when presented to staff who work with students with autism spectrum disorder. Professional development in autism spectrum

disorder for staff can be challenging to navigate when the vocabulary is foreign to the staff; it is imperative that the training must apply to the student population and render action in the school setting, particularly for staff working directly with students with DD (see Cihon et al., 2016).

Also, special education teachers' instructional practices for students with DD who may be enrolled in a high school life skills program in a self-contained classroom may include additional lessons in self-care, self-advocacy, and social skills (Noel, Oulvey, Drake, & Bond, 2017 & Wehman et al., 2014). Noel et al. (2017) found multiple barriers to employment postgraduation for 280 transition-age youth including, but not limited to, students with DD. Many students may not be instructed by high school special education teachers properly due to staff's lack of awareness and instructional practices (Noel et al., 2017). Access to instructional practices, which include social skills, may help ease barriers that affect employment opportunities for students with DD (see Noel et al., 2017). Noel et al. stressed an awareness of some barriers for transition-age youth, including those specific to identified disability groups such as students with DD, may help develop programs and instructional practices for staff to implement in their classroom.

Educators in the special education field instruct students with DD using various educational programs, in various classroom settings, at various grade levels. However, less focus on inclusion classrooms and a shared focus on special education teachers who remain in special education classrooms such as resource room and self-contained classrooms instructing students with DD. An exploration of special education teachers'

instructional practices for high school students with DD may improve teachers' knowledge of instructional practices and support students with DD (Breeman et al., 2015 & Wehman et al., 2014).

Self-Contained Model and Life Skills

Kleinert et al. (2015) surveyed 15 states and 39,837 students and most students with DD were served in self-contained classrooms, whereas only 7% were in inclusion or resource room settings. Kleinert et al. identified special education teachers tended to be more proficient with life skills such as the use of an augmentative device, whereas general education teachers in an inclusive setting were not; however, instruction in reading and mathematics proved to be a challenge in a self-contained environment. Kleinert et al. discovered from 39, 837 students 28,072 were in self-contained classrooms the majority of class time with some inclusion. There is a vast amount to learn to address students with DD and their learning needs regardless of the classroom environment. This study explored special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD and may assist high school teachers instructing in a more restrictive environment because the fact remains, students with DD continue to be instructed in self-contain classrooms (see Kleinert et al., 2015).

Research by Cheryan et al. (2014) noted special education teachers' instructional practices might influence student learning, such as attainment of life skills by students with DD. Students' with DD who complete their educational entitlement without life skills, may experience a barrier to opportunities like social, leisure, and career development post-graduation. Cheryan et al. found enhancing student learning with the

physical classroom environment (e.g., wall décor, lighting, seat arrangement, proximity to a teacher, and educational objects) will improve student achievement during their learning, especially for the most vulnerable students. In a life skills program, often taught in a self-contained classroom, students with DD benefit from having their classroom surroundings reflect everyday life activities. There should be cues either verbally or vocally that all students with DD are valued citizens in and outside the classroom (Cheryan et al., 2014).

Inclusive Model and General Education Curriculum

Morningstar, et al. (2015) studied instructional practices, use of general education curriculum, and participation of students in various learning groups. Morningstar et al. observed a program in an inclusive model that used instructional groupings (small group settings), peer-supported learning, educational support staff, and teaching modifications. The teaching modifications were described as reduced work, time demands; projects instead of written reports, use of calculator or number line, alternative books benefitted students with significant disabilities. Accommodations were provided in the inclusive model such as study carrels, movement breaks, and review of directions that supported positive outcomes for students with DD in the inclusive setting (Morningstar et al., 2015). However, Morningstar et al. emphasized modifications and accommodations were essential components of a teacher's instructional practices in an inclusive setting to support outcomes for students with disabilities.

One of the most critical issues facing administrators and educators today is the preparation of teaching staff that produces desired outcomes for all students, including

students with DD in an inclusive model (Hoppey, 2016). Dissimilar to other classrooms settings such as basic skills instruction, resource, self-contained, and vocational, there is a need for special education teachers to work collaboratively in an inclusive classroom with the purpose of supporting the learning of students with DD experiences. Effective inclusive teachers constantly use data to update their instructional practices to maintain effective instruction in an inclusive environment (see Hoppey, 2016). Hoppey pointed out more students with disabilities are entering general education classrooms, and the preparation of all teachers remains crucial.

Students with DD

For teachers who work daily with high school students with DD, their instructional practices require the implementation of not only the state's CCCS but instructional practices that entail step by step directions to instill functional skills and support the learning of students with DD (Lee & Singer-Dudek, 2012). Students with DD preparation for the world of work post-graduation is essential and emphasized; and more emphasis needs to be made on the learning of high school students with DD (Gilson et al., 2017). Lee et al. (2012) accentuated that despite federal legislation requiring high schools to include vocational skills to facilitate a transition to the community for students with DD, there is a lack of sufficient research on special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Gilson et al. (2017) highlighted similar research using a quantitative inclusion criteria approach by targeting students with severe disabilities and their access to effective vocational instructional practices to teach skills best suited for them. To describe learning experiences by way of vocational instruction

for students with DD remains critical for the world of work and Gilson et al. recognized and analyzed instructional methods implemented to teach vocational skills for secondary students with DD. There were 21 vocational instructional practices implemented for the students. A commonly used and preferred instructional practice for students with DD appeared to be performance feedback from the teacher, device-assisted instruction to support all learning styles, response prompting, and community-based instruction for skill acquisition. However, Gilson et al. discovered not one instructional practice was implemented, but several methods were consistently used to encourage students' development of vocational skills like community-based instruction.

The Learning of Students with DD

The exploration of special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD is the focus of this study. Wehman et al. (2014) revealed that support in the high school classroom and outside the classroom with a strong emphasis on instructional practices enhanced opportunities for older students with DD in an educational setting such as a vocational setting. The description of a vocational setting would include, but not limited to, skills training for students with DD, community internships, job placements, identifying careers of interest, and learning self-advocacy skills all requiring instructional practices implemented by special education teachers (Career Connection, 2018). The depth of this study focuses on special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Special education teachers' expansion and improvement in instructional practices remain crucial regardless of area of instruction or setting. Special education teachers must foster the learning of

high school students with DD and provide opportunities during their education to become productive citizens (Rogan, Updike, Chesterfield, & Savage, 2014). The high school peers of students with DD exit high school at age 18 and are likely to acquire employment, post-secondary education, and friendships as a young adult due to access to educational programs and opportunities (Dorozenko, Roberts, & Bishop, 2015). Public Law 94-142 was a swift movement to change how students with DD access learning in preparation to become community contributors as their nondisabled peers; however, the pace to develop our special education teachers' instructional practices has not changed (see Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Central Research Question

Vygotsky provided the conceptual framework for this qualitative descriptive study. The central research question was: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD? This qualitative descriptive study included special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. The results will be available in literature to inform scholars when addressing instructional practices with others. Administrators could use the results when scheduling professional development training for special education teachers. Research practitioners can use the results to develop further study in the field of special education.

Similarly, Cheryan et al. (2014) research included support for this study by learning special education teachers' instructional practices may lessen the success of students with DD, ensuing in a barrier to students' postgraduation success. This recent study was an illustration demonstrating teachers' need for on-going professional

development training to address students with DD diverse learning needs. The central research question was relevant to this study and results will promote a positive social change in the field of special education.

Summary

The major topics in this chapter were special education teachers and the relevance of professional development training to obtain instructional practices (Breeman et al., 2015 & Kennedy, 2015) and special education teachers' instructional practices in high school classroom settings (special education resource, resource, self-contained, inclusion, and vocational) for students with DD.

There were three additional matters identified as vital to special education teachers obtaining instructional practices in the classroom setting, as well as, the community setting was mentioned and will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The literature review included research about special education teachers' instructional practices with different age levels, educational settings, and various disabilities. However, there was sparse research addressing special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. This study addressed and improved educational literature and informed special education teachers about frequently implemented instructional practices for high school students with DD. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, the instrumentation, and issues of trustworthiness, ethical concerns, and a summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. The primary objective of this study was to obtain useful information from interactions with people who were aware of the topic under study through common research methodologies, such as interviews (see Schwandt, 2015).

Chapter 3 includes not only an introduction to the study but an explanation of the research design and rationale for its use as well as how it relates to the research question. I also discuss the role of the researcher, followed by the methodology, the rationale for the number of participants, recruitment of participants with a description of the relationship between saturation and sample size, issues of trustworthiness, ethical concerns, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

To date, current research about special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD is sparse. After the literature review of special education teachers and instructional practices, it became apparent that a qualitative, descriptive study approach would provide data to answer the central research question of this study. The design comprised participants' responses using one set of methods (i.e., in-depth interviews) to generate knowledge about a specific topic, and despite previous studies addressing instructional practices, the findings of this study provided a thorough description of participants' point of view about instructional practices for high school

students with DD (see Schwandt, 2015). The central research question for this qualitative, descriptive study was:

> How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD?

The central concept of this study was a detailed summarization of special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. There were some extant, comprehensive studies focusing on special education teachers and their instructional practices; however, they did not answer the research question of this study. For instance, Fatima, Hussain Ch, and Malik (2016) conducted a quantitative investigation to identify instructional practices used by special education teachers for young students with auditory impairment and found special education teachers did not put forth the effort to stimulate students' learning environment to increase skills during instruction. The researchers studied 34 schools and found all 34 schools' special education teachers employed the same instructional practices and, therefore, obtained similar test results when all students were formally tested. The recommendations offered by the researchers were special education teachers should be encouraged to receive further education and that human or material resources should be provided, then shared among schools, to stimulate special education teachers' performances (Fatima et al., 2016). The use of a qualitative, descriptive study to explore how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD added to the literature and answered the research question.

Research Design

The research design was a qualitative, descriptive study that aligned with the research question by generating data through an interview process. The methodology involved collecting the data through a face-to-face interview with each participant, which allowed me, the solitary observer and researcher, to gather the special education teachers' responses. As Yin (2015) shared, collecting data through recording, either by journaling or by tape recording, works as a way of getting to know not only the participants but also the setting they work in day after day. This qualitative, descriptive study contained participants' descriptions of instructional practices for high school students with DD.

Rationale

I considered more than one research method for this study. Traditional research methods vary in their strengths and weaknesses. Mixed methods and quantitative and qualitative methodologies can all be used to answer research questions (Walliman, 2017).

The rationale for using a qualitative, descriptive approach in this study was as follows. A researcher's implementation of a mixed methods approach is the implementation of a study attempting to respect the wisdom of both views (i.e., quantitative and qualitative; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). A mixed methods approach will provide a complete description of both parties and a thorough understanding of qualitative and quantitative results as well as facilitate generalization of the results to professional work (Lund, 2012). However, in this qualitative, descriptive study I focused on special education teachers' instructional practices only to generalize the results to the specialized field of special education. In addition, the mixed methods approach involves

qualitative methods first to develop a theory and then quantitative methods to test hypotheses based on that theory (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). I did not choose this approach because if both qualitative and quantitative research is preferred, then I would have had to employ a combination of methods (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). I did not present hypotheses or quantitative characteristics, so a mixed methods approach was not suitable. This study contained information gathered through interviews that solicited multiple viewpoints from only one professional occupation: special education teachers.

The use of a quantitative methodology includes data in the form of numbers, which are analyzed statistically, and sometimes quantitative data comes in other forms like the words "excellent, good, fair, or poor" that are then coded with numbers (Patten & Newhart, 2017). In this study, there were no numbers to study or analyze. Quantitative methodology is a process to recognize the relationship between identified variables, which were not used in this research study (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

I used interviews as the primary data source in this study to collect special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Asking open-ended questions allowed participants to expand their responses beyond the use of a survey. Schwandt (2015) defined qualitative inquiry as being notoriously difficult to define because to some scholars it refers to a social movement from the 1960s. Today, qualitative research studies have grown and expanded into an intellectual arena that embraces different epistemologies and relates to quality (Schwandt, 2015).

This qualitative descriptive study allowed for the exploration of the central research question, especially when clarified by probes, and expanded information

towards understanding the research topic (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive study approach was the appropriate research tradition for this study.

Role of the Researcher

Adhabi and Anozie (2017) emphasized that the role of the researcher will be the only human being to sufficiently comprehend and learn from participants during the interview process. As the researcher, I had a connection to all participants due to my current employment in special education as a case manager of students with DD and being a parent of an adult with disabilities for more than 30 years. The significance of this qualitative research was unified by the chosen central research question to identify instructional practices (Bouck, 2012; Plotner & Dymond, 2017). During this descriptive, qualitative study, my priority was to explore how special education teachers' implement instructional practices for high school students with DD and answer the research question.

The use of an interview protocol was appropriate to obtain a thorough understanding of the concept and answer the research question. Additionally, I took hand-written notes and audiotaped participant responses during the qualitative interviews, after receiving permission from the participants to do so. My biases, such as personal values, background, professional occupation, and gender, may have swayed my thought process when interviewing participants; however, they did not compromise the data because the steps and findings at each stage of this study were carefully reviewed and guarded to help stop and mitigate the effects of such issues. My background was not a barrier to obtain

relevant and pertinent data for this study from others in the field of special education, but rather acted as a unification of the minds to close a gap that many researchers have missed filling. Any participants who presented a conflict of interest or were familiar to me before the study and who were employed at school districts were not included or considered for participation in this study.

Methodology

Qualitative Descriptive Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative, descriptive design using interviews. The in-depth, participant interviews were followed by a comparison of the various participants' responses, which contributed to the identified central themes to be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (see Katchergin, 2014). The research design aided in describing special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD because existing research had not addressed this gap in the literature. In addition, this qualitative study resulted in data encouraging other researchers to duplicate this study in another community. Patton (2015) explained qualitative inquiry means using the language and concepts to design authentic studies, conduct data gathering in the field, analyze the results, and judge the results from the qualitative investigation.

This study was authentic because I saw, heard, and recorded experts in the field of special education. My occupation is also in the field of special education, and an awareness of my biases that may have influenced participants' answers remained critical when interviewing the special education teachers (see Patton, 2015). Schwandt (2015) explained biases mean individual preferences, predispositions, or predilections that

prevent neutrality or objectivity during the interview process. For this qualitative descriptive study, high school special education teachers provided detailed information on their instructional practices for high school students with DD in interviews. Patton (2015) stated that qualitative studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to explore their field through an in-depth interview with participants. Schwandt stressed that researchers should reflect on their prejudice or prejudgment because they might possess and distinguish enabling from disabling prejudice. I might have learned of an instructional practice I may not have implemented as a special education teacher during the interview process. Despite my newly gained knowledge, I wanted to promote the success of other special education teachers. My goal was to inform future teachers about instructional practices for their high school students with DD; therefore, this qualitative, descriptive study was designed to address the central research question and the interview questions provided rich data (e.g., details of participants' instructional practices), while I remained neutral to what I saw, heard, and recorded.

Participant Selection

For this study, I recruited special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD using purposeful sampling. A total of 10 participants were interviewed with the same questions. Otherwise, with fewer participants it would have been difficult to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Patton (2015), the implementation of purposeful selection supports the rationale of the study. The purposeful selection of special education teachers allowed me to conduct an in-depth inquiry of special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with

DD. Patton concluded that small samples, which are studied in-depth, have provided many important breakthroughs in our understanding of a topic under study; however, Fusch and Ness (2015) noted each qualitative study is unique, and there is not a firm guide on how many participants are required in a study. Obtaining rich data and data saturation is not about the numbers but about the depth of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012).

Participants for this study were recruited based on three main criteria. The first criterion was that participants must be certified special education teachers. The second criterion was that participants must be currently providing instruction for students with DD in a high school classroom. The final criterion was that all participants must be instructing students in a public high school. Other data, years of teaching experience, types of teaching experiences, and past professional staff development were gathered during the interview process before implementing probe questions (Appendix A).

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

Before conducting my research and upon approval from Walden's institutional review board (IRB), my goal was to reach out to three high schools in one school district. There was a protocol that I followed to commence with the recruitment and participation of participants for this qualitative descriptive study.

First, after an introduction of myself and a detailed description and the purpose of my study with the proper school personnel and gaining cooperation from proper administration (principals) to proceed forward (Appendix D), recruitment of participants advanced. To recruit all special education teachers as participants for this qualitative

descriptive study, the request to office support staff to place a flyer in their special education teachers' mailbox describing the purpose of the doctoral study, and a consent form with my contact information was completed. All participants were considered volunteers and were not pressured into participating by me, administration, or the school district. All participants interested provided verbal and written consent to participate in this research study. Participants who met the purposeful selection criteria were contacted either by telephone or by e-mail within a few days to be considered for the study and to establish a time and date to conduct the interview process (Patton, 2015). There were at least 40 participants to recruit among the three projected high schools, and I applied purposeful selection (high school special education teachers) and the criteria (who instruct students with DD), the number of interviews anticipated was small, but significant (Bernard, 2012) in order to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data Saturation

It was my intent of this qualitative descriptive study to reach data saturation that would provide strength in the results (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). In the field of research, saturation is acceptable and used in qualitative studies as a criterion for discontinuing data collection that is then used for coding (Saunders, 2012). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is reached when there is enough information to duplicate the study. The ability to obtain new information from participants during the interview process has been achieved, further coding is no longer realistic. The same questions were presented in the same format to each participant of this study to encourage data saturation. It was anticipated that 40 high school special education teachers would be

invited to participate in this research; however, how many will participate was not known. A satisfactory sample (10 participants) provided the best opportunity of saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To understand saturation and the relevance it has on this study, Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) described saturation requires no additional data and themes can be developed. In other words, I focused on special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD from more than one conducted interview. When similar themes began occurring, I recognized that saturation was achieved, the need for additional interviews became absent, and research data was no longer mandatory (Saunders, 2012).

Data Collection

Interview Protocol

For the essential elements of this qualitative study, the study included an interview protocol (Appendix B), created by me, and administered in person (face-to-face). Following Patton's (2015) suggestion, this interview protocol used wording and sequence of five questions determined in advance specifically tailored for high school special education teachers who instruct students with DD. The interview protocol reminded me to share important information to each interviewee, such as restating the purpose of the interview, what will happen to the information gathered from the interview, and confidentiality of each interviewee (see Patton, 2015). A good interview protocol is important; however, a good interview protocol may not guarantee good results (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Having respectable connections with the participants will result in getting better data by building a sense of trust. Sharing similarities with the

participants included statements about my experiences, an emphasis on the study and their involvement, and the expectations of this study. Before the interview process, feedback from special education teachers was requested.

Feedback from Special Education Teachers

For this qualitative study, I asked three special education teachers to review my interview questions and provide a response. I developed the probing interview questions for this descriptive qualitative research (Appendix B) in advance before sharing the questions with the three special education teachers. For the interview questions, the three professionals ensured validity confirming specific characteristics outlined in the e-mail (e.g., interview questions relevant to the central research question) and all three participants were not participants in this study.

Their valuable feedback as three professionals in the field of special education validated the questions by adding information or deleting information. By reviewing the interview questions for this qualitative descriptive study, their input supported the developed interview questions, and their involvement supported the inauguration of this qualitative descriptive study.

Journaling and Audiotaping

With acknowledgment and consent from the participants, journaling was a useful method for data collection to record responses obtained during the interviews. The qualitative research interview allows for the researcher to collaboratively engage in a conversation with participants and during the collaborative conversation the researcher

can write rich data from the participant on how they implement instructional practices for high school students with DD (Schwandt, 2015).

Journaling, being a form of writing, is helpful in both an immediate sense and at a later date when reviewing data (see Louise & Crawford, 2016). For example, when reading my journaled notes, there were opportunities to identify themes and patterns, and make sense of the recent collaborative engagement with the participants during the interview sessions (Louise & Crawford, 2016). Humble and Sharp (2012) discussed four types of journaling reflections: a) descriptive writing, (b) descriptive reflection, (c) dialogic reflection, and (d) critical reflection. For this study, I reported on instructional practices using only descriptive reflection. Descriptive reflection describes the response from participants on how they come to know certain things and how they teach a certain way (Humble & Sharp, 2012). This type of journaling was appropriate for this study because I described special education teachers' instructional practices, and they selected to share why they teach a certain way which enhanced the data moreover. Of the four types of journaling, descriptive writing identifies the least helpful regarding stimulating any extension of an idea or topic (Humble & Sharp, 2012).

Audiotaping was used to record replies simultaneously along with journaling. When journaling and audio taping during the interview process, the confidentiality, and anonymity of the participants was necessary to reduce researcher bias. Audiotaping responses will document participants' responses verbatim and reinforce handwritten notes from journaling. Rubin and Rubin (2012) observed most researchers take detailed notes during the interview process or use a combination of both methods. I used a

combination of both methods. All responses were saved for the data analysis plan for this study. Both data recording methods were reviewed, transcribed, and sorted into themes and patterns as soon as possible after each interview had concluded (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After the data collection, all participant responses were saved for the data analysis plan.

The participants received their responses by electronic mail post-interview. Review of their responses confirmed the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and validity of the journal and audiotaped responses (Patton, 2015). If there was a need for corrections or a follow-up meeting, I responded promptly to all participants involved in the study. A closing thank-you note to acknowledge their time and effort spent to support this study, and an explanation of the proceedings that followed in the study were shared with all participants.

Data Analysis Plan

The process of a data analysis plan or qualitative thematic analysis is informal unlike grounded theory methodology (Schwandt, 2015). The researcher codes, organizes, and marks sections of text (e.g., from journaling, recordings) and identifies if there are contributing factors to emerging themes (Schwandt, 2015). A theme can mean a topic, subject, category, concept, or idea (Schwandt, 2015). For this descriptive qualitative study, the theme was special education teachers' instructional practices.

The organization of data from journaled notes and transcription of audio recording responses, followed by reading all the data more than once, then coding the data by hand into themes and descriptions facilitated analysis of data and categorization

of themes. However, selecting the best coding to answer the research question: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD was a relevant consideration. There was more than one option in coding.

Schwandt (2015) identified how coding could be accomplished in three different ways. The first coding strategy is developed, and careful study of a problem or topic is under investigation, and the codes are derived directly by the social inquirer and the data are then examined and sorted into this scheme. Next, Schwandt named the second coding strategy as a noncontent developed and sorted into the scheme. Noncontent specific schemes are ways of accounting for the data by sorting it into a typology. A typology may be based on common sense reasoning (e.g., type of event, an occurrence, participants' responses, a setting) or derived from a particular methodological. The third coding strategy labeled grounded or context-sensitive. This scheme may also begin with simple typology but here the researcher works with the actual language of the participants to generate codes or categories and work back and forth between the interview segments and the codes or categories refine the meaning of categories as the data continues to build (Schwandt, 2015).

For this study, the third coding way explained by Schwandt (2015) and implemented for this study. A grounded or context-sensitive scheme was appropriate because I recorded participants' conversation verbatim and the categories continued to take shape as the data assembled (see Schwandt, 2015). Coding is a significant step in research; however, as the researcher, I looked forward to implementing my procedures for coding the gained data.

Like some qualitative researchers, I analyzed my data from the interviews. I had colored index cards, and numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3) were assigned for each participant who agreed to be interviewed initiated the process. The interviews, which I conducted, strictly followed the interview protocol (five questions to implement), and as I obtained responses from each participant for each question tags or labels began to emerge that were relevant to the research question. For example, a special education teacher may answer Question 4 (Appendix B) when I asked how do you use tools in your classroom to implement instructional practices for students with DD (e.g., computer, SmartBoard, and iPads)? This question from the protocol solicited varied responses from the participants, such as the use of iPads. All the responses from each participant were coded.

Since I chose to code the data manually, I oversaw the organization of the data. The organization of the data required colored index cards, assigned pseudonyms for each participant, and a working tape recorder accompanied by the interview questions. Proceeding forward, all answers to Question 1, for example, from the potential participants were recorded on a chosen colored index card labeled with a pseudonym for each participant. The following questions received the same action until all interviews and questions had been exhausted. Next, responses were arranged by codes based on words, phrases, patterns, and descriptive sentences that linked them to specific categories. All the categories were written on non-colored index cards to identify the supportive themes addressing the research question. Next the Excel software was used to type answers under each of the groups (codes, categories, and themes). Excel is a software program used by individuals to develop spreadsheets from recorded data. This Excel

spreadsheet facilitated uninterrupted recognition of the cumulative data. The data were saved on the computer under a file for easy access when conferring results in Chapter 4.

Despite using manual coding, the core part of this analysis was to recognize and identify triggers, examples, markers, and concepts to assist in recognizing themes and categories to address the central research question for this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The goal with coding was to present fully developed data so the process of the study can be duplicated for further analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

For a qualitative study, it is relevant to achieve the precision and credibility that make the results trustworthy (Bengtsson, 2016). It is important in a qualitative study to interview participants that understand the goals of the study to achieve credibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, special education teachers who were knowledgeable about instructional practices for high school students with DD supports credibility. Also, certified participants who instruct high school students with DD and are instructing the students with DD in a special education classroom. Credibility is achieved by providing a detailed description of the participants' perspectives being explored (Maxwell, 2013 & Rubin & Rubin, 2012) such as instructional practices for high school students with DD. The use of journaling and audiotaping participants' responses upheld this objective.

When journaling and audiotaping participants' responses, to assure what is heard to be credible, it is useful to ask the participants if they can describe instructional practices for high school students with DD before commencing the interview (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). The credibility of this research depended on the participants demonstrating how well informed they are about the central research question under study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Transferability

Transferability is the explanation of rich data collected from a qualitative study and the ability to generalize information to another setting (Schwandt, 2015). When readers comprehend and apply the research study results, there will be a degree of transferability to their own lives because of this study (Cope, 2014). The exploration of special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD provided outcomes pertinent to other special education teachers.

Dependability

A series of interview questions provided for participants ensured the dependability of the data from this qualitative study obtained through actions, which included audiotaping and journaling participants' responses (Patton, 2015). The questions were presented one at a time during the interview in this qualitative descriptive study, and the participants' responses validated the dependability of the data, and the data was analyzed simultaneously to gather results (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Patton, 2015; & Yazan, 2015). Set procedures formed an audit trail of details about the inquiry for this qualitative descriptive study to ensure dependability and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability found in qualitative research offers descriptions and conclusions in the rich findings (Cope, 2014). Also, the development of a research audit trail from this study added value to the qualitative methodological results strengthening confirmability (Connelly, 2016). With methodological thoroughness, commitment to the investigation, and recording and reporting the data, I obtained confirmability and developed robust conclusions (see Cope, 2014).

Coder Reliability

St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) shared coding is in a systematic manner to sort out data provided by participants' words. During interviews, details about instructional practices was assigned a code for consistency until saturation was met. Maintaining the reliability of the coding helps establish the credibility of qualitative results and strengthens the validity of the study (Macphail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016). This qualitative descriptive study identified links and patterns from the coding (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

Treatment of Participants

Rubin and Rubin (2012) asserted the core of the expectations and obligations that are part of the qualitative research process is guaranteeing ethical procedures are followed throughout the study, and all research participants are treated with respect. Walden University outlines regulations that were followed when conducting research that entails ethical practices. Criteria when engaging in a study on human subject research

required all commitments to participants be completed, all necessary documents were provided for consent from participants, and fair questions were asked to participants (reviewed and approved by Walden University IRB #03-08-19-0291451) during the research process.

Gaining Access

To avoid ethical concerns by the participants, they were informed of any risks and benefits of their participation before the interview questions were presented. The participants' participation was voluntary without compensation from me. All participants had the option to withdraw from the study if needed due to an unpredictable event that may occur in their lives. All questions asked by participants before, during, and after the research was addressed by me to gain access to data.

The maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity of participants remained constant by using pseudonyms for their identity (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All data obtained from participants' responses were stowed and locked on a personal computer throughout the research and then will be destroyed along with notes, transcriptions, and journals at the end of my study to preserve confidentiality and maintain participants' privacy.

An outline of the study was shared to familiarize each participant with the research. It was imperative for the participants to comprehend during their entire time participating in this research that all ethical standards were strictly followed, and their privacy was protected.

Summary

Chapter 3 began with an introduction to the purpose of this study and the design and rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology approach. Next, the role of the researcher, the methodology that included participant selection, the interview questions, and a review of the interview questions. Then the procedures for the recruitment of the participants, the central research question, the probing interview questions (Appendix B), and a data analysis plan. Last, issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures were major components of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes the results of this qualitative descriptive study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. The research question for this study was: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD? I interviewed 10 participants who responded to five interview questions (see Appendix B). Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the setting, demographics of participants, data collection, data analysis, themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Settings

The interview process required 3 months and was spread over two counties in New Jersey. At first, I anticipated that 40 high school special education teachers, all from the same school district and county, would be able to be invited to participate in this research; however, the initial 40 high school special education teachers pinpointed for this research were informed by their union president that they were not allowed to participate in this research study due to contract negotiations. Later, I recruited 10 special education teachers from three different school districts spread across two different counties in New Jersey. The plan to recruit 10 special education teachers transformed considerably (it was reviewed and approved by Walden University IRB); therefore, I sent 12 separate school district administrators initial invitations to participate. From the 12 administrators, nine responded with interest by e-mail. Of these nine, there were three separate school district administrators who responded with interest, allowed invitations to

be placed in their high school special education teachers' mailboxes, and cooperated with the research requirements for interviews to commence for this study.

Demographics

There were 10 participants in this study who were all certified to teach special education in a public high school. There were nine female participants and one male participant. All participants taught high school students with DD and had at least 3 years of experience teaching high school students with DD. Table 1 shows the pseudonyms used for confidentiality as well as each participants' gender, their years of experience, and the subject taught.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Experience	Subject Taught
P1	Female	20	Life skills
P2	Female	20	Science/math
P3	Female	6	History/English/vocational
P4	Female	8	Life skills
P5	Female	14	Vocational/life skills
P6	Male	6	Social studies
P7	Female	3	Language arts
P8	Female	20	Science
P9	Female	16	Language arts
P10	Female	5	Math

Data Collection

I collected data for this study through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with each participant at the times and locations agreed upon between myself and each participant. The interviews were conducted in three separate high schools from 2 of the 21 counties in the study state. The first high school only had one special education teacher who volunteered to be interviewed for this study. The second high school had two special education teachers, and the third had seven special education teachers who volunteered to be interviewed. I do not believe there was a negative impact on the interpretation of the study results; however, 1 of the last 7 high school special education teachers transitioned to the middle school during the research timeframe. The change in her staff position did not influence her answers to the interview questions since she had held the position as a high school special education teacher for students with DD.

All interviews were held in a school building. Of the 10 face-to-face interviews, I conducted seven interviews in the participant's classroom during their teacher preparation time, and three interviews were conducted during the participant's assigned hall duty time.

All participants were notified that a small recorder was being used to record their responses and that journaling would coincide. I also reviewed the consent form with them and obtained their signature, which specified their agreement to be interviewed. Each interview session lasted no more than 45 minutes, with five questions being asked during each interview. The participants and I sat face-to-face, and I began the interview with an introduction (see Appendix A). Following the introduction, I asked participants

were provided, and they responded to all of the questions (Appendix B). I created both protocols. The participants' responses to the five interview questions were used to collect data for my research.

I saved each participant's responses for data analysis afterward; however, after each interview concluded, the participants were offered a chance to review their responses for accuracy since they were handwritten in my journal. All participants agreed their responses were accurate and detailed and did not feel compelled to listen to the tape recorder, but each participant appreciated hearing their responses read back to them. The opportunity for participants to review their responses after the interview concluded is called member checking. There were no unusual circumstances encountered in data collection. All participants were agreeable to terms, responded with accuracy, and pleased to participate in this study.

Data Analysis

The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Vygotsky addressed the development of intelligence of individuals and emphasized that thinking and learning occur with actual relationships between other people. In the interviews, the 10 special education teachers shared responses about the instructional practices they used to increase the thinking and learning of their students with DD. All the participants' recordings were transcribed verbatim in my journal. I read these notes multiple times and ensured that I did not miss any information shared by the participant by cross checking my audio with my journaled notes. To file all interviews, I typed an interview script.

Next, using my journaled notes, I highlighted repetitive words or small phrases based on the framework constructs of Vygosky. Then, I analyzed the remaining data for any lingering codes outside of Vygotsky's social development theory. Using index cards, the entire assortment of identified codes was recorded. I arranged the cards into categories to facilitate the identification of themes. The results were typed into an Excel spreadsheet to make it easier to read and sort the data on one sheet versus multiple cards disseminated on a table. There were not any discrepant cases factored in the analysis. The specific codes, categories, and two emergent themes follow in the Results section of this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness emerged in multiple ways in this study. To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I applied member checking and triangulation. Member checking established accuracy in the responses of each participant to ensure dependability. Member checking also allowed for corroboration between the participant and myself as well as validation of their time and effort for this study. The application of member checking with each participant required me to guard against doing anything that would have influenced participants to change their responses (see Schwandt, 2015). As mentioned earlier, participants could review their responses after the interview concluded. Each participant could either listen to the tape-recorded interview or read my journaled answers. At the end of each interview, all participants chose to hear their answers read aloud. I also offered to e-mail all written responses to each participant to confirm accuracy.

Furthermore, I utilized triangulation to ensure credibility. I used more than one source of data to increase the internal validity of the study. In this qualitative study, I was the primary instrument of data collection. To increase the validity of the research, I validated the data and my interpretations of them by carrying out member checking and journaling. Using more than one method kept me vigilant concerning pattern recognition from the beginning to the end of my research while watching for any outliers of data (see Patton, 2015).

Credibility resulted when the data accurately represented the responses from each participant and matched the empirical literature cited in Chapter 2. For example, the finding of the need for professional development for special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD aligned with findings from the literature (see Carter et al., 2014; Maccini et al., 2013). Professional development and instructional practices were a theme that emerged in the data that also matched topics from Chapter 2 (see Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Karvonen et al., 2013). This connection confirms the credibility of the current study because I identified a critical topic that other authors, such as Pennington and Courtade (2015) also found in their studies. This connection increased the internal validity of the current study and my interpretations of the results.

Transferability ensued when I obtained rich data from the participants for this qualitative, descriptive study that provided instructional practices for current and future special education teachers who instruct students with DD. Sufficient data about special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD were collected in this qualitative, descriptive study. The findings of this study provide a foundation for readers

to speculate or consider whether they may or may not apply to other cases or similar situations (see Schwandt, 2015). As previously stated in Chapter 2, literature about special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD remains sparse (Carter et al., 2014; Maccini et al., 2013; Pennington & Courtade, 2015). The results of this study fill a gap in research and, therefore, support transferability.

Dependability was essential to the trustworthiness of data reflected in this study. The use of triangulation increased the internal validity of this research as well as strengthened the quality of my data that made it significant to audiences who access the study (see Schwandt, 2015). Dependability (which is the same as consistency) relied on myself, the researcher, ensuring the methodological approach was rational and followed. I was able to crosscheck the data that I reviewed from the audiotaped and journaled responses, which reinforced confirmability.

Results

The results of this qualitative study answered the research question. Two main themes emerged from the interviews. The special education teachers who implemented instructional practices in a classroom setting used terms, such as group games, technology, music, visitors, and curriculum. The special education teachers who implemented instructional practices in the community setting used terms, such as functional skills (e.g., community literacy and social skills) and vocational skills (e.g., self-advocacy and responsibility). The students with DD in a classroom often benefit from a specific curriculum, modifications, and accommodations as well as specialized instructional practices. The students in the high school classroom have been and will

continue to receive instruction in academics (e.g., reading, math, and science). Their aptitudes exceed their peers who receive on-going instruction in the community, whereas the students with DD in the community benefit from a specific curriculum, modifications, and accommodations, including placement in a community setting to obtain functional and vocational skills.

There are distinct differences between a classroom setting and a community setting when discussing students' learning environment. First, if a high school student learns in a classroom setting, their teachers will implement daily instructional practices in a specific subject. Subjects could be science, math, social studies, or language arts. The preparation of students immersed in high school subjects primes them to become productive citizens postgraduation.

Second, when a student benefits from a community setting versus a classroom setting, school staff recognize the student has exhibited a need for functional and vocational instruction versus academia instruction. The decision to place a student in the community on a more frequent basis involves the review of documented observations, examination of Child Study Team standardized assessments, as well as staff and parent input. The special education teachers who instruct in the community setting implement instructional practices for students who benefit from extra functional or vocational skills not addressed in the classroom setting. The team members are aware students' academic skills have plateaued since the previous standardized assessments and have demonstrated a lack of performance and academic skills in the classroom. After some time, such high school students with DD are prime candidates to be instructed in the community setting.

The community-based setting, for example, may include two or three students at a business participating in job sampling under the careful watch of the special education teacher, as well as the job coach. The amount of high school students with DD placed in the community varies year to year. Annually a review of students with DD who have an Individualized Education Plan, like most school students with a disability, may warrant a change in their educational setting – depends upon their learning needs students may participate in both settings. Therefore, some students' benefit from instruction in the classroom setting versus the community setting. The decisions are based on each students' needs as an individual, not as a group. For students in a community setting, their preparation can also lead to postgraduation success, just like their classroom peers.

Five out of the 10 participants teach in a classroom setting; however, the remaining five participants implement their instructional practices mainly in a community setting. A discussion of both settings, as well as subthemes and supportive concepts, follows.

The responses from the participants began or ended with "My classroom" or "In the community." As the researcher, it was interesting to discover five implemented instructional practices primarily in the classroom and the remaining five implemented instructional practices in the community. These two distinct settings were equally extraordinary; yet, each served a different purpose. The special education teachers in these two separate settings promoted instructional practices for students with diverse needs. The students with DD in the classroom presented abilities and instructional requirements higher than functional and vocational skills. Whereas, students with DD in

the community presented capabilities and instructional requirements to increase their functional and vocational skills. The goal for all participants, regardless of their instructional setting, pinpointed student success postgraduation.

Theme 1: Classroom Setting

In this study, 5 out of 10 participants said they taught in the classroom. A classroom setting reinforced five subthemes. The five subthemes were instructional practices, mixed activities, miscellaneous activities, curriculum, and training.

During the interview participants' responses were "In my classroom" or "The students in my classroom" or "Sometimes my classroom." Shared by P8, arranging the classroom to stimulate her students' learning and compliment her instructional practices was imperative. Since she taught science without a curriculum, she attempts to reinforce the theme of the week using her classroom as a visual aid. For instance, P-8 placed 3-D items around the classroom, posters on the walls, and anchor charts near the students' desks to encourage learning. P8 stated, "In my classroom, I display materials pertinent to the subject my students are learning that week." Another participant said how her classroom serves numerous purposes and allows for her instructional practices to serve multiple purposes. P9 said:

> My classroom becomes a coffee shop. The students are in charge of making coffee for the staff members. We interact in the classroom; the students practice vocational skills relevant to a coffee shop and build relationships with staff members. A classroom can be more than four walls and many desks. Our classroom becomes a coffee shop every week.

Subthemes

There were five subthemes under classroom setting. First, subtheme instructional practices included the categories: student groupings, side-by-side instruction, modify class work to meet students' needs, remain a flexible teacher, and offer compliments to your students. Next, the subtheme mixed activities included the categories: games, dance and music, and technology. Then the next subtheme miscellaneous activities included the categories: visitors and clubs. Following, the subtheme curriculum included the categories: inadequate access and the use of the general education curriculum with adjustments. Last, the subtheme training included the categories: collaboration and minimal. All subthemes and categories are presented and described below.

Instructional practices. The primary focus of this study is on special education teachers' instructional practices. Student groupings for instruction, side-by-side instruction, modify class work to meet students' needs, remain a flexible teacher, and offer compliments to your students are key categories associated with instructional practices.

Student groupings for instruction. Groupings preferred by the participants are discussed and differ depending upon the subject taught, students' abilities, and the instructional setting. To begin, 9 out of 10 participants indicated whole group discussions are valuable in the classroom or the community setting. There was only one participant who stressed her instructional practices occur in a small group or 1:1 instruction in her classroom. P1 continued to say, "The whole group idea I save for the community, but for my entire class learning together in the classroom, that does not

support my students with DD learning." From the remaining nine participants, four out of the nine said whole group instruction fosters problem-solving, listening, and taking turns among peers. Also, all nine participants observed collaborations, partnerships, and on-going conversations occurring between peers due to whole group instruction regardless whether in the classroom or the community.

In the classroom, P7 shared:

> In my classroom, the first thing we do, especially on a Monday, is a whole group discussion about everyone's weekend. The sharing is important to my students because this may be the only time, they can communicate their thoughts and feelings about their personal lives. It helps me stay connected to my students' lives.

Similar ideas about whole group instruction shared by P6:

> For me, the first thing I incorporated as an instructional practice when I became a high school teacher, which may be a unique practice, I never assign seats for my students. The students can still learn as a whole group, regardless of where they sit. I do like whole group learning because I can move about the classroom and observe all my students working. If I have to stop and work side by side with a student to support their learning, then so be it.

P4 implements whole group instruction in her classroom and circulates with her para-professionals to ensure all students are engaged, have their questions answered, and engaged in learning. P4 shared, "Teamwork includes me, my para-professional, and the students. Sometimes we work as a group, and sometimes we don't." For 9 out of 10

participants in this study, they implemented small group instruction. Small group instruction remains a critical instructional practice for those requiring a slower pace.

P5 spoke about small group instruction that occurs when her students are in the community job sampling in pairs. Also, in our classroom small group instructional practices allows more modifications when implementing a lesson at a table of three to five students. P7 stated:

> Using instructional practices in a small group, I would suggest no more than five students, I can pinpoint learning gaps, and I can personalize my instruction to meet their needs. I would encourage special education teachers to implement small group instruction when appropriate.

The special education teachers combined groups regardless if instruction happened in a classroom or the community. P5 spoke about small group instruction that occurred when her students were in community job sampling in pairs. P3 found small group instructional practices allowed accommodations and modifications.

Side-by-side instruction. Side-by-side instruction was a phrase shared by participants. Just 2 out of 10 participants used the exact phrase side-by-side instruction in their response. The remaining eight participants stressed small or whole group instruction. P10 said, "If I see a student struggling in math, I will work side-by-side with the student until he or she displays progress." P6 said, "I like whole group teaching, I can walk around and watch my students work; however, I will stop and work side-by-side with my student if the student benefits."

Modify class work to meet students' needs. Modified class work continued as a joint theme. P10, P9, P8, and P3 shared similar ideas about modification to student work. All four participants confirmed modification promotes student success and supports their learning. P10 stated:

> In a small group, I can provide more attention to my students who are struggling with a concept, or I can opt to allow the same student who is struggling with a chance to do-over their work or lessen their work. The pace is slower; however, the work remains as relevant as all the students in my classroom. A chance to do-over is a simple practice to implement for students who struggle. I find if I modify the student's work, nine times out of 10 the student will experience success.

Remain a flexible teacher. Flexibility remained a key term used by participants. Ten out of 10 stated flexibility multiple times in their responses. Two participants taught math and shared constant flexibility of student grouping worked for them because of their subject matter. The remaining seven participants implemented large group, small group instructional practices, and worked side-by-side if necessary, to support their students' learning in the classroom. P9 stressed her students' needs "require an immense amount of flexibility on her part. Flexibility is a practice all teachers should remain when it comes to teaching."

Offer compliments to your students. The use of compliments was an interesting response by more than one participant. P6 shared, "Brag on your students' work and display their work because it reflects your instruction to them. This is such an easy

instructional practice." P10 shared, "I enjoy small group instruction because I can hone in on my students' work and recognize their progress. They don't have to wait for a report card to see that they have improved. I compliment them, on the spot." P1 stated, "Absolutely recognize student progress with positive remarks, particularly when learning is a struggle for students with DD. It takes a couple of minutes of your time."

Mixed activities. Mixed activities were an identified subtheme for this study. Games, dance and music, and technology are key categories associated with mixed activities. All 10 participants incorporated one or more of these activities. There were 5 out of 10 participants who incorporated games to encourage student engagement. Some responses follow.

Games. Games shared by participants were creative, and suggestions follow in this section. P9 shared a game dubbed the big picture. She would introduce a topic for study, and the students each take turns offering an idea about what they already know before instruction of the item. She stated, "In my classroom, I use games for lessons and themes for the week."

P9 stated:

> There are days I implement tabletop activities. The students have a tabletop activity waiting for them at their desks. The activities can range from a puzzle to a game that requires two players. These activities are part of their lesson for the day. The students are encouraged to try other classmates' tabletop activities, as well.

Some games require other adults to be a player like the game P6 spoke about. P6 shared about a game he uses on a regular basis in his call. The game is called *guest in the closet*. He described this game in detail:

> First, I want special education teachers to understand this game supports the theme or subject matter I am teaching that week. So, when the day arrives, the guest hides in the closet before the students come to the classroom. The students listen to vague descriptions about the guest, and they ask one relevant question. The students are permitted to provide one guess. Even if a student guesses the correct answer, my final phrase, after all students' guess is, "Can the guest in our closet. please come out?" The students love this game and they learn about staff in our high school.

Another game shared by P2 involves quick thinking. She called her game *do now*. This activity happens each day in her classroom. The students have activities that are related to a theme. So, the weather might be the theme, and she described how her do now game worked:

> The game requires the students to anticipate an activity each morning related to a theme and requires a bit of planning and implementation. Once the lessons and activities are planned, they can be saved for next year.
>
> An exciting game developed by P4 involves movement. She called her game, *modified escape room*. P4 described the game with enthusiasm:
>
> The game is a hunt for clues that leads students to the only exit out of the classroom (not allowed to take shortcuts out the classroom door). It is a

> scavenger hunt, a problem-solving journey, to figure out how to escape the classroom. The game involves preparation; however, I use it every year. The skills which my students improve on include map reading, problem-solving, communication with each other, learning how to ask questions, and listening.

P7 spoke about her teachable moments and how those moments stimulate a student's inquiry through fun. She explained her teachable moments:

> Since I teach language arts, my students come across unknown vocabulary words. When students are engaged in a lesson, and they hear a word or read a word they don't know, I have them look it up. After, I have the word visually pinned on a board, and my students strive to see how many times they can use the brand-new word during the week.

Dance and music. Dance and music have the propensity to go together, and that is no exception in school. 2 of the 10 participants who instruct in a classroom emphasized the use of music and dance as an instructional practice. P5 shared her instructional practice with dance and music:

> I make time at the end of each day for the students to use instruments. How this works, each student gets to perform for a couple of minutes for their peers. One performer at a time. The musical instruments are enjoyable. I have rain sticks, sand blocks, maracas, hand drums, and tambourines, to mention a few. I would suggest special education teachers pick up simple hand instruments when they see them in the community for sale.

Sometimes, minimal movement and music can become an instructional practice in the classroom. P1 shared yoga, along with soft music, is implemented to provide calm for her high school students with DD. P1 stated: yoga calms my students and readies them to learn. Then P1 added:

> All my students benefit from yoga. I have students with significant needs and my students who use a wheel chair, they might not be able to be down on the floor with yoga mats, but they enjoy being participants in this activity.

Technology. Technology was prolific in 9 out of the 10 participants' instructional practices. Only 1 out of the 10 participants stated they used only computers "sometimes" in the classroom. Also, 9 out of 10 used the SmartBoard. The SmartBoard's primary purpose is for group lessons. Only 4 out of 10 participants had their students use an iPad. The iPad was a tool used by students for their reading and writing. Then 5 out of 10 participants allowed their students to use Chromebooks. The Chromebooks allowed students to conduct research, work on independent projects, and save their work on the Chromebooks. Last, two interesting tools shared by separate participants was a stand-up desk and cell phones. P7 said, "I wrote a grant and received funding to purchase some stand-up desks for students who have a difficult time sitting in my classroom." P3 said, "I allow my students to use their cell phones for classwork. My students can use the cell to google information, conduct spell checks, and watch relevant videos to the subject for the week."

Miscellaneous activities. Visitors and clubs are main categories associated with miscellaneous activities. Two out of the 10 participants shared exclusive instructional

practices. There were not many participants who implemented such practices; therefore, these particular instructional practices for this study entitled miscellaneous activities seemed appropriate for my research. I wanted to include both instructional practices in the hopes of sparking an idea for other special education teachers.

Visitors. Visitors are not unique in a classroom; however, a therapy dog may be. P7 spoke about therapy dogs visiting her classroom and the positive impact the therapy dogs had on her students. P7 said:

> I have been having therapy dogs come to my classroom during reading. Before the therapy dog's arrival, I have the students choose a book to read. Students can rehearse reading their books to peers. On the day of the dog's visit, the student will find comfort and confidence when it is their turn to read aloud to their canine friend. Therapy dog as a visitor is an activity I have enjoyed, and my students look forward to the therapy dogs visiting our classroom. It is a great way to cultivate conversations among peers.

Clubs. Clubs can be a successful way to implement instructional practices. P3 was the only participant who shared about an after-school club as a positive activity for students with DD. The club she organized is called *circle of friends*. P3 spoke about this club in detail:

> Our school has a club called *circle of friends*. This year we are fortunate because I earned a small grant to help with the cost. Money pays for snacks, field trips, transportation, and guest visitors. The club runs for 2 hours on a designated day. We meet once a week as a group. I would recommend any high school teacher,

particularly special education teachers, to consider starting up a club. The participants make new friends, enjoy various activities together, and that was the goal for this club. I did not have a curriculum to follow for this club; I just focused on the students with DD social needs.

Curriculum. A curriculum is a program in a specific area (e.g., math, science, life skills) taught in a high school. For special education teachers to implement instructional practices for high school students with DD, a curriculum will help them think, plan, and then implement instructional practices for their students. Since the research question remained: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD, it was suitable to explore what curriculum the participants implement by means of their instructional practices. Inadequate access and the use of general education curriculum with adjustments are vital categories associated with the curriculum.

Inadequate access. Inadequate access to a curriculum to support the participants' instructional practices continued to concern some participants. Curriculum access when instructing high school students with DD, 4 out of 10 participants stated they do not have a curriculum for either classroom or community instruction. Then 5 out of 10 participants did not mention if they had a curriculum or not, and 1 out of 10 participants stated they had a curriculum for instruction in their classroom.

The use of the general education curriculum with adjustments. The use of general education curriculum tended to be a common instructional practice by participants who did not have a curriculum. Without a curriculum to implement lessons,

4 out of 10 participants said they tend to use a general education curriculum and plan for their students based on their learning needs. When P8 had to answer the question regarding instructional practices for high school students with DD in her science classroom, she pondered a moment before answering. P8 said:

> This question is hard for me, and I don't want my answer to reflect on my instructional practices. I do not have a curriculum to implement for my students who come to my science class every day. I borrow ideas, curriculum, worksheets whatever I need from my general education peers. I have to modify what I borrow from my peers, but it is a starting point for me when I am developing lesson plans. I try hard to be creative since I do not have a curriculum to lead me through the year. The students are the ones who are as creative as the materials allow them to be.

Similar situation as P8, P4 shared that she did not have a curriculum for life skills. P4 continued:

> I teach life skills; I have to be creative and flexible. I do not have a curriculum to stimulate my ideas and facilitate writing lesson plans to address my students' learning needs. I tend to work with departmentalized curriculums from my general education peers. Of course, I have to modify my plans; however, it does help me having a curriculum from various departments in my high school. We are very hands-on in my classroom. Sometimes, I can sit down and plan with my general education peers' various lessons. It is nice to get feedback from teachers who have already worked with the curriculum.

P3 shared she did not have a curriculum to instruct history and English. P3 advocated the use of current events as an instructional practice. She stated the students love learning about what is happening in their world. She continued:

> Since my students love learning about their neighborhood, city, county, or even their state. I read the events from a newspaper or the internet to the whole group; then, we discuss the current event. I rely on events, websites, books, visual aids, and activities to personalize the lesson. If I find great books I want to read with my students for next year, I order large print books the prior year for my students with visual impairments. If I find a website that reinforced my lesson, I bookmark it on my computer. These are some practices that have helped me instruct my students without a curriculum and training.

P2 shared her instructional practices without a curriculum. She shared how she develops lessons. P2 said:

> I use the same curriculum as the general education staff. I have to be flexible and modify my lessons to meet my high school students' needs; however, I make it work. For now, I print notes out for students, I develop word banks for my students, I create my worksheets that support the topics for that week, and I have the students work with our classroom tools – like Chromebooks.

Training. Training is an alternative expression for professional development. Collaboration and minimal training were mentioned by numerous participants as concerns regarding training. Ultimately, 8 out of the 10 participants stated professional

development workshops held in their district did not apply to the students or provide new instructional practices to implement in their classroom or the community. P8 stated:

> I can go to workshops, but when I have time, I gather ideas from the general education teachers who teach science. Honestly, the professional development workshops in my district are not appropriate for my students' needs. My students are unique and have varied learning needs. Professional workshops do not help me; however, more time to collaborate with my peers would be great.

Collaboration. Collaboration with peers provides more information than any professional development workshop seemed a constant comment during the interviews. Four additional participants out of the eight who stated professional development does not provide the support needed to instruct students with DD, echoed P8, stating they would prefer staff time to collaborate. Instead of sitting for 4 hours in a professional development workshop, P2 said most staff would rather sit for 4 hours collaborating with peers in their general or special education department. With the last interview question, P6 was quick in his response:

> I will be short with you and to the point. How have professional development workshops helped me with my instructional practices? The answer is the training does not help me at all. The professional development workshops have never helped me. What is the point of sitting and not walking away as a better teacher? Professional development workshops are not relevant to my instructional practices.

A response from P9 had a more optimistic answer. P9 stated:

> I find professional development workshops in my district can help me, and some cannot help me. Most of my peers do not find professional development workshops beneficial and prefer to collaborate. If we had time to turnkey what we already know and use in the classroom with our peers, that would be beneficial and sufficient training.

Last, P7 shared:

> Professional development comes with experience, knowing where you are in skills as a teacher and where you need reinforcement to do a better job at instruction. There is minimal training in college for special education, especially for future teachers who want to work with students with DD. I think sometimes professional development may fill the gaps that college did not address; however, new teachers coming into the profession benefit from suitable professional development workshops and require training.

Minimal training. Minimal training remained a concern during the interview by 8 out of the 10 participants. Then 6 out of 10 participants shared the desire to be allowed time for collaboration among peers, even replacing minimal professional development workshops with collaboration time. Only 2 out of 10 participants said they prefer community workshops relevant to their students with DD requirements. Two participants shared separate comments from the norm of the participants and stated their "training either worked or it didn't work for them." Last, 8 out of the 10 participants expressed disappointment towards professional development. Professional development workshops

in all three high schools were delivered in a large assemblage regardless if you taught in a classroom setting or a community setting.

Theme 2: Community Setting

Data indicated 5 out of 10 participants said they taught in the community. For this study, the description of a community is a town comprising of multiple businesses for others to visit. The five participants who instruct in the community, indicated they not only brought their instructional practices into the community, but their students were learning to job sample. P1 stated:

> My students learn about jobs and practice skills for different tasks while on the job in the community setting. The goal for my students who are severely delayed, to join their non-disabled peers, will be to enhance their capabilities so they too can support community business.

It was satisfying to hear success stories from the participants who instruct in the community. Some participant remarks included, "My students are proficient at sorting library books," or "Some of my students are doing great contributing at the animal shelter," or "With practice, all my students' will have a skill to support a business."

Subthemes

There are four subthemes under community setting. Each subtheme required its categories for support. First, subtheme instructional practices included the categories: working with transportation, conferencing with the students, partnering with a job coach, and keeping anecdotal records of students' learning performances. Next, subtheme vocational skills included the categories: community access, self-advocacy and

responsibility. Then another subtheme functional skills included the categories: community literacy, social skills, and independence. The final subtheme resources included one category: limited access to the community.

Instructional practices. Instructional practices in the community setting stand alone in comparison to the classroom setting. A realistic instructional setting for students who present comprehensive developmental delays benefits from an experience in the community. Working with transportation, conferencing with the students, partnering with a job coach, keeping anecdotal records of students learning performances are vital categories associated with instructional practices. To implement a program in the community for high school students with DD requires resources.

Five out of 10 participants write a lesson for students with DD in the community setting. Of the five participants, two participants develop lesson plans and visit the community with the students more frequently since their learning needs are substantial. P1 said:

> The majority of my responsibilities as a special education teacher for high school students with DD is developing opportunities for the students to gain vocational skills. I say vocational skills; however, there are life (functional) skills involved which my students must learn. I tend to think vocational and life (functional) skills go hand-in-hand. Before I have my students placed in the community setting, I have the students conference with me their likes and dislikes before going into the community. Most of my students require guidance from me and do not have an opinion. Many students have not had a chance to contribute to the

> community. Next, I need to confirm a local business that will mentor one or more of my students, then secure a job coach for the students, and obtain a bus for transport. There are necessary steps to implement before placing a student in the community as a high school intern.

P5 mainly instructed in the community also. Like P1, P5 places students in the community as interns. The students have an opportunity to gain vocational skills at a designated worksite, they too, are encouraged to learn functional skills. P5 stated:

> My high school students with DD have demonstrated abilities, and my job is to instruct them to implement those capabilities. For example, if I observe a student with a keen interest in animals, I seek an internship for that student in a business that caters to animals. One of my students has interned at the nearby animal shelter.

The remaining 3 of the 5 participants who implement instructional practices between their classroom and the community have students who rehearse their vocational skills during field trips into the community; however, their learning needs are met with instructional practices in academics too. P8 arranges field trips for students to have real-life experiences in science. P8 said, "We go out in the community as a class, may have a scavenger hunt applicable to a subject area (e.g., insects), and students must find, collect, and bring back one insect. It is a great classroom being in the community." P9 said:

> We go in the community to support the themes I instruct. So, if we are learning about domestic animals, we may go and visit a nearby farm. A farm stimulates

the senses because the students see, hear, and touch, to learn about the animals.

P10 stated:

> We go into the high school community because my class manages the school coffee shop. I am hoping the experience will encourage them to consider employment in a small coffee shop, restaurant, or café. It is an excellent opportunity for my students. I do not require a job coach or transportation.

Working with transportation. Transportation is a crucial component that supports successful internship placements of students by providing access to the community business. Plus, students with DD may require additional staff on the bus to ease mobility due to needs (e.g., wheelchairs, walkers, visual impairment). P5 mentioned the significance of transportation is vital. She shared, "The school bus has to be available to safely transport high school students to the job site and back to the school." P1 stated, "I have to ensure that the transportation for my students who use a wheelchair includes a wheelchair ramp. We typically only require a small van since I have a smaller class."

Conferencing with the students. Only 5 out of the 10 participants said, "Recognize what interests each student regardless of their abilities." Students placed in a community business that interests them, such as an animal shelter, a diner, or a daycare, may motivate students to learn applicable skills that support the business. By conferencing with the students, it helps the special education teacher determine if the placement is appropriate for the student. P1 stated:

> Sometimes, I move my student out of a community business if it does not meet the students' needs and try a different business. On-going conversations with the

students before, during, and after job sampling, is vital to ensure the placement is a success.

Partnering with a job coach. Partnering with a job coach remains relevant to student success in the community and collaborates with the special education teacher. The job coach oversees the student's work production while the student remains in the community. Often, the job coach identifies gaps in a student's work performance that the teacher may miss. (e.g., not completing the last step, not cleaning up after a completed task and not utilizing tools appropriately). It is the job coach who ensures the students are safe, following the rules, remain engaged in the job assignment, and are not experiencing any problems during their community-based instruction. The job coach and the special education teacher work as a team to support the students with DD.

Keeping anecdotal records of students' learning performances. P1 said, "My students are significantly delayed and have various equipment to support them throughout their day. Two students use wheelchairs and three students who use an augmentative device to communicate with since they are nonverbal." P1 and P5, both said, "We keep written records and sometimes even take pictures to track progress or identify barriers of the students' learning in the community." The five high school special education teachers who implement instructional practices in the community for students with DD strive to promote their students' achievement in the community. By keeping anecdotal records of each students' learning, this instructional practice helps teachers to detect gaps in their students' learning and recognize progress made by their students.

Students learn vocational skills so that they can function in a job. Then students are expected to have functional skills while they placed in the position to demonstrate their independence. Only 5 out of 10 participants in this study concentrate on delivering instructional practices to address vocational and functional skills.

Vocational skills. Students with DD are taught vocational skills in the community. Instructional practices implemented by special education teachers targeted explicitly for students who benefit from the community remain a necessity. Community access, self-advocacy, and responsibility are critical categories associated with vocational skills.

Community access. Community access to attain vocational skills by high school students with DD requires two vital entities – the community and the school system. There are benefits for both the community business and the student. For example, students learning how to sort items in a store, pack products in a box, or wash soup bowls in a sink may seem trivial; however, those skills support a business in the community. In time, these skills may allow students to obtain employment in the community thrift shop, market, or animal shelter. Only 5 out of 10 participants mentioned various instructional practices that involved a community setting and the students' acquisition of skills.

P1 brings her students out in the community to support businesses such as the nearby daycare center and masonic village. She said:

> The students care for the elderly at the masonic village. They are not only gaining a skill set, but they are learning compassion. I see their compassion carry over to the daycare center, where they work with a younger population. In both settings,

> I am looking to promote skills such as setting the table, folding napkins, serving food, and helping residents or children play games.

P4 brings her students to larger businesses such as Walmart. She encourages her students to greet others, engage in conversation, and listen to conversation. P4 said:

> Sometimes, I developed a scavenger hunt list at a particular business, like Wal-Mart, and students must find the items. A scavenger hunt is a great way to teach students how to navigate through and find items in a business. Simple and effective.

P5 places students in the community, but before they board the bus as a "potential intern who will job sample," she encourages them to remember their name tags, aprons, any item that is a necessity for the job. She said, "Vocational skills are important; however, I want my students to look ready to work too."

P8 teaches science; nevertheless, she does schedule community outings for her students with DD to encourage vocational skill interests. She explained her outings as "hands-on experiences, real-life, and relevant to learning skills." When she returns to class, P8 said:

> I use what the students were exposed to increase their knowledge about the world around them. I think there are a lot of jobs out there that they can consider. I hope our class outings help foster their interest and vocational skills for any job in the field of science.

P9 teaches language arts and life skills; she brings her students out into the high school community to build their vocational skills. The students operate a coffee shop. P9 said:

> The coffee shop does more than supply beverages to staff members. The coffee shop encourages students to communicate with others outside of the walls of our classroom; they practice their money skills and follow multistep directions when filling coffee orders. I think this is a great community experience for my students.

There were 5 out of 10 participants who concentrated on delivering instructional practices to address vocational skills and understood how critical it was to expose students to the community to gain vocational skills. All five participants responded with similar examples of vocational skills. However, of the five participants, three-spoke in-depth about vocational skills having contributing influences. The participants spoke about self-advocacy and responsibility, and both characteristics support students with DD in the community.

Self-advocacy and responsibility. Self-advocacy and responsibility are skills, and all students are encouraged to learn regardless if they have a disability or not. P1 shared:

> Student job-sampling in the community is vital; however, students demonstrating self-advocacy is critical. I want my students to speak up when they are happy, unhappy, or have a want or need when on or off the job. I am trying to nurture them to become self-sufficient young adults with DD.

P1 and P5 agreed self-advocacy is a skill that benefits all students with disabilities, especially high school students with DD, who present significant delays. P1 shared:

> We go into the community frequently. Most of my students do not have the opportunity to enjoy the community outside of school. They learn skills in the community that I cannot teach in the classroom. (e.g., navigating to find registers in a store, asking for the bathroom, requesting food from a menu). They must learn to speak up for themselves.

Advocating for themselves involves communicating with others who may be unknown to the student in the community.

P5 stressed advocacy, as well as responsibility. She encourages both in the school and in the community setting. P5 stated:

> My students learn vocational skills; in other words, tasks by repetition. However, vocational skills can also include self-advocacy and accepting responsibility. When my students are in the community, I want them to learn to share their likes and dislikes. Plus, all my students slowly gain responsibilities in the classroom, and certainly in the community.

P4 shared that her instructional practices focus on skills in each community business that she schedules. She shared how her students demonstrate advocacy and responsibility when they participate in a community-based instruction program. She continued:

> For example, when we visit a bookstore, the students are introduced to the music area and have tasks to complete. 1) find their favorite music disc, 2) ask the cost of the music disc, and 3) go to the register and make a purchase. Or if we go to a nearby pizza place, my students must read their menu, order their food, pay for their food, and practice holding conversations while maintaining proper manners. It is a great way to build vocational and functional skills. It will not surprise me if some of my students work in a restaurant or a bookstore post-graduation.

For students with DD to have an opportunity to job-sample in their community during their high school experience remains critical. This opportunity will offer a student a chance to build not only skills but self-advocacy and responsibility. These observable qualities confirm students with DD can and will contribute to their community postgraduation. P5 places students with DD in the community frequently. She stated, "I rarely am in my classroom to implement instructional practices. My job is in the community with my students. My instructional practices include ensuring students are gaining skills by identifying the gaps in the program." P5 continued to share:

> When my students are job sampling in the community, I predict they will gain vocational skills. What I am looking for is their ability to advocate for themselves, make choices without adult prompts, and complete tasks assigned to them. They are young adults and will not have a job coach all their lives to tell them what to do. So, showing some responsibility is a great skill – I know they can perform tasks.

Vocational skills are essential for all students with or without disabilities; however, students with DD must have frequent exposure to job sampling to acquire vocational skills, demonstrate self-advocacy, and display responsibilities. Preparation for high school students with DD to become a community contributor postgraduation requires a united partnership between the community and the school system.

Functional skills. Functional skills seem intertwined with vocational skills. However, the participants' responses indicated instructional practices address critical areas targeted in functional skills. Community literacy, social skills, and independence are key categories associated with functional skills.

Special education teachers understand functional skills are those skills required to make sound decisions at home and in the community. For example, functional skills at home may include personal hygiene, upkeep of their living space, or proper nutrition. Functional skills in the community may include riding transportation, developing friendships, and problem-solving. For high school students with DD, the best way to gain functional skills is to practice.

Community literacy. Literacy is a functional skill reinforced in the community. Students surround themselves with community information, and students with DD benefit from instructional practices to address the gap in community literacy. There were 4 out of the 5 participants who implement instructional practices for their students who learn in the community recommended some simple instructional practices to address community literacy.

P1 shared her think boxes in her classroom as an easy instructional practice. Each box contains activities that assist students in learning about their community. The boxes contain activities, including word games, matching uniforms to employees, direction cards, and restaurant menus. It is her intention for the boxes to be educational and an enjoyable way to increase the students' reading skills. She said, "They enjoy reviewing the think boxes before they head out into the community. It is a great get ready for community activities."

P1 also stressed students benefit from riding transportation such as the bus or train. They learn to read directional signs, informational signs, and work with maps and money. P1 said, "We don't ride the bus or train enough – I wish we did. I think having students with DD in the community is vital and will address skills not taught in the traditional classroom."

P3 shared partnering students by ability in the community is vital. The more reliable reader can help the partner with reading environmental signs or products. She added, "For example, in a restaurant, the more reliable reader can read off the menu for the other student. Sometimes the students are better teachers than I am." P4 shared how she uses center-based activities to promote reading. P4 said:

> My goal for my students is their reading will generalize into the community. We use center-based learning in the classroom in preparation for community outings. I like to review the vocabulary about the community business before visiting. There are various ways to review community words. I find the use of games,

peers working with peers on activities, and group work where I model, and my students follow.

P5 said:

My students have word cards, and sometimes we have a great time with games. The students can quiz each other, and they can play charades with some words, they can write them on different modes (e.g., iPad, computer, individual chalkboards); they can even quiz each other. The students keep their words on a ring, and we add to it throughout the year. I don't do a lot of reading instruction because we are mainly in the community; however, when I see gaps in their learning, I try to make it fun.

Social skills. Social skills are reinforced in the community by engaging in conversations with community members. Just 3 out of 5 participants who instruct in the community shared their thoughts about social skills to enhance their students with DD functional skills. P1, P3, and P4, shared their instructional practices for social skills that work in the classroom, as well as in the community.

P4 shared:

On our community outings, the students greet people, engage in conversations, and make requests to the employees working at the business. We do practice in the classroom before visiting a community business. Students' preparation is the key to building their social skills.

P3 discussed her Circle of Friends club after school encourages positive social interactions among peers. She said:

Circle of friends teaches students how to be a kind listener to others. Eventually, the students hold conversations and engage in activities independently during the gathering, but at first, I had to coax the students along.

P1 said:

Most of my students use an augmentative device; however, if the student uses a device for communication, they must still greet and hold simple conversations with peers, as well as with staff. I do have one of the quieter rooms. Socially, my students smile, and wave, and that starts a great day.

Independence. Independence is a skill desired by staff for high school students with DD to possess by graduation. Five out of 10 participants shared instructional practices to nurture their students' independence. Special education teachers strive to instill independence in their students with disabilities, particularly students with DD. The instructional practices stated to apply to the classroom, as well as in the community.

P2 stated:

Keeping a routine encourages my students' independence. They are secure when they come into my class because they know what to do from the start. I don't have any surprises. The structure benefits my students, and their growing independence benefits them.

P3 stated:

One instructional practice I learned long ago, I allow students to earn while they learn. I conference with my students, I have visuals to show them their gaps, and

I provide support if they are struggling. The incentive for them to try hard allows them a say in free time.

P5 said, "Having my high school students assigned to internships not only allows them to gain vocational skills, but they become responsible for their assigned tasks. This responsibility inspires independence."

P6 stated:

I am a true believer in offering a second chance when a student or a group of students fail a test or a project. There may have been a disconnect in my instruction or a bad day for the student during instruction; therefore, I allow students a second chance.

P10 said:

I am a visual learner. By that, I mean, I need to see it to do it. I use that strategy as part of my instructional practice. When I instruct a concept, I display a poster or an anchor chart with the full steps on how to complete an activity. Students appreciate the instructional practice and are more independent with their tasks. They are not having to raise their hand or come to my desk with questions.

Resources. When it comes to implementing instructional practices in the community, there are costs associated with a program providing such an opportunity for students. Limited access to the community is associated with resources.

The 5 out of 10 participants who implemented instructional practices in the community have found ways to support their high school students with DD in the community with limited resources. Plus, they have developed ways to implement

instructional practices without a curriculum. Those instructional practices have fostered vocational and functional skills in high school students with DD. The community is real-life experience, and students' have the optimum environment to learn.

Having the resources to learn other instructional practices remains limited for special education teachers regardless if they teach in the classroom or the community setting. Limited resources for special education teachers to gain instructional practices for vocational or functional skill lessons remain a concern, especially to the participants who implement instructional practices in the community. Limited implementation of instructional practices for high school students with DD in the community may stunt their growth to become a productive citizen in the community post-graduation.

Limited access to the community. Limited access to the community either as a student or as a staff member indicates a lack of resources. Districts become pressured to provide transition programs for students with DD. Special education teachers must implement instructional practices for students who are most vulnerable without training and a curriculum. These high school participants recognize the limitations set before them daily; however, their ingenuity, compassion, and an unyielding dedication to their students with DD are unwavering. The conferred themes, subthemes, and codes are displayed in Table 2 and presented below.

Table 2

Identified Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Classroom setting	Instructional practices	Student grouping for instruction Side-by-side instruction Modify classwork to meet students' needs Remain a flexible teacher Offer compliments to your students
	Mixed activities	Games Dance and music Technology
	Miscellaneous activities	Visitors Clubs
	Curriculum	Inadequate access Use general education curriculum with adjustments
	Training	Collaboration Minimal training
Community setting	Instructional practices	Working with transportation Conferencing and taking inventory Partnering with a job coach Keeping anecdotal records of students' learning performance
	Vocational skills	Community access Self-advocacy and responsibility
	Functional skills	Community literacy Social skills Independence
	Resources	Limited access to the community due to resources

Summary

Special education teachers assigned to high school students with DD, instruct students in a classroom setting or a community setting. Their instructional practices have been obtained by modifying the general education curriculum, peer collaboration, after school webinars, and implementing their creativity to meet each students' needs. Unfortunately, 9 out of 10 participants said they did not obtain added instructional practices from their district's professional development workshops.

Keeping experienced teachers in the school system has become an essential challenge for administrators (Da'as, 2019). Administrators who recognize the needs of their special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD can facilitate to solve the concerns presented by our participants. In this chapter, 5 out of 10 participants implemented instructional practices in the classroom setting, whereas the remaining participants implemented their instructional practices in a community setting. For all 10 participants, the availability of time to collaborate with peers and attending relevant professional development workshops would support their role as a vital staff member in the school district. From this study, special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD provided original instructional practices. Also, their responses to the five interview questions answered the research question: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD?

Chapter 5 contains the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study and the interpretations of the findings. I include a description of limitations, recommendations for future research, and the implications for a positive social change.

Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD. I developed five open-ended interview questions were developed and to ask to the 10 special education teacher participants. The interviews were conducted on three different high school campuses at an agreed time between me and each participant. A qualitative, descriptive approach allowed me to answer the research question and uncover beneficial results.

The special education teachers' responses showed all 10 participants had an abundance of teaching strategies for high school students with DD and implemented necessary and motivational instructional practices to foster their students' skills. All participants were advocates for their students. All the participants, being knowledgeable special education teachers, shouldered the responsibility to discover the right instructional practice that brings a lesson to life in any subject matter.

All special education teachers practiced teamwork with their general education peers and encouraged collaboration in their classrooms. It was apparent that while they were immersed daily in special education, the participants believed and relied on communication with their school community whenever possible. The participants displayed experience, confidence, and knowledge when they discussed their instructional practices. Most shared that their instructional practices have increased over time due to available sources of new information, such as general education staff members, webinars,

and self-initiative. Certainly, there are times, when the problematic delivery of instructional practices exists and high school students with DD are the learners. All 10 special education teachers wanted to contribute to this study to be a part of a positive social change for others and provided supportive answers for future or current special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD.

Interpretation of the Findings

The research question for this study was: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD? Throughout the literature review, I did not find peer-reviewed research focused on special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. This was concerning to me as a professional who works as a case manager for high school students with DD. In this study, I revealed special education teachers' instructional practices for high school students with DD. Concurrently, I discovered some obstacles special education teachers must face to obtain additional instructional practices. These obstacles were found to be mutual in more than one high school and across county lines.

Most of the special education teachers spoke about minimal opportunities to collaborate with their peers due to hall, lunch, or bus duty; therefore, collaboration with their peers ranks high on their need list. School teachers are provided with classroom preparation time; unfortunately, it is never enough. This time is monopolized by lesson plans, phone calls, meetings, and grading papers, to name a few responsibilities placed on special education teachers. School administrators can support their staff by designating a set time either weekly, biweekly, or monthly for team collaboration. This time can allow

teachers an opportunity to collaborate, observe, and share ideas about instructional practices. Lloyd and Lloyd (2015) confirmed the findings in this study about special education teachers who often are not trained and seek practices and procedures from different staff. It is valuable for administrators to consider allowing their staff members time to observe different instructional practices. The findings of the current study included instructional practices implemented by participants, and not because they had time to collaborate, but because of their dedication to delivering even the most tedious lesson to high school students with DD.

The findings in the current study indicated 70% of the participants who instruct in a self-contained setting want a curriculum so they can systematically instruct their high school students with DD. Morningstar et al. (2015) confirmed these findings by revealing that most classroom curriculum and instructional practices were readily available in an inclusion setting to support special and general education teachers but not in a self-contained classroom. Special education teachers who instruct students with DD in a self-contained setting could benefit from a curriculum and additional instructional practices.

Most participants in this study noted their instructional practices were not obtained through professional development workshops but peer collaboration. The participants stressed the lack of opportunities to gain awareness for instructional practices inhibits learning for their students. They acquired instructional practices from other resources, like webinars and knowledgeable staff. Lloyd and Lloyd (2015) found special education teachers who are not trained will pursue practices and procedures from

different staff, which was supported by the findings in the current study. The participants shared their primary objective in the classroom was to produce better outcomes for their students, so they obtain practices from other possibilities (see Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). Lack of instructional practices for special education teachers opens up a conversation about professional development and instructional practices.

Instructional practices for high school students with DD placed in a life skills program also remains sparse. Noel et al. (2017) confirmed special education teachers' lack of instructional practices for students in a life skills program might be problematic for students postgraduation. The participants in this study who work with high school students with DD in a life skills program emphasized the instructional practices were obtained through years of experience and not through professional development. The findings in this study extend those of Noel et al. by acknowledging the lack of instructional practices for special education teachers with students in a life skills program remain. Administrators may consider professional development workshops a priority for special education teachers who work with high school students with DD. Special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD want to have a choice on topics for professional development. The special education teachers have shared their instructional practices in this study but want and are asking for more instructional practices. Recognizing their wants and needs will add value to their role as a valued high school staff member by validating the importance of their impact on students with DD learning. Ruppar et al. (2015) and Pennington and Courtade (2015) confirmed training for special education teachers who instruct students with DD continues to be challenging.

Connecting to this thought, Mirenda (2014) and Mngo and Mngo (2018) added special education teachers' challenges are complex and that a lack of instructional practices may affect student learning.

The participants emphasized how their current professional development opportunities were not relevant to their careers. Noel et al. (2017) published research identifying multiple gaps for employment postgraduation for students with DD, and one of the differences was the staff's lack of awareness on core subjects for high school students with DD. Noel et al.'s findings align with the results of the current study and reinforce the need to address professional development in the CCCS for special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD. During the interview process, P8 spoke about turning to her general education peers to obtain ideas for science because she did not have a curriculum. Administrators may overlook the needs of special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD; therefore, a survey requesting staff to indicate their needs for the year from professional development may be beneficial.

Participants in this study also noted they did not obtain their instructional practices through district training but primarily through peer collaboration. The participants stressed the need for opportunities to gain an awareness of not only their students and the curriculum, but they also wanted additional instructional practices to reinforce their students' learning.

Scott et al. (2014) and Woolf (2019), acknowledged students with DD require daily instructional practices to meet their skill gaps, and this was confirmed in the current study. Scott et al.'s findings were authenticated by the results of the current study. In

brief, to secure additional instructional practices for staff, administrators can offer special education teachers who work with high school students with DD choices in training topics, access to conferences, and additional peer collaboration time. Administrators' advocacy will support their special education teachers who work with high school students with DD and the learning of students with DD.

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Vygotsky addressed the development of intelligence in individuals, particularly students with DD, and discussed relationships between other people as being paramount to encourage learning and skills in students with significant disabilities as well as the instructional practices used by teachers being relevant to the learning of students, such as students with DD. For example, P6 shared that he used activities and collaboration as vital components in his classroom to foster student learning. A close review of all participant responses confirmed that Vygotsky's theory was an appropriate choice for the conceptual framework of this study.

Vygotsky (1978) described social development theory as social interactions between the special education teacher and the student as well as student to student in a small setting, such as a classroom. Vygotsky's social development theory aligned with the study participants' responses. For example, multiple participants practiced the delivery of their instructional practices in small groups or staff to students. They used words like clusters, collaboration, group, teamwork, and community when describing their instructional practices. One participant stated:

> I instruct students who are extremely disabled, and it is beneficial to instruct some of my students in a small setting. This approach of instructional practice allows me to work side by side with the student, slow the pace of instruction, and monitor the students' success with anecdotal notes during their skill performance.

It is relevant to consider a student's response to the special education teacher's instructional practice as an indicator of a lesson's success despite the instructional setting (Scott et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). This study included special education teachers' instructional practices implemented in the classroom setting or in the community setting. Both settings required a special education teacher's mindfulness of instructional practices to promote new skills for high school students with DD. A focus on their students' learning performances in academics and functional or vocational skills were shown to be a priority to the participants despite minimal training, lack of curriculum, and limited resources.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was the use of the qualitative method to obtain in-depth data through an open-ended, semistructured interview process, which limited the data collected. Another limitation was that there was only one coder for the data; this encouraged researcher bias and may limit credibility. Another limitation was the small sample size, which included special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD, and the results may only transfer to a specific population. Yazan, 2015I conducted this research in one state findings may not generalize to other states. Time was a limitation when conducting interviews because each interview took place during

the special education teacher's prep time. Each teacher had 40 minutes of prep time before students returned to their classroom. If I had more time to discuss each interview question with the participants, the findings might have had more depth.

Recommendations

The results I obtained from this qualitative, descriptive study may provide additional instructional practices for special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD. There is a need for the further exploration of special education teachers and their instructional practices for high school students with DD in diverse settings, which may benefit others. For example, further research can include the exploration of instructional practices at a parochial, private, or a homeschool setting. Another recommendation for a future study can include instructional practices in one specific grade (e.g., ninth or 10th), subject area (e.g., math or science), or a combination of settings. This study included high school special education teachers who were primarily assigned to a self-contained life skills classroom. With regards to other high school professional staff members (e.g., art, gym, health, and music), I recommend exploring their instructional practices implemented for students with DD that may improve the knowledge of staff members as well as impact their students' learning. There is a need for future research in the field of special education to provide results that would help others implement instructional practices.

At the beginning of each school year, administrators should take a closer look at the projected professional development workshops for staff. Administrators can ask staff, particularly special education teachers who teach students with DD, what topics

will support their instructional practices in the classroom. This study can provide administrators topics for future professional development workshops. Many themes were significant to the participants and their instructional practices and examining the themes for future professional development workshops could benefit not only special education teachers, but all staff.

Implications

There are substantial implications for positive social change presented in this qualitative descriptive study. Mason-Williams et al. (2015) confirmed that school systems have struggled to retain their special education teachers due to a lack of instructional practices. The results of this study will promote a positive social change for special education teachers by offering new and varied instructional practices. Plus, informing administrators to take a closer look at their projected professional development workshops at the start of each school year. Workshops should include topics for special education teachers who implement instructional practices for high school students with DD.

For school administrators to support their special education teachers, it is essential to provide opportunities for them to collaborate and share their instructional practices (Rodl, Bonifay, Cruz, & Manchanda, 2018). In this study, participants confirmed peer collaboration was valuable to them when in search of instructional practices. Peer collaboration can be offered as a replacement for staff professional development workshops. Administrators can promote positive change in their high school setting

simply by permitting time for peers to work together. This administrative decision benefits not only the teachers but the students they instruct.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD. All the special education teachers in the study had some knowledge about instructional practices specifically tailored for high school students with DD. Special education teachers continue to be at a disadvantage and lack relevant instructional practices to meet their students' learning (see Plotner & Dymond, 2017). Improvement transpires if district administrators advocate more frequently for professional development workshops intended explicitly for special education teachers who instruct high school students with DD. These instructional practices would not only add to the teachers' expertise but would enhance high school students with DD learning. The results from this research will promote a positive social change by informing high school special education teachers about additional instructional practices implemented for students with DD; subsequently, students with DD will increase their learning skills with everyday experiences, and the community will obtain positive community contributors.

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Appendix A: Introduction Protocol for Participant

Research Question: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD?	
I would like to say thank you for volunteering and taking time to participate in my study. I have your consent for the interview, thank you. I will be using a tape recorder and I will be journaling all responses when we begin the interview. Thank you for that consent too.	
To start, let me share briefly my own personal and professional background, and my research. You can ask any questions too.	
There are stages left after all the interviews conclude, and I would like to share them with you so that you know understand what is next following the interview.	
Stages will be primarily, but not in entirety, done in succession and same format with each interviewee. I will conduct each interview, share the results from your interview, obtain your approval that the data I obtained from our interview is accurate, and then proceed to code, categorize, and identify data from all participants that will become part of Chapter 4 (findings) in my dissertation. I will always be available for any questions or concerns you have after the interview.	
Do you have any thoughts and are you ready to begin the interview?	
The interview consists of 5 questions.	
Just share your perceptions and any relevant information that will support each question.	
Are you ready to begin?	

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Special Education Teacher

Research Question: How do special education teachers implement instructional practices for high school students with DD? **Interview Questions**	
How do you implement instructional practices for high school students with DD to encourage small group or individual learning?	
How do you implement instructional practices for high school students with DD to encourage social interaction among each other?	
How do you implement instructional practices for high school students with DD for varied subjects (math, reading, life skills, etc.)	
How do you use tools in your classroom to implement instructional practices for students with DD (e.g. computer, SmartBoard, iPads)?	
How has professional development workshops helped you implement instructional practices for students with DD?	