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General Education Teachers' Self-Efficacy Perceptions of Teaching Students with Disabilities

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Walden University

College of Education

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Hester J. Mallory

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

General Education Teachers' Self-Efficacy Perceptions on Teaching Students with
Disabilities

by

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MA, Central Michigan University, 2006

BS, St. Paul's College, 2002

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2021

Abstract

Over recent decades, a challenge faced in public schools in the United States is the appropriate education of students with disabilities (SWDs) in inclusive classrooms. The problem this study addressed is that, despite the implementation of inclusive practices, SWDs in a small rural school district in Virginia have low achievement rates. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions, exploring the relationship between lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices. The conceptual framework for this study was built upon Bandura's self-efficacy and social cognitive theories. The research questions centered on how the experiences of general education teachers of SWDs shape their perceptions of self-efficacy toward inclusive teaching and their professional development needs. Open-ended interview questions were created to gather data from purposefully selected eight middle school teachers who teach SWDs in inclusive classrooms. The interview recordings were transcribed, analyzed, and coded for themes that aligned to address each research question. The key findings included teachers' beliefs that with professional development support, they could help increase SWDs' achievement. Based on the findings, a professional development series was designed to provide strategies to meet the needs of SWDs. The potential for positive social change includes improved specific inclusion-based professional development for all inclusion teachers which may increase the likelihood of higher self-efficacy perceptions for teachers and higher academic achievement for SWDs.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my only child, my son Demetrius, and my granddaughter, Makayla. You are the love of my life! I dedicate this study to you as an inspiration and a reminder that you can do anything that you want to do as long as you put God first. Philippians 4:13 reads, I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me. When things get tough, don't give up. Keep reaching for the stars, and be the best that you can be! I hope that my academic journey will motivate you to pursue and reach your academic and career goals as I have. I love you both with all my heart!

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I am grateful to have met my friend Frank in the midst of my doctoral journal. Thank you for your consistent encouragement, understanding, and support during my journey. Love Always, My Rock!

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Despite the performance directives in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Standards of Learning (SOLs) implemented in 2002, the achievement rates of students with disabilities (SWDs) at a rural local school district in Virginia have declined instead of increased. Each year, students in the district take an end of grade assessment to determine performance levels and mastery of content. According to the Department of Education website, SWDs yielded a 42.33 % pass rate compared to a 79% pass rate for students with disabilities (SWODs) on the Reading (SOL) for the 2017-2018 school year (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2018). The problem examined in this study is the low achievement rates of SWDs in inclusive classrooms. One of the factors that may cause this is teachers' self-efficacy perceptions related to teaching SWDs (Dufour et al., 2008)

Despite the implementation of inclusive practices, SWDs continue to have low achievement rates in inclusive classroom settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Assessing in all subject curriculum for students in grades K-12 disclose SWDs's achievement rates are lower than their developing peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The population of SWD; ages 3 through 12 has increased from 4.7 million to approximately 7 million since 1991 (USDOE, 2016).The largest percentage of SWDs (35%) were diagnosed with a specific learning disability (USDOE, 2016). SWDs who have speech or language impairments were deemed the second largest percentage of SWDs (21%; USDOE, 2016). SWDs who experience an attention deficit

because of an extended or serious medical condition ranked the third largest percentage of SWDs (USDOE, 2016). Students impacted with multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and physical impairments constituted 2% of the SWD population. Students diagnosed with developmental delays and intellectual and emotional disabilities made up 5% to 8% of the SWD population.

Additionally, a recommended placement of SWDs in inclusive classrooms has led to a steady growth of SWDs in general education settings which indicates preparing the general education teachers with professional development (PD) for effectively teaching SWDs in inclusive classrooms is a priority (USDOE, 2010). As of 2013, more than six in 10 school-age students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) spent at least 80% of their day in a regular classroom whereas only 40% of SWDs spent their day in regular classrooms in 2004.

The accountability demands placed on teachers to increase the achievement rates of SWDs in inclusive classrooms is increasing (Eisenman et al., 2011; Swanson et al., 2015). Studies conducted globally express that while teachers favor inclusion, they feel unprepared to provide appropriate and effective education for SWDs in inclusive classrooms (Arrah & Swain, 2014; Malinen et al., 2013; Mazurek & Winzer, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Although inclusion provides opportunities for SWDs to receive educational services alongside their developing peers, some educators may remain uninformed about how to meet the needs of this diverse population of students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Rationale

Approximately 7 million or 13% of all public school students in the United States receive educational services in inclusion classrooms (USDOE, 2015). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 signed by President Bush and the implementation of the Virginia (SOLs) in 2002 were designed to ensure that students who graduate from high school are prepared to become productive citizens or attend an advanced scholastic program. The expectation has been that students would exit the classroom with the knowledge and capability to compete with peers globally. This attempt at transformation has been unsuccessful, and this study's focus school is challenged with addressing the low achievement rates of SWDs. For example, the focus school had an AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) ranking of 390 among the 421 middle schools in the state of Virginia for the 2017-2018 school year according to the Virginia Department of Education (2020).

The results of this study could help improve and advance teachers' best practices and self-efficacy perceptions and lead to positive social change in the special education arena. While some general elementary teachers' apprehensions about inclusion and teaching SWDs were related to self-efficacy, teachers with more training in special education had less apprehension and higher self-efficacy about inclusion (Sokal & Sharma, 2014). These discoveries bring to light the effect of experience and PD for teachers' efficacy, as well as the diversities in how and what teachers learn about teaching SWDs. With this study I aimed to provide insight into general education teachers' perceptions relevant to teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

General education teachers find it necessary to be prepared through inclusion-based PD and sufficiently supported to improve SWDs' low achievement rates.

Previous research reinforces the importance of teachers' sense of efficacy and has found it is directly related to teacher effectiveness in the inclusive classroom (Bandura, 1993; Brownell & Pajares, 1999). Although there has been research on general education teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion and the types of PD needs they have, there is little research that documents how their lived experiences shape their self-efficacy perceptions and contribute to the low achievement rates of SWDs (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). This study helps to fill the literature gap on general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching as a possible cause for SWDs low achievement rates.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions in a local middle school in rural Virginia, exploring the relationship between their lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices.

Definition of Terms

Several terms are associated with inclusion; each term conveys a different period in the history of inclusion. The following terms were integral to this study.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 or Public Law 94 142: The legislative act that stated that students with special needs should be educated alongside their developing peers in inclusive settings.

Inclusion: The combining of SWDs and SWODs within the general education and mainstream setting (Weisel & Dror, 2006).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): As defined by IDEA, the environment where the student can receive an appropriate education designed to meet their special education needs while still being educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Federal legislation mandating states achieve adequate yearly progress in ensuring all students meet sufficient academic standards.

Self-efficacy: Self-belief in the competence or ability to successfully create and carry out a task to accomplish a specific goal (Bandura, 1986).

Special education: As defined by IDEA, specialized or extensive instructions especially created to meet the individual needs of a child with a disability at no expense to the parents.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study primarily derives from the increasing numbers of SWDs who participate in the inclusive classroom settings at a local school but whose academic achievement rates continue to decline. In this study, I focused on general education teachers' experiences with SWDs that shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching and the PD needs based on their perceived self-efficacy. Using the results of this study, I hope to provide insights that may contribute to increasing the achievement rates of SWDs. These findings bring to light the effect of experience and PD for teachers' self-efficacy perceptions, as well as the diversities in how and what teachers

learn about teaching SWDs. The results of this study may support a positive change in the self-efficacy perceptions among general education teachers at the local level, therefore allowing for an improvement in SWDs' achievement rates. Through specific inclusion-based PD for all teachers in inclusive classroom settings, SWDs could be afforded a general education teacher who has high self-efficacy perceptions towards inclusive teaching.

Research Questions

The problem that this study was designed to address was the low achievement rates of SWDs in inclusive classrooms at the focus school. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions in a local middle school in rural Virginia, exploring the relationship between lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices.

RQ1. How do general education teachers' experiences with SWDs shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching?

RQ2. What are the PD needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms based on their perceived self-efficacy?

Review of Literature

Conceptual Framework

Bandura and Cervone (1983) reported that the higher a person's self-efficacy, the stronger their effort to realize their goals. The more positive teachers are about their ability to teach a subject, the higher their goals and the stronger their commitment to improving student achievement (Bandura, 1997). In the focus school, positive self-

efficacy perception would empower the general education teachers to expand their efforts to increase student achievement.

Bandura's (1993) theory of self-efficacy was used to develop and guide this study. For the most part, self-efficacy perception is the belief that that guides the feelings, thoughts, and behavior of individuals that lead to the ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 2018; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2018). Self-efficacy theory posits that people generally will attempt things they believe they can accomplish. According to Bandura (1994), people with high self-efficacy see circumstances as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. Teachers' self-efficacy perceptions may significantly influence their instructional pedagogy, classroom atmosphere, and perceptions toward educational instructions (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2018; Malinen et al., 2018).

The influence of beliefs that guide people's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors informed this study's approach, research questions, instrument development, and data analysis process. The self-efficacy framework required a qualitative approach to explore the beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that may affect teachers' self-efficacy perceptions related to inclusive teaching. The two research questions in this study were also informed by the self-efficacy framework as I sought to understand participants' feelings and beliefs concerning inclusive teaching.

In addition to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, the conceptual framework for this study was also supported by Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura's social cognitive theory proposes that people learn from one another through observation, emulation, and setting examples (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's social cognitive theory has

been widely used in studies of human behavior and the consequences that occur from their chosen actions (Woodcock & Reupert, 2011). Although social cognitive theory reflects self-perceptions (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Woodcock & Reupert, 2011), researchers attest that teachers with high efficacy create stronger student achievement than teachers with lower efficacy beliefs. Consequently, implementing PD to supplement practices used in inclusion settings is important to ensure significant and relevant educational experiences for SWDs (Braden et al., 2005). Having the ability to produce a desired result is one of the significant ideas of the social cognitive theory.

In as much as some researchers have revealed that general education teachers do not feel prepared or assured in their own abilities to meet the academic needs of students with special needs, the lack of self-efficacy could be detrimental in inclusive settings (Cullen, 2010). According to Leatherman and Niemeyley (2005), experiences in the inclusive classroom can impact teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Therefore, Bandura's (1993, 1997) theories and other current research studies support the conceptual framework for this study because people develop attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about a situation based on their lived experiences. Efficiently addressing the research questions, data collection, and analysis require the input of individuals who have developed a sense of self-efficacy for teaching, or are moving in the right direction to improve their teaching methods that directly affect self-efficacy perceptions and its influence on improved student achievement (Bandura, 1997).

Review of the Broader Problem

To investigate the broader problem of teacher efficacy perceptions regarding SWDs' low achievement rates, I used the databases ERIC (peer-reviewed articles), ProQuest, and SAGE. I used specific key words: *self-efficacy perceptions*, *secondary general education teachers*, *students with disabilities*, *inclusion*, and *low achievement rates* as I searched for peer-reviewed articles published between 2017 and 2021.

I focused the literature review on the study's conceptual framework and on literature relevant to general education teachers who service students with disabilities. This literature review consists of seven sections addressing the following: (a) least restrictive environment, (b) inclusion, (c) responsibilities of the general education teachers, (d) SWDs' academic achievement, (e) educators' perceptions of inclusive practices, (f) general education teachers' preparation, and (g) inclusion-based PD.

Least Restrictive Environment

IDEA defined the LRE is the environment where the student can receive an appropriate education designed to meet their special education needs while still being educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Prior to 1975, the only alternatives to educate SWDs were transitioning students from general education classrooms or placing students in isolation all day (McLeskey et al., 2011). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 SWDs and SWODs should be taught in the LRE to enhance their academic and social development. McLeskey et al. (2011) contended that the general education teachers play a main role in the inclusive classroom. One of the main aspects for a successful classroom lies in the teachers' self-

efficacy perceptions about accommodating SWDs and their discernment about the students' abilities to achieve academically. To accommodate the needs for each student, general education teachers should be provided with resources that will meet their challenging responsibilities and be given gainful support (McLeskey et al., 2011).

Inclusion

Inclusion is a term used in education to convey the objective that all children will be educated to the maximum extent possible with their peers, whether they are disabled or nondisabled. The original goal of inclusion policies set forth in IDEA was that SWDs would benefit socially from merely being in the classroom with their nondisabled peers, not that they would perform academically equal to their nondisabled peers. While federal law does not require inclusion, federal law does require that educational facilities make endeavors to place SWDs in the LRE, which may include inclusive settings. Olson et al. (2016) revealed that the rationale for inclusion of SWDs is educational equity because SWDs have the right to have access to the same content as their nondisabled peers.

Due to the declining academic achievement of SWDs, many administrators are compelled to increase teacher accountability, student performance, and academic achievement, consequently placing increased responsibility on the general education teacher. Overstreet (2017) reported that new teaching strategies that affect students' academic achievement in high-stakes testing have made teacher learning a common topic. Research has indicated that the success rate of SWDs is low in general education classes and that the efficacy of teachers in meeting the needs of SWDs in general education classes is very low (Stefansk, 2018). The assertion was made that secondary teachers

should be required to expand the skills needed to assist SWDs in inclusion settings (Melekoglu, 2018).

General Education Teachers' Responsibilities

Since the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of (1975) was enacted over 40 years ago, inclusion of SWDs in the general education environment has increased dramatically. With its enactment came new and continuing responsibilities for general education teachers. In recent years, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandated accountability in all states for the continual academic progress in achievement of all students, including and specifically SWDs. Additionally, the IDEA mandated the individual needs of SWDs be considered during lesson planning to ensure accommodations were provided for them in the general education setting. Katz (2015) reported the huge workload associated with SWDs being educated in the general education classroom created serious uneasiness for general education teachers and contributed to their low self-efficacy. Increasing demands to effectively educate SWDs along with their nondisabled peers were being placed on general education teachers (Shoulders & Krei, 2016). In mixed methods research Patterson and Seabrooks-Blackmore (2017) found that preservice teachers often display low self-efficacy and do not feel sure of their abilities to teach all students. In addition, the researchers recommend enhancing teacher preparation programs.

One of the preeminent problems stemming from general education teachers' low self-efficacy has been its effect on teacher performance. Yildiz (2015) conducted a study focusing on teacher and student behavior in the inclusive education setting using a time-

sample behavior analysis hinging on distracted behavior, problem behavior, and intellectual behavior. Yildiz (2015) concluded many general education teachers harbored negative attitudes about the education of SWDs in the general education classroom.

Academic Achievement

Numerous researchers studied self-efficacy regarding student achievement. Research has indicated that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy have a positive effect on their own beliefs about student behaviors, which improves their classroom instructions and positively impacts student achievement (Miller et al., 2017). Shahzad and Naureen (2017) stated that teacher self-efficacy had a positive influence on student achievement. Moreover, student achievement was also influenced by teachers' classroom perceptions, an attribute of teaching greatly impacted by teacher self-efficacy (Gilbert et al., 2014).

Educators' Perceptions of Inclusive Practices

International perspectives relevant to the education for SWDs have been shaped over the years by legislation and policies. Shari and Vranda (2016) reported reluctance among teachers to accept SWDs in their classroom was high. Shari and Vranda revealed that teachers' attitudes and perceptions relating to inclusion are just as significant as policy approval in successfully implementing inclusion. A teacher will demonstrate a high level of dedication to their beliefs and values about students in a classroom. Odongo and Davidson (2016) asserted that teachers are the motivating force behind inclusive education. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are essential for the successful implementation of inclusion.

Researchers have reported both novice and in-service teachers have experienced low self-efficacy in regard to their abilities to efficaciously instruct SWDs. Malinen et al. (2013) also noted the low self-efficacy teachers encountered while teaching SWDs in the general education classroom. Due to the content-driven nature of instruction on the secondary level and the lack of adequate teacher preparation, the low self-efficacy levels displayed by educators to efficaciously instruct SWDs needs to be addressed (Montgomery & Mirenda, 2014). Teacher self-efficacy has been found to have a strong effect on many areas of instruction. Kormos and Nijakowska (2017) discussed the negative attitudes teachers presented toward the inclusion of students with dyslexia when the teachers felt unprepared to efficaciously instruct all students, including those with disabilities, in the same learning environment. This often resulted in negative outcomes.

The attitudes of teachers towards SWDs being serviced in the inclusive classroom and their perceptions regarding students affect their academic achievement (Botha & Kourkoyras, 2016). Teachers' perceptions and their experiences of SWDs has an impact on the delivery of effective support to SWDs. Sometimes SWDs are stereotyped due to the teachers' negative experiences. According to research, teachers are inexperienced in the skills needed to address the challenges SWDs present (Klopfer et al., 2019). The challenges faced by educators in dealing with SWDs are related to a lack of teacher training.

Teachers are ill-equipped with the knowledge required to implement inclusive practices and address the special needs of SWDs. A study of teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of SWDs supports appropriate training as a method of general education

teachers provide adequate educational support to SWDs (Botha & Kourtas, 2016).

Findings have indicated that the interactions between the teacher and students with health impairments are affected by a teacher's perception (Whittle et al., 2018). Educators who consider it their duty to promote the student's success regardless of their special needs interact with SWDs more effectively than the educators who believe that learning disabilities are a lasting trait that has nothing to do with them as an educator (Whittle et al., 2018). A qualitative analysis that focused on teacher's impact and the connection to student academic achievement was consisted of 37 teachers who were randomly selected from 31 secondary schools in Australia (Whittle et al., 2018). The results revealed that teachers believe that their proficiency in the education program, the expectations they place on students, and the use of cogitative practices affects students' academic achievement. The findings also revealed that positive teacher-student interrelations enrich the performance of the students. According to the results of the study, the efficiency and quality of teachers can be strengthened through the adoption of PD opportunities for in-service teachers. These training opportunities are noted to enable educators to strengthen their students' academic performance (Whittle et al., 2018). Determinant factors of student achievement are the teachers' motivation to engage and inspire the students. Teachers' perceptions of SWDs can impact a student's academic performance (Whittle et al., 2018). Hornstra et al. (2010) proposed that some teachers have low expectations for SWDs as compared to SWODs. Negative perceptions of students by teachers can result in negative interactions, which influences the learning opportunities offered to students and consequently affects the student's mastery (Kourkoutas & Stavrou, 2017).

On the positive side, Odongo and Davidson (2016) asserted that the perceptions of teachers will improve if the necessary resources and other forms of support systems are in place to help. Odongo and Davidson reported that teachers tend to have better attitudes towards SWDs in inclusive classrooms if the resources and accommodations are provided. Odongo and Davidson clarified how critical teachers' perceptions are and how those perceptions may lead to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Teachers' perceptions about children with disabilities may control their attitudes towards implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers' perceptions have extensive influences on student achievement (Williams, 2012). In a study designed to assess how student achievement in math and reading is affected by the teachers' expectations, the findings indicated that teachers should look beyond their viewpoint and misbeliefs about SWDs and focus on serving all students (Williams, 2011). As noted in several studies, the perceptions of teachers appear to be a significant indicator of positive outcomes for these students (Whittle et al., 2018; Williams, 2012).

Teacher Preparation

Cochran (1998) established that as the educational system continued to change, general education teachers were not only responsible for the general education course of study, but essentially, had become special education instructors mandated with delivering a special education service. Even though educators began undertaking additional responsibilities in the inclusive classroom setting, the training and preparation for these had barely changed (Cochran, 1998). The U.S. Accountability Office (2009) reported

teachers disclosed that they had little to no coursework related to special education or the inclusive classroom. The study also reported that most student teachers were only mandated to observe SWDs during their teacher preparation. Without directions in how to provide instruction, the general educators were unprepared to meet the needs of SWDs in their classrooms (U.S. Accountability Office, 2009).

When novice teachers are faced with opportunities to teach in an inclusion-based classroom setting, there is documentation that indicates that universities do not sufficiently prepare teachers. The results of a mixed methods study indicated that teacher preparation programs require an adequate curriculum to address inclusion (Noggle et al., 2018). The reorganizing of the undergraduate course content to include topics on inclusive classroom teaching was recommended.

Research shows that a key determinant of student performance is the quality of the teacher's perceptions about the students (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). To address the challenges faced by SWDs, it is appropriate to center attention on teachers. Improving the quality of teachers is paramount in enhancing the ability of the teachers to provide emotionally reassuring atmospheres to SWDs (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Hamre & Piantab, 2009).

Abery et al. (2017) reported that although inclusion in the general education classroom steadily increases, the preparation and PD of general education teachers is lacking, resulting in general educators unprepared for the responsibility. Unprepared general educators intensified the perception that special educators should be solely responsible for the academic and social needs of SWDs. Abery et al. further reported that

while much had been done to increase participation in the general education setting, progress needed to be made to ensure meaningful academic and social access to typical developing peers and grade level curriculum.

Inclusion-Based Professional Development

To support success in inclusive classrooms, general educators need to acquire current knowledge through ongoing PD. Multiple researchers have conducted studies to bring to light how PD is of paramount significance and essential in the livelihood of educators and students (Flannery et al., 2013; Glazier, et al., 2016; Grima-Farrell et al., 2014; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Saleem et al., 2014; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). Teachers in inclusive classrooms need up-to date and significant resources related to SWDs through inclusion-based PD to further enhance their pedagogical practices.

It has been established that a one-time instance of PD training may be insufficient and that subsequent activities may be vital to the success of PD and may alter how instruction is provided to SWDs (Collins, 2019). Peter (2018) performed a study on the school placement of SWDs in which teachers were prepared for SWDs being enrolled in general education classrooms. The training extended for 7 weeks in the form of ongoing PD. The PD made it possible for these teachers to have a better perception and acceptance of SWDs. Peter (2018) stressed the importance of PD transpiring over a period of time to support teachers in adjusting their processes. Nazier et al. (2017) agreed that PD should have a continuing effect on teacher assurance and capability to teach. High self-efficacy perceptions are the foundation of their students' academic success. Rutherford et al. (2017) stated that teachers who are involved in sustainable PD have a

more favorable effect on student academic achievement, and desirable PD influences teachers' high self-efficacy for teaching.

School administrators and inclusion-based PD can enhance the attitude of teachers by making available strategies that can assist the teachers to enhance inclusion classroom instruction. With the increase in the number of students entering the inclusion classroom, it is paramount that administrators of education programs evaluate their curriculum to include more educational courses.

Implications

Because of the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and IDEA, it is imperative for teacher education programs to provide effective training to highly qualified and novice teachers to prepare for challenges of teaching in inclusive classroom settings (Harvey et al., 2010). Desimone (2011) reported, "Positive student achievement occurs when features of effective teacher learning are the product professional development" (p. 71). The findings of this study could provide a basis for PD that supports teacher efficacy perceptions that could result in an increase in student achievement. The outcomes of this study could provide insight to administrators regarding increasing the achievement rates of SWDs.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the self-efficacy perceptions and experiences of general education teachers toward the inclusion of SWDs at the middle school level. In this research study, I addressed various acts such as the No Child Left Behind Act of (2001) and IDEA that played a major role in ensuring that the

SWDs in the United States have access to the same education as their developing peers. A major reason behind the analysis of No Child Left Behind Act and IDEA is that these laws have forced administration to provide opportunities for education to SWDs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers are being challenged to find ways to successfully accommodate SWDs academically in the inclusive classroom (Swain et.al., 2012). It is vital to the success of inclusion that teachers have high self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching. It is important that stakeholders be made aware of the factors that influence teachers' self-efficacy perceptions. Teachers' self-efficacy perceptions can play an important role in the success of inclusion. The next section provides the research method used for this study. The components include the research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, as well as ethical considerations. In addition, the next section includes a discussion of the findings and the goal of the study project.

Section 2: The Methodology

At the focus school, the decreasing rate of academic achievement among SWDs has impelled administrators to increase efforts in challenging educators to contribute more to the success rate of SWDs placed in general education classes with their nondisabled peers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the self-efficacy perceptions of secondary general education teachers toward teaching in an inclusive setting, using a qualitative approach, which will allow the researcher to explore the relationship between their lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices. In this section, I described the study methodology and research design. I also provided a description of the participants, the ethical protection of participants, and the data collection effort. I discuss interview procedures and my role as the interviewer. Finally, I address methods of data analysis, including coding and credibility procedures.

Research Design and Approach

For this qualitative study, I employed a basic qualitative approach to data collection using semistructured interviews. Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research presents reality to its readers and induces feelings of mutual experiences. The design centers on participants' interpretations of their experiences. This is an appropriate research design because I sought to understand human experiences and how people interpret them individually.

In quantitative research, the researcher investigates a research problem based on tendencies in the field or a need to interpret why something transpires using numerical data. I did not select quantitative research design because my research centered on

responses to open-ended interview questions that provided dialogue from participants in the study, which offered data on the study topic along with an intricate picture of the study phenomenon.

Mixed methods research design allows the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study or an array of studies to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2018). Mixed methods is an excellent design to use if the researcher plans to build upon both qualitative and quantitative data. I did not use mixed methods because I gave more attention to data produced from open-ended interview questions that provided dialogue from participants in the study, which offered views on the study topics along with an intricate picture of the study phenomenon.

Ethnography involves the study of a culture-sharing group by observing a society from the perspective of the subject of the study. The culture of the people is documented as presented. Creswell (2018) depicted ethnography as a design that involves the collection of data mainly through interviews and observation. According to Creswell (2018), ethnographers describe a holistic perspective of the group's history, religion, politics, economy, and environment in a natural setting over a prolonged period.

The intention of ethnography is to study cultural concepts including a culture's values, to paint a holistic cultural portrait of its intricacies. Ethnography is useful to obtain knowledge rooted within a culture, such as how attitudes and value systems directly influence the demeanor of the group (Jones-Smith, 2018). For this study, individuals within the culture are of concern, not the culture itself; consequently, ethnography was inappropriate for this study.

In a narrative research design, the researcher investigates the lives of individuals through stories (Creswell, 2018). For the narrative research design, the researcher retells stories about the lives of the individuals who are the subject of the study. Creswell (2018) further reported that the researcher restates shared stories chronologically, with the stories often giving consideration to a merging of the researcher's and participant's perceptions. Owusu-Ansah and Agarwal (2018) concurred that the use of narrative research is to determine the views of narrators using interviews. A narrative design would not have been appropriate for this study because the participants' life stories were not the focus of this research.

In a grounded theory study, the researcher generates or builds a theory. Chi et al. (2018) portrayed grounded theory as the study of processes and experiences. This was not an appropriate research method for the current study. The current study involved comparing individuals' responses from shared experiences of a phenomenon.

Participants

The population for this study was middle school general education teachers who had at least 2 years of experience teaching SWDs in inclusive settings. The focus school is a public school located in a rural area. It has 346 students in Grades 6-8 with a student to teacher ratio of 18 to 1. Of the 346 students, 7% are SWDs. Ninety seven percent of teachers have 2 or more years of teaching experience. According to state test scores, 45% of students are at least proficient in math and 67% in reading.

The process for the selection of participants was purposeful, which allowed for deliberate selection of the participants from the study site. This assisted me in attaining a

greater understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Day, 2017). Purposeful sampling is frequently used in qualitative research for the selection of participants with experience in the phenomenon under study (Tyson, 2017). Purposeful sampling can promote the quality, accuracy, and credibility of data. I selected the first eight responses in no specific order, granting for equal opportunity for all willing teachers to participate. I chose this number of participants because it was administrable in the predetermined timeframe and provided me with sufficient information about the problem under study. Creswell (2018) stated that to obtain a more precise view on a setting, it should be sufficient to study a smaller number of participants over a continued period. Creswell (2018) noted that this approach is known as *criteria-based selection*. Participants selected in this method may extend information that participants selected by any other method might not provide. Day (2017) supported using 1-40 participants for this type of research, for the use of more participants could result in superficial perspectives. Purposeful sampling selection was appropriate to focus on the self-efficacy perceptions of general education teachers toward inclusive teaching because there was a need to attain information from participants who were knowledgeable about and had experience in teaching SWDs in inclusive classroom settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I invited individuals who were general education teachers in the inclusion setting to participate in the study. At the onset of the study there were 10 teachers who met the criteria for selection. Overall, 8 teachers who consented to years of teaching in the inclusive classroom environment ranging from 2 years through 8 years; the average number of years in the education arena was 8.8 years. All the participants reported that they have

taught in a general education classroom and an inclusive classroom setting. There were five females and three males.

Gaining Access to Participants

Once I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval number 09-09-20-0055-222), I forwarded a request for permission letter to the superintendent of schools to receive written permission to conduct research on general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions on teaching SWDs. After gaining appropriate approvals, I electronically sent an invitation to participate to prospective participants at the school, along with a consent letter to all teachers who met the study criteria. The consent letter included an explanation of the purpose of the study and the participant's role in the study. This letter explained the study and provided a brief summary of how research would be collected. The informed consent explained the participants' rights, the interview process, and distinctly stated that participation was voluntary. Prospective participants were asked to indicate their consent by replying to the email with the words, "I consent." All teachers who met the requirements for participation were invited, but they were not required to take part in this study. Upon collection of all invitations, I sorted the responses by the replies of "I consent" or denial of consent to participate.

After participants returned the email with the words "I consent" as instructed, I made contact with each teacher via email to schedule a time to meet for the purpose of a one-on-one interview at a time appropriate for the participant. Interviews were

conveniently scheduled so that there were no interruptions of instructional time. Each participant received an email to advise them of the scheduled interview.

Establishing Researcher/Participant Working Relationship

I have worked with a majority of the participants for approximately 5 years without any conflict or negativity. In accordance, I expect that my relationship with the participants will remain collaborative and cordial. During the interviews, I discussed with the participants concerns over the decreasing academic achievement of SWDs.

Ethical Concerns

For this study, I took several steps to address ethical concerns. First, I secured permission from the superintendent of the school district to conduct the study. After approval from Walden University Institutional Review Board office and the district, I had face-to-face contact with the administrators of the study school to confirm permission. The consent form was initially sent via email so that participants could become aware of the specifications of the study and have ample time to consider whether they wanted to participate in the study. I requested that each participant email a copy of the consent form to me indicating their consent by replying to the email with the words, "I consent" within 5 business days to avoid the perception of influence.

Participants in the study received an email as well in which I included:

- informed consent to participate,
- an outline of the specifications of the study,
- affirmation of honoring confidentiality concerns, and

- promise of acknowledgement of the findings with participants and stakeholders upon completion and final approval of the study by the dissertation committee.

I honored participants' confidentiality using a code for participation and gathering of data. To ensure protection of the participants and confidentiality of the data, each participant was assigned a number that allowed me to identify each participant by their number rather than their name. I informed the participants of security precautions in place, such as a password-protected file, ensuring the security of the interviews. Participants' individual statements will remain secure on an external hard drive, as well as the computer available only by me. As the researcher, I was the only person with the ability to retrieve the data throughout the study. Both the computer and the external hard drive will be reserved at my residence in order to prevent any unintended worksite interference.

Data Collection

The collection of qualitative data for the study was done by the means of semistructured, individual interviews with eight participating teachers. Upon approval, interviews took place during grade level planning periods or at the convenience of the participants. The interviews were conducted, one-on-one by telephone at the time most appropriate for the participants. Students' participation in other scheduled classes allowed freedom from distractions. I held two interviews with each participant. The first interview was held for the purpose of gathering initial information pertaining to the research questions. The second interview with the participants consisted of a review of the initial

data as a member check and to add additional information participants wanted to contribute that may have benefited the study. All prospective participants received an invitation to take part in the study.

Instrumentation

I conducted the interviews based on the interview protocol. Accordingly, first I introduced the interview topic along with the contents of the informed consent document at the onset of each interview. I asked for demographic information consisting of participants' years of teaching experience and teaching grade at the time of the study. The responses assisted me in expounding the dissimilarities of responses by participants to the interview questions. I used the 12 content questions to address the research questions and help gain insight into general education teachers' relationships between lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practice in addition to their PD needs. I produced field notes during all the interviews. Creswell (2012a) clarified that a researcher should make notes during interviews because recorders can malfunction. Precisely, I documented details about the participants' observations, perceptions, and gestures. Furthermore, I used the field notes along with the recordings to identify explicit hot subjects for each participant. Glesne (2011) identified the researcher's journal as one of the most important instruments because the researcher can record a range of information in the journal, such as prolific detail about the participants, the site, communications, and observations. Glesne further noted that bias is controlled by the researcher, aiming attention at recording specific, accurate information, unlike judgmental information. Questions 1-8 address RQ1 ("How do general education teachers' experiences with SWDs shape their

self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching?") and questions 1-4 address RQ2 ("What are the professional development needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms based on their perceived self-efficacy?"). The interview protocol is provided in Appendix B. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

As Khan (2016) recommends, I recorded the interviews and transcribed the audiotapes for the data analysis. I was responsible for assembling the information from the initial invitation, consent to participate, and personal interviews. Creswell (2012) reported that to validate findings, data transcriptions and analysis, the researcher may utilize member checking and present findings that contradict the themes. Once the interviews were completed, coded, and analyzed, I used member checking with the participants to determine the accuracy of the transcriptions.

Role of the Researcher/Biases

The role of the researcher should be made known at the onset of the study. Creswell (2009) emphasized the significance of the role of the researcher, their visualness, as well as how data are collected and analyzed influences the findings. I have approximately 15 years of experience at the study site as the Exceptional Education Department Chair as well as that of a teacher of grade levels six-eight. I have been a co-teacher in an inclusive classroom setting for the past 10 years. I have also worked with most of the teachers in the aforementioned grade levels for most of my tenure at the school.

I have never held a supervisory position that required an evaluation of any of the participants in the study. Moreover, the participants are enthused to resolve the problem.

In order to maintain assurance that no biases occurred, I kept an eye on the reflective journal to identify any personal assessments. My role as the researcher was that of an interviewer asking open-ended questions to induce recorded responses. As a special education teacher in the district, I do not hold a supervisory role nor influence over the participants. My personal bias identifies with all SWDs being allowed an opportunity to participate in an inclusive classroom to the greatest extent appropriate. My personal experiences educating SWDs play a role in my bias. In order to ensure my bias did not have a role in the research, I provided a standard introduction prior to each interview, specifying that it was my job to listen, accurately transcribe the information, and abstain from instilling any bias or personal beliefs. I transcribed responses from audio taped and handwritten notes by typing them into a computer file for analysis later (Creswell, 2018). The purpose of the open-ended questions in the interview was to allow the participants to describe their experiences without being compelled by any prospect that I might have or any published research findings.

Data Analysis

After the final interview, I began the transcription of the audio recordings and continuation of the data analysis. At least one hour was planned to transcribe each 15 minutes of the interview. In the weeks following the interviews, I transcribed each interview and arranged participants' comments to survey for emerging themes for coding by identifying specific words, reasoning, expressions, and subjects (Creswell, 2012a; Merriam, 2009). When analyzing the interviews, I recorded notes in the reflective journal of my observations and inquires that I found interesting and instructive to the focus of the

study; therefore, beginning the coding process and forming of categories. I read the information multiple times, highlighted emerging themes with code words all through the transcribed text, recorded the emerging themes related to the problem and conceptual framework, and grouped those that shared commonalities. Based on the emerging descriptive themes, I organized the coded themes into meaningful analytical categories. When analyzing the interviews, I recorded notes in the reflective journal of my observations that I found interesting and informative to the center of the study such as beginning the coding process and the forming of categories. I read the information thoroughly, marked emerging themes with code words throughout the transcribed text, recorded the emerging themes related to the problem and conceptual framework, and grouped those that shared commonalities. Results were presented in narrative form with emerging themes arranged into main categories and, as depicted by Creswell (2012a), I used the language of the participants to support established themes.

A rich, descriptive summary was created to pinpoint similarities to determine the role a teacher's self-efficacy plays in SWDs' academic achievement despite of or because of perceptions as they relate to providing instructions in inclusive classroom settings. Additionally, I discussed in detail the PD needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classroom based on their self-efficacy perceptions.

Microsoft Excel was used to generate a chart suitable for a visual portrayal which would serve to narrow the data. Each interview was reviewed for both accuracy and coding. The codes were placed with its own heading and the information collected was entered into pertinent rows with the most precise category as illustrated by the

participants. It was anticipated that as the data developed so would the serendipitous ideas and the forming of a more accurate and deliberative display of the data collected from the individual interviews.

Evidence of Credibility and Trustworthiness

Merriam (2009) emphasized that member checks were essential to a study and can also assist in recognizing any biases by imploring feedback from the participants based on emerging patterns and preciseness of the interviews. Along these lines, misjudgment or misapprehension could be prevented. Member checking is also essential to identify the lack of consistencies concerns and allows for preciseness through checking with participants and should occur within 14 days from completion (Merriam, 2009). The draft summaries from interviews were emailed to each participant and she/he was asked to provide feedback about information in which they may disagree or may have neglected to share. The findings of the study were emailed to the participants for the purpose of preciseness, authenticity, and impartiality to avoid any misjudgment.

Another proposal to control personal viewpoints and biases was to consistently record reflective field notes along with a journal of reflections (Lodico et.al., 2010). I kept an ongoing research journal of my reflections about the study to assist in developing meaningful ideas. Once the interview notes were transcribed, I re-examined and reviewed to identify data that were likely pertinent for further coding purposes. In order to ensure internal validity, I implemented member checking of the draft summary of findings, along with a time in which participants could meet with me to address any possible discrepancies or concerns. In addition, the participants were asked to check for the

preciseness of their data included in the findings within a 14 day window and return the revised summary to me upon completion (Merriam, 2009). Sample transcriptions of interviews and coding are included in Table 2 to support credibility and trustworthiness.

Management of Discrepant Cases

Being the case with qualitative research, it is considered part of the results if participants provide a response. The value or depth of the information provided in qualitative data analysis has more substance than the number of participants who provided an opinion does (Creswell, 2012b); Merriam, 2009). In this research study, I searched carefully for discrepant or negative cases as I conducted the analysis. No discrepant cases arose in this study.

Limitations

At this time the limitations have been identified. First, the participants of the interview process were limited to middle school general education teachers from one school within one district. This indicates that these results/outcomes may not be established for other schools or special education teachers. Also, time can be considered a limitation, as this study took place within one semester of a school year. Another limitation could have been the unwillingness of the teachers to completely share their ideas.

Data Analysis Results

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Creswell (2009) explained that during the data analysis procedure, the qualitative researcher explores and establishes patterns and codes to form themes to define an experience or problem. All participants

were asked the same initial semi structured open-ended questions which were devised to attain a deeper understanding of their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching. Participants were also asked about their PD needs based on their perceived self-efficacy. Some participants were asked follow-up questions if further explanation was needed only. All interviews were recorded for the purpose of transcription. To protect the participants' identity, a number was used as a pseudonym.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions, exploring the relationship between their lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices. Specifically, 12 questions were presented to each participant. Appendix B displays the number of specific questions used in the interviews to answer each of the research questions (see Appendix B Interview Questions & Protocol). After reviewing the emerging themes for each interview question, the elements were organized into major themes. Numerous expressions were categorized. Essential phrases and sentences were drawn from the interview questions and analyzed for commonalities. The data disclosed many similarities and patterns in responses from the participants (see Table1). The biggest concern for the general education teachers was the need for inclusion-based PD.

The research questions developed to address viewpoints of the problem were:

RQ1) How do general education teachers' experiences with SWDs shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching?

RQ2) What are the PD needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms based on their perceived self-efficacy

As illustrated on Table 1, the general education teachers' responses to the interview questions differed but corresponded in several areas. Based on the findings from the data analysis, distinct themes emerged that represented the self-efficacy perceptions shared by the participants. These were the following: (a) lack of inclusive teaching strategies, (b) special education teachers' support, (c) teachers not able to meet the needs of SWDs, (d) special education department and administration support, (e) differentiated and specially designed instructions, (f) inclusion-based professional development to improve the performance of general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings, and (g) teaching strategies for inclusive education settings and training for new teachers. The themes were used to form a description of the meaning and essences of the experiences of each participant. The participant's individual descriptions of the perceptions are the center of the next section. Pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' names to protect their privacy and to help maintain anonymity.

Table 1

Research Questions, Interview Questions, Themes, and Examples of Participants'

Responses

RQ 1: General education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions

Interview questions	Themes	Examples
What is your opinion of SWDs' behaviors in the inclusive classroom? How does the SWDs' behavior affect the learning environment in the inclusive classroom setting?	Lack of inclusive teaching strategies	<i>"SWDs' behavior can be very disruptive especially if they are not receiving the support that they need. Some are embarrassed for one reason or another, so they cause problems to take the attention off of themselves. I wish I knew some strategies to correct the behavior because it disrupts the whole class. I need help with strategies so that the behavior can be controlled, and more learning can take place."</i>
Do you feel that SWDs can master the general education curriculum in the inclusive classroom setting? Do you think that SWDs should be taught in separate classroom settings? Why?	Special education teachers' support	<i>"I think SWDs should be educated in the inclusive classroom setting with their nondisabled peers. I think some students with disabilities are embarrassed when they are in the self-contained special education classrooms because sometimes they are teased. They say that everybody knows that they are in the slow class. Their self-esteem is higher when they are in the inclusive classroom setting. So yes, I</i>

		<i>think they could be successful if they had a general education teacher who is trained to implement the IEPs, inclusive teaching strategies, along with a supportive special education teacher”.</i>
What is your opinion of SWDs’ achievement scores on the SOL assessments in the past two years? What is your perception of the reason for declining SWDs’ achievement scores in the past two years?	Teachers not being able to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusive classroom	<i>“The SWDs are achieving at a lower rate because they are not being accommodated. These students need their material delivered in different ways. We need to determine what approach works for each individual student to ensure we are meeting their needs. This is called differentiation, and a lot of the teachers are unfamiliar with how to differentiate.”</i>
Has there been some challenges to executing collaboration within your grade level? Please explain.	Special education department/administration support	<i>“Yes, there are some problems with executing collaboration within my grade level. Some of the general education teachers are hesitant about teaching SWDs because they are not properly trained or prepared to deal with the behaviors, classroom management, reading IEPs, teaching strategies, and all legal aspects that the special education department is trained to handle. There has been a vacancy for a special education teacher on our grade level for at least three or four years. There</i>

are not enough paraprofessionals nor special education teachers to cover all grade levels. The special education teacher and the general education teacher are not planning together in all subjects; therefore, modifications are not being made in the lessons to accommodate the SWDs. There is frustration because some teachers do not get the support from the special education teachers; therefore, it is a lot on the general education teachers. We constantly stay overwhelmed. Self-efficacy is low because the general education teachers feel inadequate. We need more support from administration and the Special Education Department.”

Discuss your perceptions of your ability to teach and meet the increased demands of the state of VA “No Child Left Behind Act?

Differentiated/specially designed instructions

“I feel that it is possible for my SWDs to pass, but I cannot do it alone. It takes two strong teachers in the inclusive settings. I have a strong and experienced special education teacher as my co-teacher. Although we both could use more training on how to teach in the inclusive classroom setting as far as implementing different strategies, specially designed instructions, and

differentiated instructions. I do not feel good about meeting the increased demands of the state of VA, “No Child Left Behind Act” right now, but with more training specifically in these areas, I think it is possible to meet the increased demands of the state of VA, “No Child Left Behind Act.”

RQ 2: Professional development needs based on self-efficacy

Interview questions	Themes	Examples
How might professional development be used to increase SWDs’ academic achievement in the current inclusion program?	Inclusion-based professional development to improve the performance of general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings	<i>“There is a demand for more PD for general education teachers on how to modify information for SWDs. SWDs could be successful in inclusive classroom settings if all the components are in place to include specially designed and differentiated instructions to accommodate students with diverse/various needs to include comprehension of IEPs, small group, efficacious lessons, one-on-one inclusive classroom strategies, and co-teaching models before the SWDs are placed in the inclusive classrooms”.</i>

<p>What specific PD do you think may help you meet the demands of the increased standards and support you in increasing SWDs' achievement rates?</p>	<p>Teaching strategies for inclusive education settings and training for new teachers</p>	<p><i>“The master’s program did not provide me with the substantial information on working with SWDs that teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms required like implementing the IEPs successfully, and how to maintain a classroom of students with diverse learning and behavioral disabilities. I pursued PD on specially designed instructions and co-teaching models to better accommodate the needs of my SWDs. All new teachers need more PD before they enter an inclusive classroom setting.”</i></p>
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Results

Research Question 1: General Education Teachers' Self-Efficacy Perceptions

Theme 1: Lack of Inclusive Classroom Teaching Strategies

When participants were asked their opinions of the SWDs' behaviors in the inclusive classroom setting, most shared a concern with how to deal with students' behavior effectively. First, it was obvious that the participants' responses reflected the belief that SWDs' behaviors in the inclusive classroom were sometimes uncontrollable. It is also imperative to consider that most participants acknowledged that they experienced difficulties with keeping all students engaged. These inappropriate behaviors lessened the time for learning opportunities in the classroom. Participants expressed that they wished there were teaching strategies they could use to stop or minimize the disruptive behavior

because the inappropriate behaviors affected the learning environment. or instance, Participant 6 reported that she lacked strategies to keep the students engaged; therefore, the students' behaviors were disruptive to the learning environment. She clarified,

Most days, I hate to see the students come in the class because of the behavior issues. They don't listen and they pick on other students. It wears me out nonstop. It interrupts the whole class. It isn't fair to those students who want to learn. They laugh at everything, and sometimes the SWODs join in the inappropriate behavior. We need strategies that we can use to manage the behavior issues as well as strategies to keep the students engaged. Then there probably wouldn't be all of these behavior issues.

As indicated from the sequence of the responses provided by the majority of the participants, teachers felt they have not been supportive of the SWDs in providing strategies to prevent or assist with the behaviors in the inclusive classroom setting. A majority of the teachers shared feelings that the SWDs' behavior affects the learning environment. Teachers expressed that they are not being supportive of the SWDs because they do not have strategies in place to prevent the inappropriate behavior issues. For instance, Participant 8 reported that the behaviors were disruptive to the learning environment. She expressed,

SWDs' behavior can be very disruptive especially if they are not receiving the support that they need. Some are embarrassed for one reason or another so they cause problems to take the attention off of themselves. I wish I knew some strategies to correct the behavior because it disrupts the whole class. I need help

with strategies so that the behavior can be controlled and more learning can take place.

In order to provide equal learning opportunities for SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting, teachers felt that they needed inclusion-based PD. Even though, a majority of the teachers have participated in some type of PD on teaching in inclusive classroom settings, many of their responses mirrored the need for specific inclusion-based training. As indicated from the sequence of the responses provided by the majority of the participants, teachers felt they have not been supportive of the SWDs in providing strategies to prevent or assist with the behaviors in the inclusive classroom setting. The responses also indicated that the special education teacher also plays an important role in the inclusive classroom.

Theme 2: Special Education Teachers' Support

Data analysis revealed that the theme among the responses from the participants concerning their feelings about SWDs' mastery of the general education curriculum in the inclusive classroom setting or should SWDs be taught in the traditional classroom setting (self-efficacy perception) was special education teachers' support. As stated by Bandura (1992), an individual with high levels of self-efficacy would feel at ease engrossing and achieving the desired goal. Participant 3 explained,

I think SWDs should be educated in the inclusive classroom setting with their nondisabled peers. I think some students with disabilities are embarrassed when they are in the self-contained special education classrooms because sometimes they are teased. They say that everybody know that they are in the slow class.

Their self-esteem is higher when they are in the inclusive classroom setting. So yes, I think they could be successful if they had a general education teacher who is trained to implement the IEPs, inclusive teaching strategies, along with a supportive special education teacher.

As documented, the majority of teachers felt that SWDs could master the general education curriculum in the inclusive classroom setting providing the SWDs receive their accommodations and modification. It should also be noted that good classroom management, and the support of the special education teacher were mentioned as well.

In addition, Participant 8 presented information that added to, and supported the statements made by the participants in response to question # 3 in the one-on-one interview. According to Participant 8,

I think some SWDs strive to do better in the inclusive classroom setting because they want to fit in and not be embarrassed by being in the self-contained traditional classroom setting. SWDs can master the curriculum if they are provided their accommodations in their IEPs as needed. Other students need the self-contained traditional classroom especially if they are categorized intellectual disabled. SWDs categorized as ID have a severe comprehension disability. Most SWDs categorized as ID do not take the of the year assessments; therefore, they should not be in the inclusive classroom setting with the students who are assessed with the SOL because these students are on a higher level, and it is important that the teachers stay on track with the pacing guide. It can be difficult for the SWDs to keep up with the pacing guide. The focused school does not have

a self-contained setting for students because of their intellectual disability; therefore, it is imperative that the special education teacher is available and is able to provide support to the ID students and any students that need one-on-one or small group assistance. It is imperative that the special education teacher is supportive in either setting.

Similarly, Participant 5 added,

I think that SWDs can master the general education inclusive classroom if they are provided their accommodations/modifications, and specially designed instructions. All of these take training and time. Special education teachers need to be involved in the lesson planning so that she/he will know ahead of class and can prepare for the lesson by overseeing that the lesson includes the accommodations/modifications, and specially designed instructions. It has to be teamwork in the inclusive classroom setting in order for inclusion to work. I have worked in a collaborative setting before, and it takes a lot even researching strategies and best practices. It takes co-teaching which means the special education teacher has to be involved as well as the general education teacher to achieve student mastery.

One teacher out of the eight teachers shared that students with intellectual disability should be educated in the traditional classroom setting if that setting is provided due to their comprehension skills. Participant 8 shared that if the traditional setting is not available, it is imperative that the special education teacher is available in the inclusive classroom setting to assist with student mastery.

Theme 3: Teachers Not Being Able to Meet the Needs of SWDs in Inclusive Classroom Settings

Teachers were asked their opinion of SWDs achievement on the SOL assessments in the past two years and the reasons for declining SWDs achievement scores. The theme evolved around the obligations of the educators or school (i.e., education administrators in the school, district, local, state, and federal government) not being able to meet the needs of their SWDs. Participants suggested that for varied reasons, SWDs' needs were not being met. Many reasons were provided that recognized this theme. For instance, participants expressed that there was a need for differentiation of instructions due to the achievement levels of the SWDs. Participants stated that they were not allotted enough time according to the pacing guide to teach a standard and ensure that the students grasp the concepts before moving forward with the next standard. Corroborating evidence for these findings is presented as follows. Participant 1 stated:

The SWDs are achieving at a lower rate because they are not being accommodated. These students need their material delivered in different ways.

We need to determine what approach works for each individual student to ensure we are meeting their needs. This is called differentiation, and a lot of the teachers are unfamiliar with how to differentiate instructions.

Participant 3 explained his response to this question as follows:

I think there are various reasons for the declining student achievement scores.

First of all, SWDs are far below their current grade level. This indicates to me that they did not receive a good foundation in elementary school. Therefore, if they

didn't get the foundation, they cannot do the work that is presented to them in the current grade.

As clarified by Participant 5,

I feel scores have declined in the past two years because of the intense pacing guide. Teachers do not have enough time to teach a concept, and the students do not have time to grasp the concepts. In some instances, SWDs have to be retaught again and again before they grasp the concept. I have taught for approximately 10 years, and seven of those years have been in inclusive classroom settings. SWDs need information given to them at a slower pace and in manageable parts. Some SWDs do not know the basic, i.e. multiplication facts or basic vocabulary words. Students are not comprehending new concepts because they have not grasped the basics.

This participant continued to explain how the deficit in one subject affects another and influences the declining scores.

Everything involves reading and comprehending. Students are not reading to understand or comprehend. They are reading to finish or not reading at all. If a question asks them to refer to a specific paragraph, they do not even take the time to go back to read the paragraph. They will guess instead. It appears that they do not know comprehension strategies. Could it be that we as teachers were not taught how to teach reading effectively?

Theme 4: Support From the Special Education Department and the Administration

Special Education Department and Administration's support emerged as the participants specified challenges to executing collaboration within their grade level.

Participant 1 contributed,

Yes, there are some problems with executing collaboration within my grade level. Some of the general education teachers are hesitant about teaching the SWDs because they are not properly trained or prepared to deal with the behaviors, classroom management, reading IEPs, teaching strategies, and all the legal aspects that the special education department is trained to handle. There has been a vacancy for a special education teacher on our grade level for at least three or four years. There are not enough paraprofessionals nor special education teachers to cover all grade levels; therefore, some special education teachers are covering more than one grade which does not allow for them to plan with both grade levels. The special education teacher and the general education teacher are not planning together in all subjects; therefore, modifications are not being made in the lessons to accommodate the SWDs. There is frustration because some teachers do not get the support from the special education teachers; therefore, it is a lot on the general education teachers. We constantly stay overwhelmed. Self-efficacy is low because the general education teachers feel inadequate. We need more support from administration and the Special Education Department.

Participant 4 expressed,

It is a challenge executing collaboration among our grade level because the teachers are not trained to teach SWDs in an inclusive classroom setting. It is hard keeping the students on task, implementing strategies for SWDs, following the IEPs, and teaching the content. I know this sounds horrible, but sometimes, it is all that we as teachers can do is keep the students in the classroom. This is when my self-efficacy is at its lowest, but we cannot take the blame for not being trained. Even with the special education teacher in the classroom, it is still hard if neither teacher has been trained to deal with the different behavior issues.

According to the responses from the majority of participants, more support is needed in the inclusive classroom from the Special Education Department and the school and district administrators. Participant 1 elaborated on a shortage of special educators and supporting staff. This can be a hindrance in the inclusive classroom setting as far as implementing the necessary accommodations and modifications for SWDs academic success. Participant 1 shared her concerns pertaining to a shortage of special education teachers; therefore, teachers were covering more than one grade level, not allowing for common planning on both grade levels. Participant 1 explained her concerns in the following manner,

With this being an issue, there is a lack of common planning among all grade levels. The special education teacher does not have input into the planning of the lessons. With the general education teachers not being fully abreast of the modifications and accommodations of the SWDs, it is not incorporated into the planning. In addition, with the virtual teaching, it could be more effective if the

teachers knew their role before entering the classroom. This is where the different co-teaching models could come into play as well.

Participant 7 explained,

Yes, it can be a challenge executing collaboration. This semester we are having to teach online which can be a challenge in itself. We don't have all of the behavior issues to deal with, but it is harder for the SWDs because they need modifications and individual assistance. Both teachers are online. Sometimes we open up the breakout room and the special education teacher goes in there with the SWDs or any students who need help including reading to the students. Sometimes it can be challenging trying to teach together online. Maybe if we could decide which co-teaching model will be used before class it would be helpful, but that takes planning together as well.

It was acknowledged by the greater number of teachers' responses that it is imperative for the special education teacher and the general education teacher to share planning periods due to all the specifications that need to be included in the lesson plans for SWDs' academic success in the inclusive classroom settings. Participants expressed their concerns with teachers collaborating in a virtual setting, and not being aware of their roles. Responses from the participants indicated that they felt that executing collaboration is a challenge because of the lack of support from administration and the Special Education Department. Participants expressed that it would be helpful if the general education teachers and the special education teachers could plan together so that they will know what role each teacher is taking on before class in addition to ensuring that SWDs'

accommodations and modifications are incorporated in the lesson plans. Upon this discussion, the six-co-teaching models emerged as a solution for determining the teachers' roles in the collaborative classroom settings as well as both teachers being involved in the delivery of instructions. This would be an administrative decision to allow co teachers of all grade levels to share planning periods and ensure that other duties do not become prevalent over planning. Due to all the specifications included in teaching in an inclusive classroom setting, two participants acknowledged that their self-efficacies are low regarding executing collaboration within their grade level.

Theme 5: Differentiated and Specially Designed Instructions

The last interview question that contributed data that could be used to formulate a response to Research Question 1 asked participants to discuss their perceptions of their ability to teach and meet the increased demands of the state of VA No Child Left Behind Act (i.e., self-efficacy perception). Differentiated and specially designed instructions were prevalent among the participants' responses. There were many reasons given that identifies this theme. Support for these findings is presented.

Participants expressed a need for differentiated and specially designed instructions as components needed in the inclusive classroom setting. SWDs enter the inclusive classroom with diverse needs; therefore, they need their information delivered in different ways to accommodate their learning styles. Without their accommodations being met, they are not succeeding academically in the inclusive classroom settings. For instance Participant 1 explained,

I feel that it is possible for some of my SWDs to pass, but I cannot do it alone. It takes two strong teachers in the inclusive settings. I have a strong and experienced special education teacher as my co-teacher. Although we both could use more training on how to teach in the inclusive classroom setting as far as implementing different strategies, specially designed instructions, and differentiated instructions. I don't feel good about meeting the increased demands of the state of VA, "No Child Left Behind Act" right now, but with more training specifically in these areas, I think it is possible to meet the increased demands of the state of VA, "No Child Left Behind Act."

As indicated from the consistency of the responses provided by a majority of the teachers, they felt that they have the ability to teach and meet the increased demands of the state of VA "No Child Left Behind Act, but components needed to be in place for teaching SWDs in an inclusive classroom setting. Participants shared that students could possibly be successful if they are provided differentiated instruction and specifically designed instructions. Two of eight participants provided uneasiness in accomplishing the goals mandated by the state of VA "No Child Left Behind Act.

Summary

The eight participants' perceptions were that teachers, special education Department, administration, and parents have an obligation to ensure that students have been provided the opportunity for academic achievement. Data analysis for RQ1 evolved around themes emerging from the interviews. Information from the interviews, as clarified by the participants, was presented which supports the findings of the recognized

themes. Moreover, it was also documented that the participants synonymously shared more than one reason for the decline in student academic achievement.

Information attained from the participants related to PD needs from questions 1-4 were reviewed and analyzed to develop a response to this research question.

Research Question 2. Professional Development Needs Based on Self-Efficacy

The first most common theme identified during interviews was the need for inclusion-based PD training. A majority of participants believed that Inclusion-based PD training was needed to improve the performance with SWDs in inclusive settings. Some participants had attended some workshops for teaching in inclusive classroom settings and expounded on how significant these sessions were in supporting sufficient training and conveying the imperative information required for a successful inclusive classroom experience. The majority of the participants felt that the workshops delivered a good source of information to bring back to the classroom, but the participants felt that more specific inclusion-based training would help them become more effectual in the inclusive classroom setting.

Theme 1: Inclusion-Based Professional Development to Improve the Performance of GE Teachers in Inclusive Classroom Settings

For this question which states, how might PD be used to increase SWDs' academic achievement in the current inclusion program, there were 7 of 8 participants who specified that PD training on inclusion was needed to improve the performance of general education teachers who service SWDs in inclusive classroom settings. From the quotations there were several reasons why participants indicated that PD training on

inclusion was needed to improve the performance of general education teachers who service SWDs in inclusive settings. One rationale for the need for PD was a desire to acquire additional skills to assist students in their academic achievement. Contrarily, Participant 1 did not feel that PD workshops were successful. She expressed, “There hasn’t been much of an attempt to provide professional development that targets inclusion or collaborative teaching, but for the few that we have had, we just return to the classroom nonchalantly.”

Contrarily, the majority of the other participants concurred that PD attempts had been somewhat successful, but teachers required more workshops to become more knowledgeable about coteaching models and strategies for enhancing their instructional delivery in inclusive classroom settings. Teachers indicated that they needed more PD on instructional strategies to use in the inclusive classroom to provide equal learning opportunities for SWDs in the general education environment. Participant 2 stated,

There is a demand for more PD for general education teachers on how to modify information for SWDs. SWDs could be successful in inclusive classroom settings if all the components are in place to include specially designed and differentiated instructions to accommodate students with diverse /various needs to include comprehension of IEP Plans, efficacious lessons, one-on-one or small group instructions, and co-teaching models before the SWDs are placed in the inclusive classrooms.

Theme 2: Teaching Strategies for Inclusive Education Settings and Training for New Teachers

Participants were asked about specific PD they thought may help them meet the demands of the increased standards and possibly support them in increasing SWDs' achievement rates. Again, "Teaching Strategies for Inclusive Education Settings" emerged as in Research Question #1, Interview Question #1. Participant 7 explained,

We have never had a lot of PD for general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings. This year we have PD once per month. We have some topics, but we are not given strategies. We don't learn about IEPs, not even classroom management. We need some hands on and teachers interacting with one another.

According to the data analysis, the general education teachers felt that a diversity of PD is needed for teaching in inclusive classroom settings. Participants shared the importance of PD and provided examples of types of PD needed at the research site. Seven of the participants expressed that there is a need for training on the six models of coteaching as described by Friend (2013). These models include: (a) station teaching; (b) team teaching, (c) alternative teaching; (d) one teach, one support; (e) parallel teaching, and (f) one teach, one observe. In order to maintain equality in the learning opportunities for SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting, teachers shared that they required additional training on instructional strategies to implement in the inclusive classroom setting.

Participant 7 explained,

I have had the privilege to participate in a few professional developments regarding instructional strategies; nonetheless, the professional development entailed minimal training in best practices for teachers to incorporate in inclusive teaching. More successful professional learning is needed. Ongoing professional learning is needed with some hands on opportunities in implementing the strategies. In the professional development workshops that I have acquired in the past, consultants tell you, but no one demonstrates the strategies needed to assist the SWDs in achieving their goals. If someone could come in the classroom and provide strategies to the students, I feel it would benefit the general education teachers and the special education teachers as well.

While exploring the PD needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classroom setting, teachers expressed their concerns relating to the lack of training in interpreting and administering Individualized Educational Plans. Teachers feel that there should be further training for administering students' IEPs.

Participant 5 clarified,

Over the years I have become familiar with reading IEPs, but each one documents various accommodations and modifications to serve individual students. I use the IEP as a reference since I do not hold a special education degree, but I often question my co-teacher for input regarding implementing modifications and accommodations. Additional training is needed in this area of inclusion for general education teachers so that we can implement the IEP sufficiently as a

general education teacher and would not have to depend on our co-teacher as much.

During the interviews, the eight general education teachers who participated in the study all recommended that new teachers sustain PD related to apprehending and implementing IEPs prior to teaching in the inclusive classroom setting. General education teachers expressed that in order for teachers to provide successful implementation of accommodations, it is imperative that new teachers receive training before entering the classroom, and weekly or bi-weekly thereafter.

Of the 8 participants who responded regarding the PD needs for teaching in inclusive classroom settings, participant 2 felt that new teachers were somewhat prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom with the limited amount of education to prepare them for teaching in the inclusive classroom setting.

Participant 2 stated, “New teachers have classes in college now to somewhat prepare them for teaching in the inclusive classroom setting. That is more than what was given in the past.”

Participants 4 and 7 expressed that they did not feel that new teachers were provided enough training or education to prepare them for teaching in the inclusive classroom setting. Participant 7 explained,

The master’s program that I completed did not provide me with the substantial information on working with SWDs that teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms required like implementing the IEPs successfully, and how to maintain a classroom of students with diverse learning and behavioral disabilities. I pursued

professional development on specially designed instructions and co-teaching models to better accommodate the needs of my SWDs.

Participant 7 added that presently, she is much more knowledgeable of how to accommodate all students, but still feels that all new teachers need more PD before they enter an inclusive classroom setting. Participant 4 shared, “I had a few years in teaching in an inclusive classroom setting, and I did not feel that I was always able to accommodate the SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting three years ago.”

Participants 4 and 7 denoted the significance of PD and having the knowledge for working with SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The teachers expressed that effectual PD was intrinsic to the success of the students and the teachers in these classroom settings. Participants 4 and 7 conveyed that appropriate training for teachers in inclusive classroom settings would be advantageous to both experienced and new teachers. Participant 7 shared that with appropriate training, both teachers would be cognizant of the responsibilities and protocol needed to lead in the inclusion classroom, thus creating a collaborative workload. The majority of the teachers felt that PD was essential for new teachers.

Evidence of Quality

I closely monitored and documented emerging understandings through reflective journal. Findings pertaining to each research question are successively presented after member checking, considering participants were emailed a summary of the findings along with the opportunity to respond to avoid misinterpretation or bias (Merriam, 2009).

Summary of Findings

I conducted a basic qualitative study to determine general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions on teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting. In this study, general education teachers described how their experiences with SWDs shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching and the PD needs of general education teachers based on their perceived self-efficacy. The research findings were related, as well as different to research presented in Section 1. While most of the participants did in fact agree that inclusive classroom settings had a positive impact on SWDs' academic achievement, it was debatable as to how this could be implemented successfully.

Participants were able to articulate their perceptions based on their experiences in the inclusive classroom. Participants provided extensive information about what is needed for a successful inclusive classroom to enhance SWDs academic achievement. Participants voiced their opinions about what they needed to be successful in the inclusive classroom.

All participants did conclude the lack of inclusion-based training as a possible reason for low student achievement. General education teachers' belief of their ability to teach SWDs in the inclusive classroom is affected by the lack of training (Everling, 2013). According to participants, the support of the special education teacher is needed in the inclusive classroom, and teachers should be provided necessary resources to accommodate SWDs. Participants also asserted the need for common planning time. Participants shared that this involves support from the Special Education Department and

Administration. According to the data, participants felt they needed time for planning efficacious lessons, reviewing and interpreting IEPs to include implementing modifications into the lesson plans, and sharing teachers' roles and responsibilities before entering the classrooms. Several reasons were given by the participants for declining SWD's achievement scores on the SOL assessments in the past two years. Participants acknowledged that there were various reasons why SWDs needs were not being met. Teachers reported that they were not given time to sufficiently teach a concept before having to move forward with the next concept. Participants concluded that the achievement levels of the SWDs required differentiated instructions, but some teachers were unable to provide differentiated instruction. A majority of participants noted how differentiated instruction could help general education teachers as well. According to Shaunessy-Dedrick et al. (2015), some type of differentiated approach is recommended to meet the diverse needs of all students. While teachers emphasized the importance of meeting the needs of SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting, a majority of the teachers agree that self-efficacy is necessary in enhancing their pedagogical practices for increasing student achievement whether in the inclusive classroom or a traditional setting and that they, as a whole, perceived they had the ability to teach and meet the increased rigor as outlined by the state of VA, "No Child Left Behind Act." Bandura (1997), reported that the higher a teacher's efficacy the greater their effort to reach their goals. He proceeded to say that high efficacy affects the level of one's goals, the intensity of the obligation to a goal as well as their analytical performance.

Participants expressed that there was little information included in their graduate course for teachers in inclusion classrooms. One participant in this study with experience and a master's degree said that he had one course in his graduate program, and this course did not prepare him for working with SWDs. In addition, the participant shared that he pursued PD on his own, and presently he is much more knowledgeable of how to accommodate all SWDs, but he still feels that new teachers need more PD before entering the inclusive classroom. Two participants added that new teachers are not provided enough education or training to prepare them for teaching in inclusive classroom settings. Contrarily, one participant felt that new teachers were somewhat prepared in their college course to teach in inclusive classrooms.

A majority of the participants in this study stated that they did not receive courses in inclusive practices in the preservice workshops or training programs. Moreover, it was noted that the participants stated that their preservice training did not effectively equip them with strategies to teach SWDs in an inclusive classroom setting. Singh and Glasswell sustained and spotlighted the significance of training for both general education teachers and special education teachers to have a successful inclusion classroom. Preservice teachers should be provided a variety of learning opportunities that require them to cogitate on their misapprehensions, perspectives, principles, and perceptions; in turn, preservice teachers' occurrent belief can be altered (Bialka, 2016). There is a limited possibility that they may change their perceptions after completion of the in-service program. This can have an effect on student achievement if they are deficiently encumbered (Bialka, 2016). Furthermore, opportunities for self-cogitation in

preservice training was reported as an undertaking that will inspire the preservice teacher to become conceptualizers (Jenset et.al., 2018).

Participants emphasized the significance of ongoing PD and training on inclusion-based practices used in a successful inclusion program. Findings relating to the effect, frequency, and structure of PD for teachers are in agreement with Peterson (2016), Sunet et al., (2013), and Sledge and Paley (2013). Petersen and Sun et al. underscored the significance of ongoing PD, as well as granting time for teachers to interact and engage in discussions and work with colleagues.

Participants agreed and understood that there was a need for additional PD for teaching in an inclusive setting that addressed specific inclusion-based strategies in addition to training regarding interpreting and administering student individualized education plans. Every participant maintained that student growth was the most relevant advantage to receiving specific inclusion- based PD.

Section 3: The Project

The problem examined in this study was the low achievement rates of SWDs in inclusive classroom settings. One of the factors that may cause this is teachers' self-efficacy perceptions related to teaching SWDs (Dufour et al., 2008). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching as a possible cause for SWDs low achievement rates. I used semistructured interviews as a method of data collection. The teachers who participated in the study were teaching in the inclusive classroom at the time of the study. Seven themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) lack of inclusive classroom teaching strategies, (b) special education teachers' support, (c) teachers not being able to meet the needs of SWDs in inclusive classroom settings, (d) support from the special education department and administration, (e) differentiated and specially designed instruction, (f) inclusion-based professional development to improve the performance of general education teachers in inclusive settings, and (g) teaching strategies for inclusive education settings and training for new teachers. The first theme, the lack of inclusive teaching strategies, was the most prevalent theme discovered. This was the theme that all participants cited as a reason for the low achievement rates of SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Badri et al. (2016) clarified the prevalent belief that educators are adequately knowledgeable when they enter the teaching profession, whereas in reality there are many aspects of teaching with which they are unfamiliar, and this is why PD is imperative.

The project was a PD series. I selected a PD series for the project format due to the findings of this study, which showed that teachers felt that they need sufficient PD to teach SWDs in inclusive classroom settings. I created a 3 - day PD series entitled *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment* (Appendix A). The PD centers on examining general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions, and exploring the relationship between lived experiences with SWDs and their professional practices. The PD will commence in July during the Summer break of 2021/2022 school year. All general education teachers and special education teachers who will be coteaching at the focus school are encouraged to participate even though this PD will be on a volunteer basis. The school administrators and counselors will be welcomed to participate as well, because they play an essential role in the effective implementation of inclusive classroom settings.

The PD will be in session over a period of 3 days. The first 2 days will be held in succession in July prior to the beginning of the school year in August. The third day of PD will commence within 30 days after the 2nd day PD in August so that participants will have the possibility to implement what they have learned in the PDs and share their experiences with their PD co-teachers. Each session will commence at 8:00 a.m. and end at 3:00 p.m., with two 10-minute breaks and a 30-minute lunch break. The 1st day will center on effective communication in the inclusive classroom setting and interpreting IEPs. The 2nd day will center on differentiated instruction and the six co-teaching models. Finally, the last day will entail teachers applying strategies in their classrooms and receiving co-teachers' assessments.

Rationale

A PD series was chosen based on the data analysis results in which participants stated that they needed more effective inclusion-based PD to be able to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusive classroom settings. Teachers at the middle school expressed that they specifically wanted inclusion-based PD that included both general education teachers and special education teachers and some hands-on interactions in the classroom with SWDs.

This project will provide opportunities for teachers and school administrators to reinforce their knowledge of effective inclusive education methods. All-inclusive differentiated instruction, comprehension of IEPs, coteaching models, and inclusive education for new teachers were areas of need, as disclosed in the findings of this study. Kennedy (2016) noted that veteran teachers experience difficulty in practicing what is learned at PD sessions. Educators, especially veteran teachers, have best practices already in place that they feel comfortable with and believe work best; therefore, they do not care to abandon their strategy for one that is unfamiliar. This PD will provide the teachers and administrators with effective communication, inclusive classroom components, and teachers implementing practices they have learned and providing feedback. According to Basye (2018), PD should be engrossing, center on the needs and particular roles of the learners, and provide the possibility for progress tracking of the implementation. The objective of this PD series is to equip general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators with strategies necessary for the learning opportunities for SWDs in the inclusive classroom settings. While a majority of the participants identified

the significance of inclusive classrooms, they articulated the need for inclusion-based PD to include differentiated instruction, interpretation of IEPs, six models of coteaching, and training for all new teachers.

Review of the Literature

Section 1 includes a review of literature that begins by discussing the Bandura theory of self-efficacy (1997) as the conceptual framework and is followed by a brief history of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975, inclusion in the United States, the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, LRE and IDEA, inclusion, and inclusion practices. It also includes information on teachers' perceptions toward teaching in inclusive classroom settings and their experiences of teaching SWDs in the inclusive settings. The second literature review includes the following subsections: Relevance of Professional Development, Effective Professional Development for the Inclusive Classroom Teachers, Professional Development and Differentiation of Instructions, and Professional Development and Student Achievement. I used the Walden University online libraries to attain various research databases, including Proquest, Sage online journals, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Premier, and Walden University dissertations. I searched for the following terms: *professional development, student achievement, inclusion, self-efficacy perception, relevance of professional development, effective professional development for the inclusive classroom teacher, professional development and differentiated instruction, and professional development and student achievement.*

PD is an important element of any school. Desimone and Pak (2017) stated that PD is any official or unofficial process of learning to improve student achievement. Other terms used are professional learning, teacher in-service, staff development, and workshops. For this paper, the term PD was used.

Official PD was created in the 1980s because of the increasing stipulations for education reforms. The purpose of PD has sustained the ability to improve teachers' practices and student achievement. School districts approach PD as affirmation that educators will continue to make progress and improve their pedagogical delivery level and increase student achievement during their teaching careers. Di Paola and Wagner (2018) noted the goal of PD is to raise the capacity of educators to increase student achievement (Patton et al., 2015; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective PD as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. 7). The increase in student achievement is the overall goal of PD. PD will warrant that all teachers are knowledgeable of educational acts, policies, laws, and evidenced-based practices (Gaines & Barnes, 2017, Martin et al. 2019). This section of the review of the literature center on inclusion-based PD. Efficacious teacher PD improves teaching habits and increases student achievement. However, ineffectual PD is happening in school systems, and a shift is needed. The implementation of an efficacious PD project will provide teachers at the focus school with the necessary skills to enhance their profession and increase student achievement. Desmone and Pak (2017) reported that one time PD delivered in a lecture

format has proven to be ineffectual, and there has been a change in PDs. Schools are presently shifting away from ineffectual PD and towards more effectual PD.

Relevance of Professional Development

PD is a significant component in the success of the inclusive classroom setting. PD increases students' achievement and is a determining factor for the enhancement of teacher standards (Tran et al., 2020). According to Balta and Eryilmaz (2019), increasing the proficiency, competency, and merit of teachers empowers a balance between school needs and individual needs, which affects school improvement. Comparable to Balta and Eryilmaz, Welp et al. (2018) found that attending PD is correlated with greater collaboration and performance.

Educators identified the advantages of PD in the enhancement of their proficiency. According to Gutierrez and Kim (2017), PD affects teacher perceptions. Avido-Ungar (2017) conducted a study of 196 educators and discovered that educators' engagement in PD is related to their perception of the significance of the PD and eagerness to incorporate lessons from the PD.

With the increase in the number of SWDs being serviced in the inclusive classroom environment, educators need further reinforcement and training to meet the needs of diverse learners (Livers et al., 2019). PD applications with the greatest performance level incorporate real-life implementation, modeling, cogitation on performance development, and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses (Erickson et al., 2017). De Simone's (2020) claim that effectual PD incorporates peer collaboration that contains possibilities to contribute experiences and professional discourse concurs with

the suggestions from participants in this study. As PD is designed, one of the most relevant points of convergence should be ensuring that the PD will prepare teachers to meet the needs of their students.

Effective Professional Development for the Inclusive Classroom Teacher

There is a need for effective inclusive classroom teachers in today's schools. Schools are grappling to educate teachers with the needed PD to adequately teach SWDs in inclusive settings. Roose et al. (2019) described inclusive classrooms as "classrooms that cater to the needs of all students for whom equal educational opportunities are needed" (p.140). Schools have shift away from the traditional classroom settings of all SWDs to the inclusive classroom setting. This movement in teaching pedagogy is forcing educators to adapt their teaching practice to include students with diverse needs (Abdreheman, 2017). During the lesson planning and instructional delivery, all aspects must be considered to include SWDs' native language; ethnicity, race, and religion. Zhang et al. (2018) argued that training teachers to teach SWDs in inclusive classrooms while supporting them with quality instruction is a challenge for many schools.

PD remains to be a needed component in the inclusive education arena. Gaines and Barnes (2017) reported that there are similarities and dissimilarities in teachers' perceptions and attitudes about inclusion across grade levels and experiences of teachers. The researchers described PD as the method that should be used to provide general education teachers with the knowledge needed to teach SWDs. PD can be used to assuage teachers' low self-efficacy perceptions toward teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom settings. PD has been instrumental in easing the transformation from general education

teachers feeling incompetent or reluctant to teach in an inclusive classroom to teachers effectively teaching in inclusive classrooms (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Equipping teachers with inclusion-based PD help teachers understand each student's diverse educational needs. Through effective PD, general education teachers can educate SWDs in inclusive classroom settings with success. The goal of PD is to help teachers enhance their strengths and create new skills, and PD will assure that all teachers are cognizant of policies, laws, educational acts, and evidence-based practices (Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Martin et al., 2019).

General education teachers need a variation of PD topics to teach SWDs effectively. Implementing and interpreting Individual Education Plans (IEP) is one of the most relevant skills required to teach SWDs effectively (Gavish, 2017). IEPs are distinctive and tailored to suit a particular individual, so governing them may be a struggle for teachers who lack prior training with them. Differentiated Instruction is another necessary component in the inclusive classroom for SWDs to be successful. Differentiation must be ongoing in the inclusive classroom for students to achieve. Each student has diverse learning styles. Teachers who provide instruction in the inclusive classroom settings have much demanded of them, and hence, PD is imperative.

Professional Development and Differentiation of Instruction

PD should particularly be provided on differentiation of instruction. Frankling et al. (2017) explored teachers' comprehension, use of varied instructional methods, and PD approaches. Frankling et al. noted that teachers feel qualified and enthused to practice strategies as a result of learned PD approaches and ongoing reinforcement.

Differentiation allows students the possibility to approach their educational program despite their academic levels (Frankling et al., 2017). Teachers can also learn about their students' inquisitiveness and academic requirements through the use of differentiated instruction (Frankling et al., 2017). Turner and Solis (2017) stated that when differentiation was the shared strategy among teachers, students exemplified academic growth and considerable motivation. Improving the success of teachers' pedagogy is the goal of PD (Slater, 2017; De Neve et al., 2014).

Slater (2017) reported that teachers are anticipated to use DI in the classrooms; nevertheless, it should be demonstrated during PD sessions. When DI is demonstrated during PD and teachers are reinforced in implementing DI, teachers' self-efficacy and student achievement increases. According to a report from the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future [NCTAF] (2016), all teachers can gain knowledge from partaking in a PD program to enhance knowledge of content, increase student achievement by demonstrating performance-driven knowledge of skills, and focus on in-depth comprehension. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) reinforce participants in sharing ideas and best pedagogy delivery (Bowe and Gore, 2017). According to Svanbjornsdotti et al. (2016), implementing PLC can empower teachers in reaching shared goals, engage in relevant discourse, provoke probabilities for cogitation, and ensure responsibility for results.

According to Turner and Solis (2017), additional time has to be dedicated to creating differentiated lessons and learning opportunities. Nevertheless, Yuen et al. (2018) noted that differentiated instruction allows the teacher the possibility to reach both

low achievers and advance achievers in a class period. Tomlinson (2014) asserted that there are three areas the teacher can differentiate to increase student achievement: (a) content, (b) process, (c) products, and the student learning environment. The efficaciousness of the teachers approaches and the student's learning capacity is demonstrated by the curriculum content, students' understanding, and student outcomes (Tomlinson, 2014).

Professional Development and Student Achievement

Educator PD promotes student knowledge and achievement (Nguyen & Ng, 2020; Yurseven & Altun, 2017). Nguyen and Ng (2020) reported that formalize and job impacted PD promote a change in teachers' pedagogical methods. An increase in PD is interrelated with an increase in student achievement results (Balta & Eryilmaz, 2019). Prast and Van de Weijer-Bergsma (2018) noted that Partakers of PD mastered increased student achievement. Polly et al. (2017) explored the effectiveness of a three-day teacher PD involving 300 teachers and 5,300 students. The data indicated that teachers who incorporated the math strategies from the PD mastered higher levels of student achievement than teachers who did not use the strategies learned in the PD.

Comparably, Kutaka et al. (2017) investigated a math PD to conclude the comprehensiveness of content-centered PD and its effects on teacher and student achievement. Students mastered growth after teachers' participation in the PD. According to Didion et al. (2020), effectual PD is pertinent and meaningful and should serve in concurrence with student and teacher personalities. Furthermore, Didion et al. (2020) specified the influence of PD fluctuates contingent on teachers' confidence, school

environment, and grade level team relationships. Teacher and teacher worth are strong indicators of student accomplishment (Gupta & Lee, 2020). Gupta and Lee conducted an investigation on the efficiency of a PD on developing teacher competence and increasing student achievement. The PD increased student achievement on standardized tests (Gupton & Lee, 2020) while supporting teachers with the knowledge and competence to meet the needs of students. Anderson and Palm (2017) found that PD had an effect on student achievement and whereas students with educators who attended PD scores surpassed students with educators who did not attend PD.

Aligned with the responses from participants of this study regarding grade level challenges for inclusive classroom settings, Able et al. (2015) identified inadequate planning time designated to general education and special education teachers to interact as a component that causes inadequacy in the inclusion classroom. Collaboration between faculty and staff are listed as strategies that lead to positive school values (Martin et al., 2019). According to Frankling et al. (2017), interactive discussions during PD grant teachers the opportunity to learn from each other. Dixon et al. (2014) recommended a workshop format constructed so that teachers can interact to design tiered lessons as an effective approach for PD.

Project Description

The project for my doctoral study is a three-day PD (workshop format) titled *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment* (Appendix A) in which I will provide general education and special education teachers who teach in the inclusive classroom setting with the possibility to learn inclusive classroom strategies. The school

administrators and counselors will be invited to attend as well because they play a vital role in the successful implementation of inclusive classroom settings. The findings of this study show that teachers felt that they need sufficient PD to teach SWDs in inclusive classroom settings. *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment* will center on five topics: 1. Effective Communication in the Inclusive Classroom Setting, 2. Interpreting IEPs, 3. Differentiated Instruction, 4. Six Models of Co-teaching, and 5. Teachers applying Strategies and Teachers receiving Co-teacher' Assessments.

Resources

To successfully implement this PD, there are resources that will be required. The first resource is support from administration to obtain permission to access the building for the PD workshops. The location in the middle school should be accessible and serene for all participants. The facility should include a table in which participants can sit in groups or pairs, internet service, and a Promethean or Smartboard. I will utilize my personal computer with Microsoft PowerPoint capability to present the presentations to PD participants. I will supply the participants with copies of all printed resources, poster board, highlighters, pens, notepads, and an agenda. Participants will be asked to bring a 2" three ring binder to create a notebook for future reference.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Two potential barriers to this project implementation are the timeframe for the first two days of the PD and limited funding for substitute teachers. Teachers may be reluctant to participate in the PD due to the first two days of the three day PD are in July during their Summer break. One way to compensate for the potential barrier of lack of

attendance by teachers could be to inquire if the school administration could present teachers a certificate to redeem some of their time throughout the school year. On the other hand, there could be a potential advantage to holding the first two days of PD during the Summer so that there will not be a need for substitute teachers. The third day of PD could be a potential barrier because this PD will occur during school hours. This might require the school to have to allocate additional funds. If the school district is not equipped to provide funds for substitutes, the third day of PD could possibly be divided into sections and held on early dismissal days when students leave a couple of hours early so teachers can take advantage of PD.

Implementation Proposal

The proposed plan will be introduced to the focus school's administrator in May 2021 and presented in July 2021. I will collaborate with school administrators and county's special education director to ascertain the most suitable dates and location for the PD. Additionally, I will meet with the focus school administrator and special education director approximately 30 days prior to implementation to intensively plan the 3-day PD session. During the meeting, a viewing of the videos and PowerPoints will be presented. A briefing will be held on Day 1 of the PD approximately one hour before the onset of the PD. A debriefing will be provided at the completion of each session with the aforesaid cadre to establish an understanding of the topics addressed in each session. I will invite all general education teachers and special education teachers who teacher in inclusive education classroom settings to participate. I will afford each participant a

three-day agenda that includes an hour by hour schedule and the goals/objectives of the PD. I will elaborate on the proposed agenda for each day in the subsequent paragraphs.

The *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment PD* will be held in July of 2021 before the start of the school year, The PD will be in session over a period of three days. The first two days will be held on consecutive days in July prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year in August. The third day of PD will commence within thirty days after the second day PD in August so that participants will have the possibility to implement what they have learned in the PDs and share their experiences with their PD co-teachers. Each session will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 3:00 p.m. with two 10 minute breaks and a thirty minutes lunch break. Each day will start with an inspirational video and conclude with an exit slip. Explicit details outlining each day's activity is provided in Appendix A. The first day will center on effective communication in the inclusive classroom setting and interpreting IEPs. The day will begin with a welcome, an analysis of the agenda and learning objectives, and an icebreaker. In addition, the agenda will incorporate a questions and feedback activity. An outline of Day 1 is as follows:

Workshop #1 Effective Communication in the Inclusive Classroom Setting 120

Minutes

Materials: Notecards, pens, highlighters

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to prepare teachers with effective communication skills in the inclusive classroom setting.

Workshop #2-Interpreting IEPs 180 Minutes

Materials: Notepad, Sample IEP , pens, highlighters, laptops

The goal of this workshop is to equip teachers in the inclusive classroom setting with strategies to build self-efficacy perceptions and increase SWDs' academic achievement. After completion of this workshop, teachers should be knowledgeable of how to implement IEPs so that SWDs can receive their modification and accommodation, and become successful in the inclusive classroom setting.

Workshop #3-Questions and Feedback 60 Minutes

Materials: Notebook, pens, stick notes

Goal: The last hour of day one will include a Questions and Feedback session where participants may ask any questions relating to teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Day 2's focus will be differentiated instruction and the coteaching models. The session will commence by reviewing the learning objectives and what was captured on the previous day. After viewing the presentation on DI, the presenter will provide different examples of differentiated instruction. The presenter will have the teachers divide into pairs and model examples of DI. After Lunch, teachers will view a presentation on the six models of co-teaching. Teachers will pair off to demonstrate the six co-teaching models and present a mock lesson. The session will conclude with an inspirational quote and an exit slip. An outline of Day 2's workshops is as follows:

Workshop #4-Differentiated Instruction 120 Minutes

Materials: Notepad, pens, highlighters, laptop

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help teachers inspire the learning experience of SWDs by using differentiated instruction and increasing student success by meeting their individual needs.

Workshop #5-The Six Co-Teaching Models 180 Minutes

Materials: poster boards, tape, markers, laptops

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to assist teachers in learning how to determine the best co-teaching model to meet the needs of their students in the inclusive classroom setting and also to determine which role each teacher would play in the delivery of instructions.

Workshop #6-Sharing Co-Teaching Experiences and Self-Efficacy Perceptions 60 Minutes

Materials: chart paper, marker, tape

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to allow the participants to collaborate by sharing their experiences teaching in the inclusive classroom setting and their self-efficacy perceptions toward teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Finally, Day 3 will commence 30 days after the second day of PD which will be after the start of school and will center on self-reflection. The workshop for day 3 is aligned with participants' request for a PD demonstrating real-life interactions in the inclusive classroom setting. Teachers may inquire about assistance with any problems that may have arose in the inclusive classroom setting. Day 3 will begin with an overview of the first two days. Teachers will express the successes and challenges they experienced while implementing inclusion-based strategies they learned. They will be afforded the

opportunity to receive suggestions and assessments from their co-teaching peers. At the end of the session, I will review the goals and the learning objectives for the *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment PD* and ask the participants to complete an evaluation.

Workshop # 7 Teachers Implementing Real-Life Inclusive Classroom Strategies

Material: Supplies appropriate for the classroom instructions

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to allow teachers to implement strategies learned in the *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment PD* and receive feedback from their co-teaching peers.

Roles and Responsibilities

The school administrator and county's special education director were the aforementioned individuals needed for the support of this project. Nonetheless, I will serve as the developer of the project. As documented, I developed the project based on the data analysis results. It will be my responsibility to contact and arrange meetings with the school administrator and the district special education director. It will also be my responsibility to create the meeting agendas, follow-up with expectations discussed at the meetings, and develop an evaluation to determine the worthiness of the PD sessions. Finally, I am responsible for assuring the participants have what they need.

The school administrator plays a vital role in overseeing the success of the staff and is charged with creating PDs that are coordinated with district and school initiatives and goals as well as state and federal initiatives (Martin et al., 2019). In a quantitative study on school administrators to determine what approach was needed to appropriately

educate SWDs, Bai and Martin (2015) noted that all participants identified PD on how to teach and deliver services to SWDs as something they needed in order to successfully educate SWDs.

Furthermore, school administrators' attitudes and perceptions were noted as significantly dominant in the development of successful inclusive classrooms (Bai et al., 2015). Hence, the key role of the administrator will be extending a positive attitude about the project and inspiring the teachers to participate in the PD sessions. I will also ask the administrator for his assistance in ensuring the PD room is accessible with the needed resources.

Finally, I will meet with the administrator as well as the special education director to review the project and to extend any additional information deemed necessary to add to the project. The aforementioned people will also be responsible for apprising me of school and district initiatives relating to inclusion.

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation of a PD is just as imperative as the PD plan itself. The reason being is that it ascertains the success of a specific approach or program and pinpoint areas that require enhancement (Pal, 2014). The project's formative evaluation was developed to ascertain whether the goals were attained and whether the PD was successful in providing general education and special education inclusive classroom teachers at the focus school with inclusion-based strategies in an effort to increase SWDs academic achievement. The participants will be asked to complete exit tickets throughout the 3-day PD about what they mastered and will implement during the upcoming school year. The

goal of using formative evaluations is to collect immediate feedback about the material that is being presented.

Project Implications

The project was developed to promote positive social change for educators and SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The project was created to provide teachers the opportunity to collaborate and gain an understanding of how to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusive classroom and increase the likelihood of higher self-efficacy perceptions for teachers and higher academic achievement rates for SWDs. The participants will be provided evidenced-based strategies that they can implement. The study and project can be utilized as the beginning for arranging ongoing interactive inclusion-based PD during the school year. A related PD has the possibility of providing all teachers with evidence-based approaches to ease or eradicate some of the challenges mentioned in this study and others identified with inclusive classrooms. The comprehensive influence of the PD is that teachers will feel more qualified to teach all students no matter what their diverse needs entail.

A basic qualitative study was conducted to address the local problem of SWD decline in academic achievement. The project was developed as a response to the participants' quotes and what they believed the requirements were for a successful inclusion classroom. The project was planned to allow teachers the opportunity to collaborate, learn inclusion-based strategies, share co-teaching experiences and self-efficacy perceptions toward teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Furthermore, participants will acquire an understanding of an IEP, the need for inclusive classroom settings, and research that reinforces inclusion.

Summary

In Section 3, I elaborated on the rationale, timeline, existing supports, barriers and solutions, project evaluation pertaining to the proposed PD project, social implications of the project, and the relevance of the project. In Section 4, I discussed my project's strengths and limitations and recommendations for alternative approaches. In Section 4, the following topics were discussed: (a) scholarship, (b) project development, (c) leadership, (d) change, (e) reflection of the importance of the work, (f) implications, (g) applications, and (h) direction for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project, *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment*, features five strengths in training on efficacious inclusive practices. Frankling et al. (2017), Turner and Solis (2017), Yuen et al. (2018), and Dixon et al. (2014) stated that PD on inclusive practices is imperative for the success of inclusive classrooms.

The second strength of the project is interpreting IEPs. Because all general education teacher participants noted that new teachers should receive PD related to apprehending and implementing IEPs prior to teaching in the inclusive classroom setting, My findings suggest it as advantageous for general education teachers to be afforded the opportunity to receive training on the purpose and components of an IEP. Another strength is a focus on differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is necessary in the inclusive classrooms, in particular because many SWDs come from diverse backgrounds, different social and economic statuses, and a wide range of emotional, social, and academic needs. Consequently, differentiated instruction is a necessity (Turner & Solis, 2017). General education teachers should be well versed in how to differentiate lessons daily (Rubenstein et al., 2015). However, Turner and Solis (2017) reported there were misconceptions regarding what differentiation entails. Yuen et al. (2018) found through their project that effectual PD enhances teacher understanding and appropriate pedagogical practices. Purposeful PD affords teachers a better perception of differentiation and how to implement the practices (Frankling et al., 2017).

The fourth strength is the six coteaching models. Seven of the eight participants expressed a need for training on the six models of coteaching as described by Friend (2013). Friend recommended that all general education and special education teachers need PD in strategies for teaching in inclusive environments. Therefore, as an effort to promote equal learning opportunities in the inclusive environment, consideration should be given to implementing all models of coteaching.

Lastly, participants concurred in a desire for facilitators to provide hands-on opportunities in the PD sessions instead of using only a lecture format. Participants requested the opportunity for interactions and assessments from co-teachers. Therefore, this workshop offers the opportunity for coteaching pairs to be observed providing strategies in the classroom.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

It could be advantageous to investigate the issues involved with the establishment of inclusion programs through other stakeholders, for instance school administrators. Martin et al. (2019) identified school administrators as vital role players in the establishment of a successful inclusion PD and inclusive classroom. Patton et al. (2015) revealed that school administrators should present a panel discussion in which educators can partake in discourse about, examination of, and reflections on their pedagogical approaches. Murphy (2018) offered 11 effective instructional strategies that school leaders can use to strengthen their inclusion programs, stating that school administrators often do not feel prepared to develop successful inclusion classrooms. Prospective researchers could explore the challenges administrators have with designing and training

teachers for inclusive classrooms, including preservice and PD, as well as developing a schedule that affords, both general education teachers and their respective co-teachers sufficient time to plan differentiated instruction.

In this study a qualitative approach was used to collect data, which limited this study to a small middle school, whereas a quantitative approach could have allowed researchers to study a larger population with greater analytical significance (Lodico et al. 2010; Merriam, 2009). A quantitative approach permits the data to be generalized to a larger sample population although both approaches allow researchers to examine participants' perceptions and beliefs (Lodico et al., 2010). Furthermore, a quantitative approach would allow researchers to use various data collection options such as paper surveys, online surveys, online polls, telephone surveys, and so forth (Creswell, 2009, 2012a; Lodico et al., 2010).

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship is the procedure by which students acquire knowledge at a higher level. The initial stages of this program have prepared me to grasp the research procedure and the different approaches that can be used to address the local problem. Through the process of conducting this study and creating the project, I learned much as an educator and department chair. Most importantly, I learned how to research and analyze data, to identify tendencies and create achievable solutions. I no longer review data from a single perspective. This program's design has also afforded me the skills needed to explore topics, interpret research, and master a topic on a scholarly level. Furthermore, I learned

that being a researcher is an ongoing progression, meaning I learned I am a lifelong learner.

During the development of this study, I established it as my obligation to disclose to educators how imperative it is to acknowledge all SWDs in an inclusive classroom. It was interesting to encounter novice teachers insufficiently prepared through PD to work with SWDs in an inclusive classroom setting. Experienced teachers acquired more PD than novice teachers did. Nevertheless, most teachers have positive attitudes toward instructing SWDs in an inclusive classroom when they have been afforded specific inclusion-based PD. Acknowledging this concept was the motivating force behind my project.

Developing the *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment* project required extensive planning. The project concept derived from my awareness of and familiarity with how educators view teaching in an inclusive classroom setting. Through my journey at Walden, I researched this topic and gathered information about obstacles associated with teachers instructing in the inclusive classroom environment, as well as what enhances SWDs' academic achievement. As a result of my research findings, I was able to identify and scrutinize strategies that lead to successful outcomes in an inclusive classroom. The literature addressed in this study reinforced the findings of this study that educators have a better perception about teaching a diverse student population in an inclusive classroom environment when they have ongoing PD.

The greatest challenge I faced with the project was considering the most effectual components to include in the PD workshop. The workshop begins with having the

facilitator elaborate on effective communication in the inclusive classroom environment. This assuaged concerns about how to establish a rapport with and get to know their students. The goals and objectives were determined by how responsive teachers were to continue to participate in the PD. This project included effective communication, interpreting IEPs, differentiation of instructions, six coteaching models, and teachers sharing strategies to build self-efficacy perceptions toward teaching SWDs to increase SWD academic achievement. My vision for this project was to provide a specific inclusion-based PD for continual use to increase the likelihood of higher self-efficacy perceptions for teachers and higher academic achievement rates for SWDs.

Being a scholar and a leader requires educators to promote achievement in a society of learners. This can be achieved by developing relationships with collaborators. For leaders to promote change within a community, they must know how students acquire knowledge and progress. Successful leaders understand that knowledge and progression are a cognitive process that occurs between the learner, their background, and the world surrounding them (Ligorio, 2010). Incorporating change in teacher pedagogy by collaborating with professional learning societies to support this process. Strong leaders promote success by having a vision and expressing their vision (Lingo et al., 2011).

As a current special education department chair, conducting this study showed me the significance of PD. As a leader, I concur with the literature presented that efficacious teacher PD improves teaching habits and increases student achievement. It cannot be assumed that teachers who lack inclusion-based PD can successfully serve SWDs in the

inclusive classroom setting; therefore, specific inclusion-based PD should be continuous. This study also demonstrated the significance of planning time for general education teachers and special education teachers to collaborate during PD and at least weekly to plan differentiated lessons. This will enhance teachers' self-efficacy perceptions by preventing teachers from feeling like they have to work and solve problems alone. All in all, I learned through this process that a successful leader promotes positive social change.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This study did not include a large number of participants; however, I maintain that the data collected will sufficiently benefit the participants, their colleagues, and the site administrator. The project was created due to the participants' desire to experience an interactive inclusion-based PD. I learned that teachers will express their needs and desires, and administrators should respond appropriately to create effective PD sessions.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Supporting the academic achievement of SAD has implications for positive social change. The SWDs in this district continue to achieve at a lower rate than their nondisabled peers. Assessing in all subject curricula for students in grades K-12 disclosed that SWDs' achievement rates are lower than their developing peers (NCES, 2016). Researchers report that the inclusive classroom setting is constantly changing to meet SWDs' academic needs (Brennan, 2019; Gaines & Barnes, 2017). This study includes supplemental support and PD that educators feel they need to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

Moreover, research studies indicated that an enhanced mastery of inclusion might subsequently assist teachers in their pedagogical practices, have positive perceptions concerning inclusion, and increase academic achievement for SWDs. When teachers acknowledge the objective of inclusion, the SWDs may enhance learning possibilities, by that increasing teacher self-efficacy perceptions, students' achievement rates, and employment prospects in the community.

Hinged on the participants' quotes and subsequent themes, it was essential that further PD is developed. This study's findings disclosed general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions had been influenced due to the lack of inclusive training in their preservice graduate courses. The participants maintained that ongoing, collaborative inclusion-based PD can increase their pedagogical delivery, as well as their co-teachers, specifically the general education teachers who are not endorsed in special education. It would be beneficial if differentiated PD is afforded to allow teachers to receive training pertinent to their individual needs. Further research should explore the different designs of ongoing PD such as inclusion-based PD along with a trainer who facilitates teachers following each PD session.

I propose that inclusion studies be conducted on a larger platform at the elementary and high schools since this one was completed at a small middle school and eight participants findings were not generalizable. There should be more than eight participants that focus on their experiences in a traditional classroom compared to an inclusive classroom. Also, it would be interesting to see the perceptions and beliefs of

special education teachers in an inclusive setting and whether their experiences are similar to that of general education teachers.

This study contains a purposeful sampling of general education teachers. However, it would be beneficial to see what special education teachers' preservice training resembled, their perceptions of SWDs taking standardized tests on grade level, rather than the level mastered on their normative tests and documented in their IEPs. It would be beneficial to know the SWDs perceptions of receiving educational services in the inclusive classroom setting. Also, I would like to see what special education teachers remember about their experiences in the traditional classroom setting.

Conclusion

Research cited in this study revealed that an influx of SWDs are entering the inclusive classroom setting alongside their nondisabled peers (Pierson & Howell, 2013). Subsequently, educators who lack inclusion-based preservice training are being obligated with providing academic services to both SWDs and SWODs concurrently. It was imperative to know how general education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions were affected by this trend and how SWDs' academic achievement could be enhanced. General education teachers' self-efficacy perceptions on teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting was the focus of this basic qualitative study. I presented the data on how general education teachers' experiences with SWDs shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching, and the PD needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms based on their perceived self-efficacy. The data included teachers' experiences and perceptions of students' achievement, inclusive practices

presently being used, challenges presented in the inclusive classroom, and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Gunnulsen & Moller, 2016; Weber & Young, 2017; Wedin & Wessman, 2017 found that for teachers and administrators to be successful with inclusion, they must be aware of the advantages and impediments of inclusive practices to prepare for success in the inclusive classroom environment. Both the general education teacher and the respective co-teacher should acknowledge their roles prior to entering the classroom, plan accordingly weekly, engage in meaningful discourse regarding students daily, and be afforded an abundance of possibilities to extend their individual teaching requirements (Chang & Pascua, 2017 ; Lyons, 2016; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018).

Inclusion is a progressing movement in the public education arena that can be beneficial to SWDs when their diverse needs are met in the least restrictive environment. The school's primary purpose is to make certain that students gain knowledge and master from best pedagogical methods (Alila et al., 2016). Teachers need to interact and center on each student's diverse needs to provide differentiated instruction consistently. Secondly, common planning time can afford teachers the possibility to interact and exchange dialogue regarding best pedagogical teaching to enhance inclusive practices for SWDs. Moreover, PD and supplementary support should be recognized as possibilities for general education and special education teachers to master efficient teaching methods so that all participants feel that student mastery is a concerted obligation. Finally, when general education teachers and special education teachers collaborate to discover the significance of consistency in providing best practices for inclusive classrooms, then the

members can recognize the importance of each teacher's contribution, develop inclusion-based PD catered to teachers' needs, and high regards for inclusion-based best pedagogical practices support from administration.

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Appendix A: The Project

Difficult behaviors are messages from me
 Understanding them is the key
 Make the change and you will see!



Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment

Presenters: Hester Mallory – Exceptional Education Department
 Chair/Exceptional Education Department Staff

Workshop 1 Day 1 (8:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.)

Welcome: Facilitator

Analysis of Agenda and Learning Objectives

Ice breaker/Group Activity

Inspirational Video

Role of the Teacher

- Assign responsibility and leadership – get to know your students/parents
- Limit negative faculty room talk
- Open parent meeting with positive comments
- Judge student's action fairly
- Criticize the action not the student
- Respect individuality
- Keep it calm do not take it personal
- Listen carefully and build trust
- Heart to heart talk
- Do not isolate the student
- Quiet correction
- Value the student

10: 45 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Invisible backpack – who are you dealing with (courts, private custody, homeless, vision, dysfunctional home setting).

Lunch: 12:00-12:30

Workshop 2 (12:30-2:30)

IEP Training-Interpreting Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

What is an IEP?

An IEP is a legal document that includes a student's disability/disabilities, Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance, Statewide and District Assessments, Accommodations/Modifications, Goals and Objectives, Services that will be provided, Least Restrictive Environment, Considerations including parental concerns.

Do you know your students?

- Services (LRE – self-contained, collaborative, SOL/VAAP, Vision, Speech Impaired....
- **Accommodation/Confidentiality/IEP**
 - BIP, Health Plan, Read aloud (except Reading – LW over 73), small group, dictate to scribe, close proximity to students, copy of notes – justification for scribe can be found on DOE....

Each facilitator will guide participants in writing an IEP in a small group setting.

Intervention Resource Handout/Accommodation Chart Sample

Workshop 3 (2:30-3:00)

Questions/Feedback

Inspirational Quote **“Whatever you want to do, if you want to be great at it, you have to love it and be able to make sacrifices for it.”** Maya Angelou

Exit Slip

Workshop 4

Differentiation is...

- "Diagnosing the readiness level of each student and customizing instruction so every individual experiences continuous learning."
(Bertie Kingore)
- "Teachers at work refining the art of teaching"
(Bertie Kingore)
- "A teacher's response to a learner's needs"
(Carol Ann Tomlinson)



Day 2 (8:00-11:00)

August 22, 2021

Inspirational Video

Differentiated Instructions

What is differentiated instructions? Why is differentiated instruction needed in the inclusive classroom setting?

Participants will be allowed two minutes to write their definition of differentiated instruction (DI).

Facilitator: Differentiated Instruction is a teaching philosophy based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction to students' diverse needs.

Carol Ann Tomlinson.

Three Ways to provide Differentiated Instruction:

Content-what students need to learn pertinent to their curriculum

Process-how the student comprehends the content.

Product-student's work.

Facilitators will use role-play to demonstrate Differentiated Instructions.

Participants will pair off to demonstrate differentiated instruction in small group settings. Facilitators will provide each pair a scenario and materials need for DI. Participants will be allowed 30 minutes to develop their lesson and present to the group.

Differentiation is a teacher's response to learners' needs			
Guided by a growth mindset and general principles of differentiation	Teachers can differentiate through	According to students'	Using a variety of instructional approaches such as
supportive learning environment	content	readiness	RAFTS
quality curriculum	process	interest	graphic organizers
teaching up	product	learning profile	scaffolded reading
flexible grouping	affect		cubing
respectful tasks	learning environment		think-tac-toe
continual assessment to inform teaching and learning			learning contracts
			tiering
			learning/interest centers
			independent studies
			intelligence preferences
			orbitals
			complex instruction
			technology
			web quests & web inquiry

Workshop 5 Co-Teaching Models

The facilitator will present the six-co-teaching model's video. Each facilitator will discuss a co-teaching model with the participants. 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Lunch: 12:00-12:30
Six Co-Teaching Models



1.

One Teach, One Observe. One of the advantages in the inclusive classroom environment is that having two instructors allows the opportunity for more explicit observation of students' engagement in the learning procedure. Incorporating this model, for instance, co-teachers can plan on what types of specific observational information to collect throughout instruction and can agree on a method for collecting the data. Subsequently, the teachers should examine the information together.

2. **One Teach, One Assist.** In another approach to co-teaching, one teacher would keep predominant responsibility for teaching while the other teacher moves around the room providing inconspicuous assistance to students as needed.



3. **Alternative Teaching.** This approach works well when students need specialized instructions. One teacher delivers instructions to the large group, and the other teacher provides assistance to a smaller group.



4. Station Teaching. In this co-teaching approach, teachers incorporate two groups, and each teacher teaches a section of the content to a group. Then each teacher teaches the same content to the other group. If applicable, another station could allow students to work self-sufficiently.



5. Team Teaching: While team teaching, both teachers are delivering the same instruction concurrently. This approach is also known as tag team teaching, and it has been thought of as the most intricate way to teach, but most appealing.



6. Parallel Teaching. Occasionally, student learning would be made easier if they had more guidance by the teacher or more opportunities for responses. In parallel teaching, the teachers are both providing the same content simultaneously to a group of students.

After discussing the video, the facilitator will have each participant choose a number from the basket from 1-6. Participants will form co-teaching teams according to their chosen number. Participants will demonstrate their chosen co-teaching models. Facilitators will act as students.

Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment
Workshop 6-Sharing co-teaching Experiences

Day 3
September 22, 2021

Overview of Day 1 & Day 2

8:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.

Teachers expressing their successes and challenges they experienced while implementing inclusion-based strategies learned in Day 1 and Day 2 Workshops. Teachers will be afforded the opportunity to receive suggestions from their peers.

The facilitator will review the goals and learning objectives for the *Building an Effective Inclusive Classroom Environment*.

Break: 10:00-10:10

Lucnh-12:00-12:30

Workshop 7-Teachers Implementing Real-Life Inclusive Classroom Strategies

Teachers will exit the PD to enter their individual classrooms. Teachers will be observed in a real-life situation during their pedagogy delivery.

Evaluation

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction to each participant

Researcher: The purpose of this interview is to gather data related to my dissertation topic of General Education Teachers' self-efficacy Perceptions on Teaching Students with Disabilities. I am grateful for your consent to participate in this study and your eagerness to be interviewed. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Please feel free to review the copy of the questions as we discuss them. Your name will not be connected with the questions in any way. As with the demographic questionnaire, pseudonyms will be assigned to protect your privacy. There are no right or wrong answers. I am only interested in your perception of what you have experienced in the inclusive classroom setting. Please feel free to elaborate past the questions that I have asked if you feel a need to.

RQ1. How do general education teachers' experiences with SWDs shape their self-efficacy perceptions toward inclusive teaching?

1. What is your opinion of the SWDs behaviors in the inclusive classroom setting?
How does the SWDs' behavior affect the learning environment in the inclusive classroom setting?
2. How does having students with disabilities affect your classroom? How do you compensate for slower achievers?
3. Do you feel that students with disabilities can master the general education curriculum in the inclusive classroom setting? Do you think that students with disabilities should be taught in separate classroom settings? Why?

4. How has your experience in teaching SWDs affected how you feel about teaching in the inclusive classroom setting?
5. What are your perceptions of SWDs' achievement in inclusive classroom settings versus traditional settings?
6. What is your opinion of SWDs' achievement scores on the SOL assessments in the past two years? What is your perception of the reason for declining SWD's achievement scores in the past two years?
7. Has there been some challenges to executing collaboration within your grade level? Please explain.
8. Discuss your perceptions of your ability to teach and meet the increased demands of the state of VA "No Child Left Behind Act.

RQ2. What are the professional development needs of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms based on their perceived self-efficacy?

1. How might professional development be used to increase SWDs' academic achievement in the current inclusion program?
2. How often do you think general education teachers should be provided professional development for teaching students with disabilities? Should this professional development be ongoing or a one-time instance pd? Please explain.
3. What resources and support(e.g. PD, educational material) does administration provide for general education teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices in the inclusive classroom setting?

4. What specific professional development do you think may help you meet the demands of the increased standards and possibly support you in increasing SWDs' achievement rates?