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## The Deficits of Special Education Training for General Education Inclusion Teachers in Elementary Schools

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Taneisha Clemons

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

The Deficits of Special Education Training for General Education Inclusion Teachers in  
Elementary Schools

by

Taneisha Clemons

MA, Saint Peters University, 2015

BS, Montclair State University, 2010

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

Walden University

June 2024

## Abstract

Elementary students who are classified with learning disabilities are usually placed in general education classrooms with teachers who have little experience in special education, therefore, feel unprepared to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. The purpose of this study was to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and about the resources and training needed to improve their practices. The conceptual framework used to ground this study is Knowles' adult learning theory. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 teachers from two elementary schools in a northeastern U.S. school network to answer the research questions addressing preparation and training needs. General education teachers who currently teach or have taught students with learning disabilities within the last five years in the general education setting participated in interviews. Data analysis was conducted using open coding to review themes and patterns. The study results indicated that teachers not only need initial training during their teacher education but also ongoing training once they are in the classroom. Misconceptions about the exclusionary characteristics of special education, specific professional development geared towards inclusion, continuous professional development (PD), additional support/physical resources, and the need for small class sizes also emerged as themes. Based on the results, a 3-day professional development training was created that focused on all aspects of inclusion. The research may create social change by allowing general education teachers to be more effective in their classrooms, which, in turn, will benefit students with learning disabilities, ultimately benefiting society by adding educated citizens.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Audrey Anderson and Danny Frazier, and my family; I did this for us, although they did not understand why I kept returning to school. In memory of my grandmothers Ida Faye Clemons and Virginia Frazier, who always encouraged me to press forward even if the answer was no. Finally, my praying friends and those I inspire constantly cheered for me and demanded that I keep going. I appreciate you all; thank you.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

General education teachers in a local school district are not meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities in inclusion settings. Due to the significant increase in students receiving special education services in a general education class, many teachers teach students with learning disabilities. Still, they must be equipped or prepared to do so (Francisco & Hartman et al., 2020). As a result, the problem for this study is that elementary general education teachers in a northeastern state have difficulty meeting the academic needs of students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms because there is little to no training geared explicitly towards special education. “As a special education principal, I do all I can within my control to assist my teachers who teach students with learning disabilities but still struggle to meet their needs” (Special education principal, personal communication February 2021). Within the population at this school being studied, there is one inclusion teacher for each grade from kindergarten to fourth grade. A teacher disclosed that not all teachers have gone through schooling to understand the depth of teaching students with disabilities (Personal communication, August 2020). Teachers at this school have shared that often, they “were put into the position of teaching inclusion without any prior professional development” (First-grade teacher, personal communication, August 2020). As a result, in a class of thirty students, teachers find it challenging to meet the academic needs of students with learning disabilities. “As an inclusion teacher, I had minimal training on specialized education outside of limited PD: although I was able to build strong relationships with my scholars

with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), I did not feel prepared to meet their academic needs” (First-grade teacher personal communication August 2020).

This school site had weekly PD, but none were entirely geared towards gaining knowledge and skills to teach students with learning disabilities; most of the time, it was a 30-minute session. A kindergarten teacher reported that,

As a general education teacher placed in an inclusion classroom without proper development, I felt as though I was a disservice to students because I had no understanding of their disability or how to modify work to meet their needs.

(personal communication, September 2020).

A third-grade teacher explained, “Although I love teaching, it is difficult to determine ways for students with learning disabilities to understand the curriculum without additional support” (personal communication, February 2021). Larcombe and Joosten et al. (2019) conducted a study regarding school experiences for students with autism spectrum disorder. They suggested that a child's experience mainly relies on the teacher and school factors. The authors highlighted the need for further training and support for teachers who work with students with learning disabilities.

Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). However, progress towards inclusive education is about identifying and dismantling the barriers to learning and participating in the educational setting while effectively meeting the diverse needs of students responsively, as explained by Jortveit and Kovač (2022). General education teachers have many daily demands in addition to other challenges faced in the classroom; therefore, being prepared with the

necessary skills to address multiple learning styles and social issues is significant (Gilbert & Rajan, 2020). It is possible to determine what teachers need to enhance their skills by exploring general education teacher perspectives of their preparation to support students with learning disabilities, as many general education teachers turn to training programs to compensate for special education knowledge they lack and to acquire special education teaching techniques (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021).

Research supports the notion that quality professional development influences student achievement (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). Darling-Hammond (2019) argued that professional development should be considered an essential component of a comprehensive system of teaching and learning that supports students in developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to thrive. Must be directly connected to daily work with students, related to content areas, and organized around real problems of practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

### **Rationale**

According to an annual report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), the number of students receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has increased by 7.3 million from 6.5 million. Allocating more trained teachers with continuous support in schools can improve the quality of learning experiences of students with learning disabilities in inclusion classrooms (OECD, 2018).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states and districts to expand and develop teacher preparation programs to increase the number of effective teachers who

improve student academic achievement (ESSA, 2015 20 USC 6601) is one solution could increase teacher preparation at this study site with an opportunity that allows teachers to improve their teaching skills to accommodate students in an inclusive environment (Powell et al., 2019). Brigandi et al. (2019) expressed that regardless of teachers' preservice experiences, they can fill in the gaps in learning and understanding inclusive practices.

The purpose of this study was to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and about the resources and training needed to improve their practices. This study is significant to general education teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in inclusive settings. Although some inclusion classes may have a special education teacher, the general education teachers have limited knowledge of special education pedagogy and the provisions of IDEA or Section 504 (Francisco & Hartman et al., 2020).

### **Definition of Terms**

The definitions explained in this study are terminology associated with the field of education and most used in special education. The following definitions assist in providing a better understanding of the following terms that appear in this study:

*Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):* Specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability (Colson & Smothers, 2018).



*Inclusion classroom:* A classroom where students with disabilities spend at least some portion of the school day in the general education classroom with nondisabled students (Blanton et al., 2018).

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP):* A legal written document for children with a disability developed and used in the educational system. It consists of a child's present level of academic achievement and functional levels, describing how the identified disabilities affect their education and various accommodations needed for progress (Sec.200.320 of the Individualized Education Act, 2004).

*Least Restrictive Environment:* A student's right to be educated in the most appropriate educational setting for nondisabled peers and in which the student can be successful with the proper support from other stakeholders (IDEA, 2004).

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB):* law for K–12 general education in the United States from 2002–2015 that held schools accountable for how kids learned and achieved (Jester, 2019).

*Professional Development (PD):* Structured professional learning that supports and promotes the growth of teachers, results in changes in teacher practices, and improves student learning outcomes (Sancar et al., 2021).

*Special Education:* Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability as defined in the IDEA (IDEA, 2004).

*The Individual Disabilities Education Act, formerly the Education for All Handicapped Children Act,* mandates free and appropriate public school education for eligible students ages three to 21 (Frizzell, 2018).

### **Significance of the Study**

The lack of teacher preparedness for teachers who teach students with learning disabilities has been an ongoing problem in the field of special education (Gottfried et al., 2019; Schweck, 2020). Data showed that there has been a significant increase in the number of students with disabilities placed in the general education classroom compared to other placements across the years since 1990 (Francisco & Hartman et al., 2020). Teachers must be equipped with the necessary training to provide students with learning disabilities with the free and appropriate education guaranteed under special education laws. To meet the purpose of inclusion and provide equitable opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities, school systems must provide teachers with the necessary training to make learning accessible.

Studying this local issue might be helpful in this educational setting because it would allow teachers to gain a clear understanding of the following: special education laws, research-based strategies for intervention, knowledge of annual goals and objectives in an IEP, a variety of learning disabilities and what they may look like in the classroom, and finally how to modify curriculum based on student needs.

### **Research Questions**

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the reason for “why something happens” rather than “what happened” (Bansal et al., 2018). Qualitative research often relies on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand interviews. Clear and concise research questions are fundamental to the research process (see Bansal et al., 2018). The research questions for this qualitative study are the following:

RQ1. How do elementary classroom teachers perceive their preparation in supporting students with learning disabilities?

RQ2. What are elementary general education teachers' perceptions about training and resources needed to effectively meet the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion class?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was the adult learning theory by Knowles, known as andragogy. The principles of andragogy state that the highest resource for learning is the analysis of one's own experience and the psychological need to be self-directing and that their orientation toward learning is one of concern of immediate application (Knowles, 1975). Knowles (1979) noted that education aims to yield a competent person who can apply knowledge to find an answer to various problems. Organizations should establish professional development that excites teachers to learn when developing and implementing PD opportunities.

Adult experiences are primary in andragogy. Adults define who they are based on the experience they have attained (Knowles, 1975). There is an increase in knowledge and experience levels in adult learners when professional development is given. Knowles (1975) noted that adults attain more meaning to learning they gain through experience than they acquire passively. Adult learning occurs through job-embedded PD, face-to-face seminars, and training. Online modules are also different methods by which PD for educators can be facilitated.

The theory of adult andragogy was proposed by Knowles in 1980 and is referred to as adult education and the art and science of education. This theory states that there is a difference between pedagogy for adults and children, and the fundamental purpose of the adult learning theory was to discover how adults learn best by seeing the value of new learning for everyone (see Tough, 1971). Adult learning differs from younger student learning; younger students learn because they are provided with an environment conducive to learning and offered 19 external motivators to learn (Knowles, 1989). Traditional pedagogy is composed of lectures, memorizing information, and assigned reading (Knowles, 1980). However, according to Knowles, adults need different instructional strategies to be successful. These are based on five assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners (andragogy):

- **Self-Concept:** As a person matures, their self-concept moves from being a dependent personality to being a self-directed human being.
- **Adult Learner Experience:** As a person matures, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- **Readiness to Learn:** As a person matures, their readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
- **Orientation to Learning:** As a person matures, their time perspective changes from postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. As a result, their orientation toward learning shifts from subject-centeredness to problem-centeredness. (Knowles, 1980).

- Motivation to Learn: As a person matures, the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles, 1984).

The adult andragogy theory guided my study. Knowles (1970) argued that adults need to be able to apply knowledge learned to their life situations. Teachers could use the skills they acquire from professional development in the classroom. Teacher preparation, in this study, is defined as results from instruction based upon Knowles' five assumptions.

Tough (1971) reported that (a) adults almost always turn to somebody for help at one point, (b) adults usually go to helpers who have not been trained as teachers, and (c) there is a natural process of learning. Over the years, much knowledge about adult learning was accumulated, forming the new theoretical andragogy model. This framework relates to my study approach and critical research questions because the study is geared towards finding out what training teachers will need to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom successfully. Knowles' theory is about adults being able to apply knowledge learned, and this knowledge learned is logically connected to the framework. Knowles (1980) stated that the fundamental purpose of the adult learning theory was to discover how adults learn best by seeing the value of new learning to everyone.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

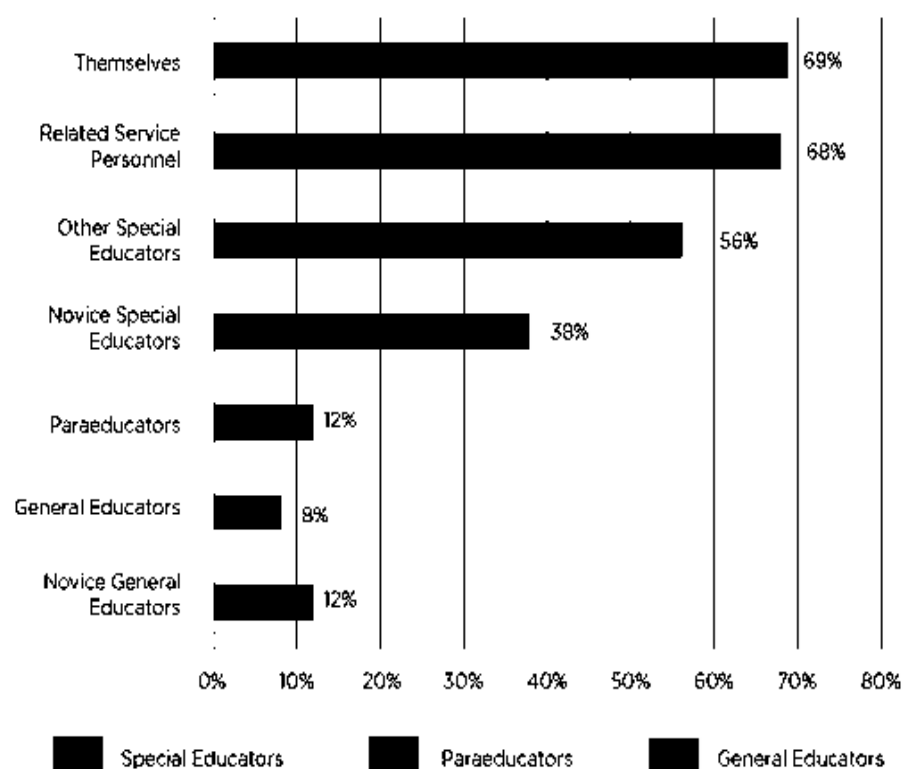
The information in the literature review was gathered using the Walden University Library Database. Google Scholar was another search engine used to gather resources and filter to show the last five years of current research on the topic. The key search terms related to the study were used: *Inclusion, preparation, preparedness,*

*inclusive environment, PD, training, special education, general elementary teachers, learning disabilities, and inclusion.* These terms were used to relate to this study.

In a survey reported by Fowler et al. (2019), researchers provided a snapshot of the special education profession, showing that general education teachers needed to feel better prepared and supported to implement IEP and modify curricula to meet the needs of these students. Figure 1 is reprinted from the survey report, showing what teachers feel prepared and supported to teach exceptional students.

### Figure 1

*Percentage of Respondents Rating Themselves and Colleagues as Well Prepared to Work with Students with Exceptionalities*



Note: From "The State of the Special Education Profession Survey Report," by S. A. Fowler, M. R. B., Coleman, and W. K. Bogdan, 2019. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 52(1), p. 15 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059919875703>)

While inclusive education is internationally recognized, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to ensure that all children have access to the curriculum used in the classroom (Gresham-Austin, 2020). However, it is difficult for a teacher to fulfill this responsibility if there is a lack of practical training. Gilbert and Rian (2020) determined in their study that when teachers are not trained to work with students with learning disabilities, it causes a drawback to the success of inclusion because the general education teachers are not prepared to teach students with learning disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Effective inclusive practices can enhance a school's culture; the basis of inclusion is the acceptance of students' diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and needs (Barth et al., 2019).

Studies of teacher preparation have shown many possible reasons why teachers feel unprepared, and the lack of PD is discussed in the research. Byrd and Alexander (2020) investigated special education teachers' knowledge and skills in preparing general education teachers for PD geared toward meeting the needs of inclusive environments. Powell et al. (2019) found that teachers needed opportunities to receive knowledge specifically required to teach students with learning disabilities. This knowledge ranges from research-based interventions to differentiating lessons and modifying assignments to meet students where they are.

Effective PD is grounded in research and sustained over time, focusing on teacher needs. PD is a learning opportunity for educators to learn as adults. Continuous PD is necessary for teachers to stay current with teaching and learning (Artman et al., 2020; Tay et al., 2021). During PD, teachers are gathered with a planned scope or targeted area

of focus provided by their building administrator or school district. Many studies suggest PD is adequate for general education elementary teachers who teach students with learning disabilities. Elder (2019) and Parsons et al. (2019) examined the purpose of PD, proving that PD opportunities yield positive results. However, Artman et al. (2020) also argued the importance of PD from a teacher-driven perspective rather than the conventional approach. Elder suggested that effective PD could responsibly and effectively increase access to classroom curriculum for students with learning disabilities. Researchers also found that PD opportunities can build faculty, staff, and administration capacity to effectively support students labeled with a learning disability in inclusive classrooms (see Artman et al., 2020).

Schools need more discussion about inclusive education and learning disabilities to have a common language and perspective on what preparation should be given to teachers who teach students with learning disabilities (Liese, 2018). Powell and Bodur (2019) and Smith and Williams (2020) researched PD. They concluded that PD provides teachers with the developmental skills needed to meet various needs and improve outcomes for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. According to his research, Powell and Bodur (2019) expounded on the importance of face-to-face PD, creating the following components of effective PD. Effective PD includes (a) learning communities, (b) resources, (c) data, (d) learning designs, and (e) implementation (Powell et al., 2019). Teachers' attitudes toward PD play a role in how teachers teach, which affects student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Artman et al., 2020; Tay et al., 2021).



DeMartino and Specht (2018) suggested that the presence of highly qualified teachers in general education classrooms could significantly affect the performance of students with intellectual disabilities; this can also apply to students with learning disabilities. Meadows and Coniglia (2018) found that PD in creating communication between general and special education teachers is needed to educate students in inclusive settings.

PD is crucial in providing continual updates on effective teaching practices, and PD in creating communication between general and special education teachers is needed to educate students in inclusive settings (Meadows & Coniglia, 2018). Teachers should participate in PD to support the students in their classrooms. The problem with PD is that the current focus is a workshop-style presentation, which has been proven ineffective in meeting the needs of teachers (Artman et al., 2020; Ellis, 2019). Too often, minimum to no follow-up feedback sessions are implemented, making educators feel less confident using the strategies they learned from a PD workshop (Martin, 2021). Complete and systemic change in inclusion programs and educating students can only occur if PD is focused on effective teaching and learning as the cornerstone.

In their research, Bates and Morgan (2018) noted seven elements of effective PD. Their findings suggest that PD provides teachers with materials and skills they can implement in their classrooms. PD should influence both teacher knowledge and practice. Bates and Morgan laid the framework for what effective PD is for educators, including their argument that effective PD should positively impact student learning. Additional findings suggest that incorporating specific strategies to teach specific student

populations is critical to effectiveness. Nguyen and Ng (2020) noted that formal and job-embedded PD is instrumental to teachers' instructional change and contributes to student learning and achievement. Increased PD correlates with improved student achievement outcomes (Balta & Eryilmaz, 2019).

### **The Evolution of Special Education**

The nature of special education has evolved over the years, with rights and funding improving since the creation of special education. Special education aims to provide equity for individuals with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020). Services provided through special education are portable and should not be identified as a special classroom. Studies have shown historically that children with learning disabilities have not always received equal treatment in the public education system. Mitchell et al. (1998), as cited in Hallahan et al. (2020), described the historical unequal treatment of children and youth with disabilities in the public education system and how parents and advocates used the court system as an attempt to force states to provide equal educational opportunities. The field of special education has significantly changed over the years; students have a more significant opportunity to receive a free, appropriate public education than they did years ago.

Francisco et al. (2020) examined how special education students were initially allotted separate classrooms and schools. However, there was a decline in support for special education, which led to social segregation and labeling of students with disabilities. In the early 20th century, students with disabilities were excluded from public school education (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) cited in (Leytham et al.,

2018). There are several cases in the United States related to equality and access to education: (a) *Brown v. Board of Education* 1952, (b) *Cooper v. Aaron* 1978, and (c) *Plyler v. Doe* 1982. *Brown vs Board of Education* was the beginning of a shift in education. The 1954 Supreme Court determined in *Brown vs Board of Education* that segregation of racial minorities in schools denied learners equal opportunities in education and was unconstitutional (Levine, n.d). As a result, schools throughout the United States were desegregated.

In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), also known as (EAHCA) was established; this federal law requires public schools to provide free appropriate educational services for all children with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 (Rozalski et al., 2020). The EAHCA helped improve how children with disabilities are educated and identified. The EAHCA also helped with providing families with due process protections. Procedural safeguards are implemented to ensure students with disabilities are placed according to the laws' requirements. Rozalski et al. (2020) discussed how, in 1986, Congress made amendments to EAHCA, which resulted in Public Law 99-457. This law authorized early intervention to serve infants and toddlers through age two.

Later, EAHCA became the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Rozalski et al., 2020). Colson and Smothers (2018) shared that general education teachers must have knowledge of IDEA. The purpose of IDEA is to (a) guarantee a free appropriate public education (FAPE) designed for individuals education needs and related services, (b) serve as protection for the rights of parents and children with disabilities, and (c) require

parents to participate in the special education process (IDEA, 2004, cited in Colson & Smothers 2018). IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared to enter their communities as productive, independent members and make academic growth (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019). Later, there was a second revision of IDEA, which occurred in 2004. Under this reauthorization, the IDEA was named Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement (IDEIA). As Congress continued to make amendments, the EACHA introduced the legally binding document known as an IEP.

An IEP is an important instrument that fosters individualized education for special-needs children in general education classrooms (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). With an IEP, the aim is to implement services and develop goals based on the individual needs of students with disabilities. Hedin and DeSpain (2018) and Liese (2018) expressed the importance of an IEP. Liese shared the details of what an IEP also includes: annual goals, objectives, and accommodations to assist the student's learning. Teachers should know each student's IEP to meet their needs in the classroom setting. In a survey reported by Fowler et al. (2019), researchers provided a snapshot of the special education profession, showing that general education teachers did not feel well prepared or supported to implement IEP and modify curricula to meet the needs of these students.

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965 (Jester, 2019); the nation's national education law is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all students. The ESEA also provides states with grant support for the

education of students with disabilities (McFeeters, 2021). On January 8th, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act that redefined the roles of K-12 public schools and sought to close the achievement gap that existed between students of low socioeconomic status and their peers (Adler-Greene, 2019; Green et al., 2020). NCLB was created to help all children, regardless of race, economic status, ethnicity, or disability, reach their full potential. The philosophy of inclusion of students with disabilities in a general education classroom was present in NCLB (Green et al., 2020).

Teacher quality is one important aspect of NCLB. The mandate requires that all teachers who teach students be “highly qualified” in the subject they teach (Green et al., 2020; McFeeters, 2021), hold at least a bachelor’s degree, be fully certified or licensed by the state, and demonstrate content knowledge in each of the core subjects they teach (NCLB, 2002). Although “highly qualified” is defined by state certification and basic skills tests, training and PD should be included when defining “highly qualified teacher.” Green et al. (2020) expounded on high-quality teaching by saying that the field of special education has suffered because of the high standards of what a highly qualified teacher should have. In 2015, the ESEA was reauthorized as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), in which the term “highly qualified” regulations were removed (Remer, 2017).

### **Inclusive Education**

An inclusive classroom is a general education classroom where students with and without disabilities learn together (Blanton et al., 2018). Successful inclusion consists of more than just allowing individuals to be educated in the same space. While inclusive

education is internationally recognized, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to ensure that all children have access to the curriculum used in the classroom (Gresham-Austin, 2020). However, it is difficult for a teacher to fulfill this responsibility if there is a lack of adequate training; Gilbert and Rian (2020) determined in their study that when teachers are not trained to work with students with learning disabilities, it causes a drawback to the success of inclusion. This drawback is challenging when preparing general education teachers to work with students with learning disabilities (Gilbert & Rian, 2020; Peterson-Ahmad et al., 2018; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018).

Studies of teacher preparation have shown many possible issues why teachers feel unprepared, and the lack of PD is discussed in the research. Byrd and Alexander (2020) investigated special education teachers' knowledge and skills in preparing general education teachers for PD geared toward meeting the needs of inclusive environments. Powell and Bodur (2019) found that teachers needed opportunities to receive knowledge specifically required to teach students with learning disabilities. This knowledge ranges from research-based interventions to differentiating lessons and modifying assignments to meet students where they are.

### **Teacher Preparation (Preservice Level)**

Dalinger et al. (2020) suggested that preservice programs be structured to promote self-reflection by requiring preservice teachers to do their field experiences before their mandated theory and pedagogy courses. Traditionally, preservice programs require isolated courses without connection to the student's field experience (Dalinger et al., 2020). The development of pedagogical skills in teaching is solely left to the teacher's

field experiences, which leads to finding the opportunity to learn and address diverse classroom needs. Whereas Gottfried and Kirksey (2020) addressed how teachers at the pre-service level supplement coursework knowledge with field-based experience and how teachers would feel better prepared if teaching programs were more coherent with the tools and strategies used throughout the teaching experience. The lack of consistency in coursework and fieldwork makes teachers uncertain about teaching students with learning disabilities (see Gottfried & Kirksey, 2020). Teacher preparation programs can change teacher education by creating programs that allow various opportunities for practice and reflection on the most essential aspects of teaching as defined by experts in the field (Green et al., 2021).

### **Co-Teaching**

Research suggests that co-teaching has benefits that are beneficial for an inclusive classroom. Co-teaching is a strategy widely used in many classrooms where general and special education teachers coexist in an inclusive environment (Jortveit and Kovač (2022). Co-teaching is a complex relationship in an inclusive environment. Rytivaara et al. (2019) shared these two viewpoints: Co-teaching is a tool by which teachers respond to the diversity of heterogeneous student populations during in-service activities. The second viewpoint is that co-teaching, seen as a necessary partnership during pre-service training, enhances the undergraduate teacher personally. Effective co-teaching includes a knowledge of strategies on how to instruct the class. Rabin (2020) shared that co-teaching promotes collaboration among general and special education teachers; however, districts may be unable to afford this, which financially prohibits the co-teaching approach.

According to the participants in a study conducted by Hills & Penny (2021), this collaborative approach is important and should be considered as a topic for PD.

### **Implications**

The findings from the literature review revealed that teachers need PD to successfully teach students with a learning disability in an inclusion classroom (Brigandi et al., 2019). The literature also discussed the power of co-teaching and how it can be beneficial in an inclusive classroom. Additionally, my review of the research also revealed that preservice programs should require teachers to have not only introductory pedagogy knowledge courses about special education but also field experience (Green et al., 2021, & Dalinger et al., 2020).

Therefore, factors such as formal education, PD, field experience, and teacher perceptions of the inclusive setting play a role in teacher preparedness. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom. In addition, the resources and training needed to improve their practices contributed to the local problem. Currently, the study's site school district offers inclusion classrooms for students with disabilities; therefore, it is necessary to gain insight into general education teachers' perceptions about their preparation to work in an inclusion classroom.

A project was developed to help support teachers by providing them with PD. The start of this PD series will be conducted before the first day of school for teachers. The outcome of this study created awareness concerning how to plan training and PD that



focuses on effective inclusive instructional strategies. As a result of this study, a project was created, which is a series of ongoing PD. The purpose of the PD sessions is to provide both general and special education teachers with evidence-based, inclusive instructional strategies. An outcome of the PD sessions is that general education teachers can modify lessons that address all students' needs and are aligned with the district's and IEP goals.

### **Summary**

In summary, effective PD and other strategies can help decrease the number of teachers feeling unprepared to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting. Many teachers state they do not have the required training/skills to meet the needs of these students with learning disabilities and struggle to meet their IEP goals. Most of the literature on teacher preparedness suggests that teachers have continuous learning opportunities to be knowledgeable in inclusive practices and pedagogy. Consequently, teachers find it challenging to address the needs of students with learning disabilities in their classes. Hence, there is a need to explore teachers' perceptions of what PD and continuous learning they may need to succeed in the classroom so that students are also achieving their goals. In Section 1, I introduced the local problem and provided the rationale for investigating the problem, as well as the research questions and Knowles' conceptual framework, and the literature review included the evolution of special education and laws benefiting students with learning disabilities. Next, in Section 2, I comprehensively discussed the research design used for

this study. In Section 3, I present the project for this study. Lastly, Section 4 contains my reflections and conclusions.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

A basic qualitative approach was used, which entailed the usage of individual, face-to-face, or virtual semistructured interviews with general education teachers who teach or have taught in the inclusive school setting. In this basic qualitative study, I aimed to investigate general elementary teachers in an inclusion classroom, their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities, and their training needs to improve their teaching practices in an inclusive setting. Other qualitative research designs, including grounded theory design and phenomenology, were considered inappropriate for this study. The phenomenology design would not be effective in the current study because this design is only appropriate when the research aims to understand participants' conscious experiences lined with a particular personal phenomenon (see Sundler et al., 2019). Additionally, the grounded theory design was not appropriate because it is used when the study's primary objective is theory development (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018); since neither of those designs' objectives fit the objective of my study, I did not use them.

A basic qualitative approach best fits this study because it allows researchers to collect data through interviews and observations, which will help understand participants' perspectives and analyze themes from descriptions given by the participants (see Lester et al., 2020). The data collected is in the language of the participants. A quantitative approach would be less practical for this study because my goal is not to predict nor confirm the number of unprepared general elementary teachers who teach students, teach

students with learning disabilities, so I will not collect numerical data or use statistical methods.

A basic qualitative research design is appropriate when studying perceptions and experiences the participants describe through stories (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Thompson et al. (2018). Since my goal was to examine teachers' experiences and perceptions, this design was best used in this study. This design allowed me to develop detailed descriptions of these perceptions and experiences and explore the shared meaning of the participants' responses. Therefore, this research design was most appropriate for this study as it aimed to understand general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate general elementary teachers in an inclusion classroom perception about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities and their training needs to improve their teaching practices in an inclusive setting. A basic qualitative design was used to understand the perceptions of general education teachers who teach students with disabilities. I recruited 12 elementary teachers who teach or have taught students with learning disabilities in a general education classroom within the last five years. A purposive sample ensured that only participants who fit the criteria were recruited.

### **Participants**

The site selected for this study was an elementary school network in a northeastern state. Participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria: they must be general education teachers who currently teach or have taught

students with learning disabilities within the last five years in the general education setting. The population consisted of general elementary school teachers from a northeastern school district. This study's target population is teachers who currently teach or taught inclusion students in Grades K-4. The sample population included twelve elementary school teachers with one or more years of teaching experience and at least one year in an inclusive classroom within the past five years. Twelve elementary teachers were identified as qualifying participants within the six elementary schools within that school network. The data from participants is included in the analysis, and all participants had the opportunity to contribute to the purpose of this study. I emailed the administrative leader at each school, explaining the purpose of my study, and asked for permission to use participants at their school. The administrative leader at each location composed a list of qualifying participants and was contacted via email for their participation in the study. Although the sampling size used in qualitative studies has been widely debated, it is known that the sample size is typically small (Vasileiou, 2018), which means there is no straightforward answer about the number needed to achieve results.

For the study to be impactful, trustworthiness must be obtained. It was vital that I presented myself with integrity and ethics while conducting research ethically; it enhanced the validity and reliability of the research (see Stenfors et al., 2020). Earlier familiarization with the study environment broadly promoted the study's credibility. I emphasized deep interactions with the target population to identify the threats and enablers of objective research. Lastly, the participant's honesty was enhanced to ensure that the data gathered was accurate and not influenced by bias. In line with this

commitment, participants were interviewed at will and were allowed to revoke consent at any time during the interview process. It was important that participants felt comfortable in sharing their perceptions, and an icebreaker was used to get to know the participants and help them relax.

All consent forms and demographic questionnaires were encrypted on my computer and stored away, with all personal data removed. Participants were identified by numbers instead of names to ensure confidentiality and protect their identity. I was obligated to report if any participants shared the intent of harm to themselves or others. Anything disclosed outside of harming themselves or others was confidential information.

### **Data Collection**

Obtaining permission to conduct the study occurred before gathering data. The school network's legal team first reviewed my research proposal; this allowed me to conduct the study within their network. This letter proposal explained the reason for my study and what I sought from their school sites. Approval was needed through Walden's Institutional Review Board to solicit the interviews from teachers who meet the participant selection criteria (#03-27-23-0989220). Participants received an email for an online interview that also included consent forms.

Individual semistructured interviews via Zoom were used to assist in investigating and understanding general education teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to work in an inclusion classroom and what specific training/ PD led to being successful in the classroom. Demographic questions were asked to gather demographic data on the

selected participants. The interview questions and demographic questionnaire were created by me and used during the process. The initial interview took place via Zoom and lasted approximately 1525 minutes individually. Follow-up interviews were conducted within two weeks for participants who wanted to share more after the first interview. The interviews were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do elementary teachers perceive they are prepared to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion class?

RQ2. What are elementary general education teachers' perceptions about training and resources needed to effectively meet the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion class?

The interview data was transcribed by a transcription service called Otter.ai, which provided real-time captions and notes from virtual meetings such as Zoom. Individual interviews provided a more individualized personal response from the participants. The interactive interviews allowed me to understand the participants' perceptions regarding preparedness to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), interviews are a commonly used instrument in qualitative research and typically consist of dialogue between researcher and participant guided by a flexible interview protocol. This data collection method allowed me to explore participants' feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about teacher preparation and PD for teachers who teach students with learning disabilities. After the interviews, I transcribed the audio recording using the transcription service Otter.ai, as described above.

As the researcher, (a) I conducted each interview with the study's participants; (b) I did not work with or was acquainted with any of the participants being interviewed; and (c) I sought guidance from my chair to assist with the participant selection, interviewing questions, progression, and the data analysis. I was also responsible for collecting and analyzing the data while reporting the findings in a nonbiased way (see Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). It is crucial to eliminate any possible bias within the research by taking these measures, which increase the study's strength and validity. As a past special education teacher employed for the school network used in this study, I needed to present myself solely as a researcher so that my experiences or biases did not cause discrepancies in my findings. Since the researcher is the primary instrument, biases are almost impossible to eliminate (Maxwell, 2005). My responsibility was to ensure that I was aware of any biases throughout the process. To uphold integrity and avoid biases or other ethical issues, I kept a reflective journal with detailed records during data analysis to be conscious of potential biases.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In the data analysis plan, I aimed to acquire valuable insights and decisions from the data derived. The research questions were the driving force for this research study. The data from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and grouped into themes and used to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives on PD. The qualitative data collected through interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), thematic analysis provides a valuable and flexible tool for acquiring a rich and detailed data account. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018),



the thematic analysis method is appropriate when one is interested in understanding a set of thoughts, behaviors, or experiences across a data set. This study intended to understand general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning. Hence, a thematic analysis was appropriate for the current study.

The analysis followed a six-step process for thematic analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data; this involved immersing myself in the data to ensure I was thoroughly familiar with the content, which involved active reading and re-reading the data and searching for patterns and meanings. Second, I generated initial codes; according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), codes identify data features that appear interesting to the researcher. The coding procedure involved reading through the data, marking the significant points, and sorting and categorizing the coding of the major points. The coding was done by hand. For the third step, I had to search for themes; this step involved sorting the list of codes initially generated into potential themes. I analyzed the codes and considered how the many codes may be combined to form an overarching theme. This was achieved with the help of visual representations such as tables. After I searched for themes, I reviewed the themes defined and named the themes. Finally, I produced the report. In Steps 4-6, I reviewed and refined themes to consider whether the themes formed a clear pattern and ensure that the themes fit into the research questions before writing up the analysis and presenting the research findings. Specifically, I presented a rich narrative that provided a concise, clear, and logical interpretation of the data.

The credibility of the research demands that the methodology chosen should be well-explicated and justified. Researchers can ensure credibility by using many strategies

(Stahl & King, 2020). I employed the strategies of member checking of transcripts, earlier familiarization, and promoting the respondent's honesty. Members' backgrounds were central to promoting the proposed study's reliability. I scrutinized every respondent to ensure suitability for participation in the research. The quality of participants differs, necessitating a careful analysis of potential participants to ensure only those who can give quality responses are engaged.

Earlier familiarization with the study environment largely promoted the study's credibility. I emphasized deep interactions with the target population to identify the threats and enablers of objective research. Lastly, the respondent's honesty was developed to ensure that the data gathered was accurate and not influenced by bias. In line with this commitment, respondents were only interviewed at will and could revoke consent anytime during the interview process. Coercion is the leading cause of respondents' dishonesty, which is eliminated by allowing them to withdraw consent to research participation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Stahl and King (2020) referred to dependability as another perspective of trustworthiness and the idea that another researcher would find similar results in a similar study. Peer debriefing is a concrete research practice demonstrating dependability, a solid communication habit that creates trust (Stahl & King, 2020). I used member checking and repeated exposure to address the dependability of findings (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I reviewed the transcripts, codes, categories, and themes multiple times for extended data exposure.

To ensure all information I used for the analysis was accurate and supported the validity of the study, I engaged in the process of member-checking. This type of respondent validation entails that each participant reviews the transcript to validate the accuracy of the portrayal of their voices, allowing the participants the opportunity to confirm or deny the interpretations (Candela, 2019). To ensure the process of confirmability, participants reviewed the transcripts from the interviews to verify that the information was accurate and reflected their perspectives and opinions. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings (McGinley et al., 2021). In other words, this means that the findings were based on participants' responses only and not any of my potential biases, perspectives, or personal motivations. This task involves making sure that researcher bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants say (McGinley et al., 2021).

### **Data Analysis Results**

This study's primary data collection method was one-on-one semistructured interviews developed to answer the research question, guided by Knowles's andragogy theory. The instrument used to conduct the interviews was an interview guide (see Appendix C) to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and the resources and training needed to improve their practices. I began collecting data on May 8, 2023, after receiving Walden University's IRB approval (#03-27-23-0989220). Data collection concluded on June 8, 2022. I obtained participants by sharing the flyer with site principals within the school network. Once the flyer was shared

with staff for the purpose of recruiting, participants were able to contact me via email. I ensured they met all criteria and gave proper consent after reading the consent form. Participants were advised to share their availability for an interview. I then scheduled a Zoom meeting, and a Google calendar invite was sent as a confirmation and reminder of their interview date and time. I also tracked when participants reached out to me volunteering to participate and when they gave consent. A total of twelve participants met the eligibility requirements and consented to participate in the data collection portion of the study.

Each participant was emailed a consent form to read via email; once they replied and gave their consent, a follow-up email was sent asking for their availability to schedule a videoconference for the initial interview. On the scheduled interview days, I reminded each participant that the interview was being recorded and that I was using transcribing software to transcribe what was being audio-recorded. Once participants confirmed that they understood the interview process, I began with the opening statement of the study, which was a review of the study's purpose and ensuring participants had the option to opt out of the study at any time. I also made participants aware that the interview was confidential and that none of the information would be bought, sold, or used against them in any way. Although Otter.ai transcribed, I also took notes when identifying trends from different participants.

The interview instrument consisted of twelve questions to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and about the resources and training

needed to improve their practices. The duration of the interviews took less time than I projected; instead of 30-45 minutes, the interviews ranged from 15-35 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses, making this the only variation in data collection from the plan presented earlier in Section 2. No follow-up interviews were needed for this study. At the end of each interview, I listened to the audio recording and viewed the transcripts for any word accuracy errors that may have occurred in the process. The audio recordings, transcripts, and notes taken were stored in my home office on my computer, locked with a password.

When analyzing the data, I used the six-phase thematic analysis approach (see Braun & Clark, 2006) to help me analyze and familiarize myself with the data. After familiarizing myself, I began the initial coding phase, generating codes and themes. Reviewing transcripts and repeatedly listening to audio recordings allowed me to validate the themes and report on the identified themes. The thematic analysis helped determine the meaning of themes aroused from the participant's responses to the open-ended interview questions. In addition to having the video conferences audio transcribed by Otter.ai, Zoom also recorded the video and enabled captions to retrieve what the participants stated. I wrote some responses by hand if it was something I repeatedly heard as I interviewed participants. I listened to the audio constantly, compared what I heard to what was written on the transcript, made changes if needed, and took additional notes. I also used highlighters on the transcripts to highlight important information I believed answered my research questions. I addressed my personal biases by journaling them separately to avoid my interpretation skewing the data.

Five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) the need for specific PD geared toward inclusion classrooms, (b) resources, training, and additional support, (c) classroom size as a challenge, (d) special education not being viewed as exclusive in education, (e) importance of on-going training throughout the school year. The themes above were derived from the interpretation of the data collected and shared with the participants, referred to as member checking. This allowed each participant to review the data to check for accuracy; the data was included in the study once the accuracy was confirmed. The 12 open-ended questions I asked during each interview allowed me to gather ample data and highlighted the perceptions of lack of training, preparedness, and what they believed they needed to succeed. The codes and themes, in addition to some of the interview questions and segments of the participants' responses, are represented in Table 1.

**Table 1***Interview Questions and Segments*

Interview questions	Interview responses	Key words and phases	Themes
What resources are/were you given as a general education teacher who teach students with learning disabilities to be successful in the classroom?	<p>“... So nothing that I created myself, well then modified versions assessments”</p> <p>“Verbal resources, learning specialist...”</p>	Teacher created resources	Need for physical resources to inform instruction
Were you exposed to any special education classes while becoming a teacher on the pre-service level? How many?	<p>“Yes, one exceptional learners’ class in undergrad. Mostly just a general overview of how to support students with learning disabilities.”</p> <p>“Just one course in college”</p> <p>“I only had one class and it was like SPED at a glance”</p>	Undergraduate course General overview of Special Education	No in-depth knowledge of special education
Is PD provided by your school geared specifically towards special education?	<p>“No, the PD isn’t really geared towards special education. They usually divide us up into general education and self-contained.”</p> <p>“Not much, more like an overview of things we may experience in the class”</p>	General education	Inclusion-specific PD
What do you think is the biggest challenge facing	“Lack of rigor...not challenging them... or assuming they (student	Lessen Rigor, stakeholders’	Content knowledge experts in

special education students today?	<p>with disabilities) can do it just because everyone else can... a novice co teacher is a because they are still learning the basics.”</p> <p>“Space conducive to learning, lack of training for the teachers, classroom size, not having a sped teacher in the class to support.”</p> <p>“Lack of knowledge across stakeholders about the importance of an IEP”</p>	knowledge, large classrooms	Special Education
Are there any trainings you wish you could participate in that will be beneficial to you in the inclusion classroom?	<p>“...looking at lessons and tailoring them to meet the needs of the student based on what the IEP goals are...like having an expert in the knowledge.”</p> <p>“Sped Dept trainings, because they are usually not for the general education classroom more for the specialized classes”</p>	Tailored instruction, IEP goals	Alignment of curriculum to IEP needs
How could your leadership team improve PD at your school? What topics would you be interested in?	<p>“...A lot more PDs solely for inclusion, support for paraprofessionals</p> <p>“Provide exclusive PD on how special ed works, reading an IEP, accommodations and modifications.”</p>	PD, Exclusivity	Specific PD



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	<p>“View special ed as part of general education and not just part but whole of education, it will increase teacher willingness.</p> <p>Understanding IEP vs 504, Understanding Classifications and the Abbreviations, differentiation.”</p>		
<p>Do you think on going PD should be provided throughout the school year? What styles are best?</p>	<p>“Yes...quarterly...even monthly, just to make sure we are getting the support the support we need to implement a strong inclusion room... a combination of expert modeling, small group... online training within person follow up training”.</p> <p>“Yes. in the moment PD/training through observation, live videos of role modeling support.”</p> <p>“Yes at least monthly, because we don’t get enough opportunities to work with sped teachers across the network.”</p>	<p>Frequent training combination of PD styles</p> <p>Modeled support</p>	<p>Importance of ongoing PD</p>
<p>If PD session is given, are there follow ups about how to apply the strategies in the classroom or is it discussed and often not revisited? Why do you think</p>	<p>“...yes , it may be a broad idea, but never checked in on to see if they were put in place in the class... there’s not much follow up for inclusion needs at our school.”</p>	<p>Inconsistency</p> <p>Not enough manpower priorities</p>	

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they lack follow ups?	“Often not revisited, maybe brief convo amongst teachers but not as a department...there is an overload of needs and not enough people to service the needs.”	
Does the school staff collaborate on solutions to provide effective learning?	“... yes, I think the whole school is intentionally in collaborating, but I think teachers should be given a choice on what they want to learn.”	Intentionality Follow-up collaboration
	“At times we do... we may come together to discuss what scholars need but often falls through the cracks”	
How would you describe your overall experience as a teacher who teach students with learning disabilities? why	“it’s challenging at times, but I can’t see myself out of the inclusion setting, there are days where I am doubtful and days where I see fruition.”	Challenge rewarding Lonely Defeated
	“Left alone, like I have to find my way on my own... defeated in a sense when I don’t have all the tools...”	Low self- efficacy due to lack of support and tools to feel successful

The following data sources were used to gather data: interviews and notes. The communication application Zoom was used on my computer to collaborate with participants and record the interviews then the Otter.ai software was also used to record audio and transcribe during the transcription process. These applications were used on my computer, which required a login ID and password to access the applications. The transcripts are stored on my Otter.ai account and downloaded to my laptop. The data and field notes are locked in my home office. All recordings were saved using a pseudonym for each participant.

## **Results**

This qualitative study investigated general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and the resources and training needed to improve their practices. I created two research questions that aligned with the problem and purpose. The research questions for this study were addressed based on the responses of the 12 open-ended interview questions provided by the participants.

Q1. How do elementary classroom teachers perceive their preparation in supporting students with learning disabilities?

Q2. What are elementary general education teachers' perceptions about training and resources needed to effectively meet the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion class?

Overall, all participants were asked the same questions, although some needed additional probing questions for further explanation to give a more in-depth response. The data was

saturated after speaking with a few participants, and I realized no other data was needed because of the repeated common responses among participants.

### **Theme 1: Need for Specific Professional Development Geared Towards Inclusion Classrooms**

The participants expressed a need for specific PD to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom because the Special Education PD received at their school was not explicitly geared towards Special Education. Effective PD allows for the development of successful, inclusive classrooms. The participants conveyed in their interviews how they believed leadership could improve PD at their school. “For PD, there would be maybe a section of the PD, but it was not just specific or geared for those types of learners; it was just like a subsection,” said Participant 12.

Participant 5 shared that there needed to be more strategic PD for general education teachers in inclusion classrooms. “Not as much as it should be, but it is more like an overview of things we may experience or tools we can use to support those scholars.”

### **Theme 2: Resources, Training and Additional Support**

Most participants expressed that they need tangible resources to help them teach in an inclusion classroom. Most of their resources are materials they created independently, information shared by the learning specialist, or network assessments modified for students with individual education plans. Participants believed teaching an inclusive classroom without the training and resources is difficult. Results from the interviews showed that these general education teachers in inclusion classrooms needed more resources to meet the needs of students who needed more resources. Participant 1 is

a First-grade teacher who has been teaching for five years; “I provide my students with manipulatives...the biggest resource I received is being able to understand the economy of language to use when helping a struggling scholar.” Participant 4, a Fourth-grade Math teacher, stated, “I do not know if a paraprofessional or learning specialist counts as a resource, but that is the gist of resources I am getting right now.” In a qualitative analysis conducted by Allam and Martin (2021), they explained that just because students receive placements in inclusion classrooms alone is not enough without the necessary support and services to meet the needs of the students in the class. Participant 5's response also mentioned a learning specialist: “The main resource is whatever the learning specialist provided such as tips or some tools to support, but no concrete curriculum.” Participant 6, a sixth-year teacher with a Master's Degree, argued, “I was not given any resources to help support them.”

The teachers shared the type of support and training they felt they needed on specific topics to be successful in the classroom. While interviewing, it was an evident trend of topics participants expressed they would like to have at their school during PD. Some training topics included differentiation, writing/reading an IEP, IEP vs. 504, how to provide accommodations/modifications, and understanding classifications and how they may appear in the classroom. All the participants in this study also communicated that they were either only exposed to one general overview of special education or not exposed at all on a pre-service level. Gottfried et al. (2019) noted a disconnect between the best practice concepts delivered via pre-service programs and candidates' real-world

field experience. As a result, educators reported not feeling confident in their teaching abilities to educate students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

### **Theme 3: Classroom Size as a Challenge**

Four Participants believed that classroom size was a challenge. Participant 12, an elementary teacher, said, “For me, working with students with disabilities walking into a classroom, year after year, with very different students with different levels of need.

Classroom sizes are very large; when I say large, I mean over 21 or capacity, sometimes 30-35 children alone as a lead teacher and a content area”. Participant 12 also stated,

“There is a lot of confinement. There is not a lot of space for students to move around. There is a huge expectation that all students are supposed to sit down all day long, have their feet on the ground, and have both their hands on the desk.

And that's just not what we are talking about ergonomics; it is just not the most conducive thing for students.

Participant 5, a ninth year First-grade elementary teacher, expressed, “We have our classroom sizes are so large that sometimes the space within that classroom is not conducive for that scholar because there are so many kids in one room and just the space for them to be successful learners.” Participant 9, a fifth-year teacher with a Master’s Degree explained, “my roster maxes out at 32 kids, and when I think of inclusion, it is not necessarily like a 50/50 split between Gen Ed and Special Ed. I always thought the number of special education scholars would be smaller.....the maximum number of kids in my room, and special education and general education would just be capped at a lower number. Participant 11 “Absolutely...I had 31 kids that year. Moreover, I will never

forget that it was one of the worst years I have ever experienced as an educator. Moreover, I mean, I was putting out fires left and right because I did not have the capacity to deal with the needs of all the children.”

#### **Theme 4: Special Education being viewed as Exclusive in Education**

During interviews with participants, many voiced their perspectives on how they felt about working with students with learning disabilities and how Special Education felt exclusive and needed to be more inclusive. In addition, Florian (2019a) also argued that special needs education produces exclusion because it is positioned at the margin of education’s normative center. Participant 1, a kindergarten teacher who has taught elementary, shared, “I think that they want us to teach to the majority, but there are students in our class that have significant needs that may get brushed under the rug because the majority of students are performing a typical.” Participant 2 also agreed that often Special Education is viewed as a piece of education, “Special education often goes by the wayside because the mentality is it works for a, b, and c, instead of determining why it is not working for everyone.” Florian (2019b) discussed the necessity of the co-existence between special education and inclusive education. Participant 2 said, “I think if they saw inclusion as part of education as a whole and not just Sped versus Gen Ed, that would, I think, increase just the overall willingness of teachers to have these students in these classrooms and just increase their comfortability.”

Participant 6, a dual role 2nd-grade teacher and Grade Level Chair, was concerned that the PD they did receive at school was often divided and excluded teachers. “Leadership should allow all teachers to attend PD no matter what. It should not

be based on what you went to school for.....but if all teachers were exposed and had those PD training, or just received training in general, I think many kids would benefit”. Participant 7 thought it was not much inclusivity, “I do not think it is inclusive; it is like a one-way street and a general baseline for everyone; however, it should not be.

### **Theme 5: Importance of Ongoing Training throughout the School Year**

We must improve the types and the usefulness of the professional support offered to teachers and ensure they have the resources needed to access those opportunities (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Participants equally advocated that they believe providing continuous PD would be beneficial. In addition to the PD they do have the opportunity to receive, eight out of twelve participants felt as though the PD they did receive regarding basic strategies to implement in a classroom often needed to be revisited due to many other things that may have priority. Participant 9 said PD was “often discussed and not revisited; people are spread a bit thin, and competing priorities tend to get in the way, so certain things get pushed towards the bottom of the pile.” Continuous learning via PD helps teachers do their jobs more effectively and efficiently, advancing their careers and increasing their sense of dedication, purpose, satisfaction, and professionalism while helping students perform (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).



### Section 3: The Project

The problem I explored in this study was teachers' lack of preparedness to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Teachers' abilities to be effective and feel prepared were aligned with the lack of PD, resources, and tools provided to enhance their skills and knowledge on how to meet the needs of these students. I investigated general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and the resources and training needed to improve their practices. Exploring this problem allowed me to understand teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and whether they received enough PD. I used semistructured interviews as my method of collecting data. The participants included in this study had taught, or are currently teaching, students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom at the time of the study. Although many themes emerged from the data analysis, the central theme was the need for frequent PD geared towards inclusion practices, such as providing appropriate accommodations and tailoring instruction to fit the needs of the students in an inclusion classroom. Five themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) the need for specific PD and training geared toward inclusion classrooms, (b)resources, training, and additional support, (c) classroom size as a challenge, (d) special education not being viewed as inclusive in education, (e) importance of on-going training throughout the school year. The first theme, the need for specific PD and training geared towards inclusion classrooms, was a major theme that all participants expressed they needed that could help improve their teaching and academic

achievement for students with learning disabilities in the inclusion classroom.

Throughout the interviews, I realized many subthemes can be categorized under this significant theme, such as differentiation, research-based strategies, and expert special education knowledge.

### **Rationale**

Based on the study's findings, I chose the project genre PD. PD was the most applicable genre for the current research and the findings. The results of this study revealed that PD is essential to the development of novice teachers and teachers with experience. Regardless of teachers' preservice knowledge, PD allows teachers to reflect on their learning results and increase their professional knowledge (Bredmar, 2020).

Some research I highlighted in Section 1 cited reasons teachers felt unprepared, and as I interviewed participants, I noticed that the research supported some of the thoughts participants shared. All 12 participants agreed that they had experienced a significant drawback in the success of their classroom because they were not adequately trained or did not have leaders who were experts in the field of education to support them. Special education laws and federal mandates were also referenced because more students with disabilities are being educated in the general education classroom.

While all participants expressed how they felt that special education is not viewed as inclusive but rather an exclusive entity often overlooked, all the participants expressed that they needed more relevant PD geared toward inclusive classroom settings. Although their school provides PD, it rarely focuses on teaching in an inclusive environment. Inclusive PD should focus on differentiation practices, instructional techniques, and

coaching on how educators can examine and alter the curriculum and assessments to ensure that they are planning to meet the needs of all their students (Bredmar, 2020).

Bredmar (2020) noted that educators must have consistent, relevant PD that allows time for reflection, professional discourse, and collaboration to assess current practices critically.

### **Review of the Literature**

The results of this study specified that general education teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom need PD to provide accommodations, collaboration, and much more. With many states' educational mandates, there is a greater responsibility to ensure that students with learning disabilities receive the maximum time in general education (inclusion) with educators who are prepared to address their needs. Postholm (2018) conducted a study regarding teachers' PD in school, which focused on discovering how one's development influenced school improvement. Onrubia et al.'s (2022) study aimed to determine how to assist the emergence of productive teacher discourse in PD. PD is not an isolated activity but a dynamic, ongoing, interactive teacher exchange. All the participants in this study voiced the need for ongoing PD at their school site. The participants also described the different types of PD they deemed beneficial and the various topics that would be helpful to their success as teachers in the inclusion classroom. The participants in my study shared that they felt their school should provide more PD or pay to send them to PD in addition to lacking the necessary resources to be successful in the classroom. In an international study (see Chu et al., 2020) on teacher unpreparedness to accommodate students' needs,

the results indicated that students who had teachers who took inclusive education PD significantly performed better than their peers. This shows that teachers having PD that fits the needs of their classroom can help change the achievement gap.

### **Importance and Impact of Professional Development**

Teacher agency is a great awareness regarding PD. Pantic et al. (2021) and Polatcan et al. (2021) explained that teachers demonstrate their' agency when they reflect on their teaching, assess their current PD needs, and seek training to improve their skills. Cohesiveness between PD and the needs of students and teachers results in knowledgeable teachers and meaningful content for students. Administrators and policymakers often differ in their understanding of alignment compared to classroom teachers. Participants in the study explained how the administration sometimes provides quick strategies based on one student or observation. Still, it did not necessarily align with student needs in the classroom. For example, one resource the general elementary education teachers described having access to was modified assessments; however, the modifications were so broad that they did not meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Classroom practices have a more significant impact when there is a cohesive nature of PD activities, PD aligns with school improvement efforts, and teachers are given the autonomy of choice to meet their learning needs (Agboola, 2022).

Research to evaluate the level of support provided by school leadership determined that school leadership did not sufficiently support teachers' PD; they mostly followed relevant resources to inform teachers about educational innovations (Karacabey, 2021). School leadership should help teachers identify their development needs through

experimentation and allocation of resources to support learning. Many educational players are in a child's life, but the most significant is a teacher because of their impact on student learning. However, teachers need PD to be impactful. PD is claimed to be the most effective route to quality teaching (Agboola, 2022), and participants of this study continually spoke of the need for PD to better inform their instruction and enhance their teaching knowledge to meet the students they teach where they are. Casanova et al. (2023) noted that educators are agents of change that require PD experiences that supply pedagogical knowledge, co-construct knowledge, and give them time to reflect.

### **Models/Types of Professional Development**

There are many types of PD. Some are more traditional than others, such as workshops, conferences, and seminars, which research labels conventional PD. Participants in this research suggested having flexible PD types and a way to mix things up outside the typical workshop they would like to engage in. Some suggested PD models are peer mentoring, classroom observations, gamified learning, online learning, and collaboration research. The above types will keep educators engaged and provide another way to receive continuous learning. Bragg et al. (2021) shared that online PD for teachers is more productive than traditional face-to-face PD for strengthening learning and critical thinking skills when relevant to teachers' professional learning needs. PD is a way for teachers and professionals to learn and grow their skills continually. Conventional PD has many processes through the intervention of legislatures, yet research shows that the PD system is still broken.

Artman et al. (2020) emphasized that teacher-directed PD/learning (TDPD or TDPL) is a form of self-directed learning that primarily occurs outside conventional school development. Research suggests that this form of PD incorporates autonomy, freedom of the learner, and independence because it is rooted in the pedagogical theory that allows adult learners to plan how to meet their needs when knowledge gaps are present (Artman et al., 2020). Alshaikhi's (2020) research on teachers' experiences in teacher PD emphasized self-directed learning, in which he identified some of the main features of self-directed learning as networking, collaboration, reflection, and collegiality, as reflected in teachers' current practices. These main features align with other research noted regarding self-directed learning.

Active learning is implemented and demonstrated by learners engaging in meaningful and relevant content, which increases understanding and implementation of new meaningful information (Raffo et al., 2021). Most of the participants from my study shared that the PD they received from school was often relevant to the experience they were seeing in the classroom. If they had a PD Day, it would only include some staff. This made participants of this study feel like special education is viewed as exclusion when it should not. The topics discussed or sessions provided were split between general education and self-contained. General elementary teachers working in inclusion classrooms felt their needs were unmet in the school-based PD.

Virtual and on-demand PD has become a new demand since the increase in technology following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has allowed remote access to information to become a preference. Virtual PD consists of training provided remotely

using the internet and technology; these include video conferencing, electronic books on teaching methods, informational presentations, and forms of social media platforms (Asim et al., 2020; Lara-Alecio et al., 2021).

With the correct information and proper search terms, teachers can research on the internet and obtain a variety of on-demand virtual training sessions. Creating virtual professional communities, providing remote access to instructional coaching, and increasing rural teachers' access to training are some advantages of virtual and on-demand PD (Hartshorne et al., 2020). Lara-Alecio et al. (2021) also explained that this form of PD is cost-effective for school districts and a flexible and convenient method to collaborate with other teachers outside their school building.

### **Transformative Learning**

Martin et al. (2019) researched the power of teacher input on PD and described that teachers' PD sometimes requires them to change their personal belief systems and teaching repertoires. With this approach, he suggested that when schools reflect on the needs of their educators and plan for effective PD, it will help lead teachers to success, which is linked to transformative theory. Although Knowles' theory of adult learning is used in this study, it can be viewed as parallel with transformative learning since self-directed learning is a critical element in both adult education practices. Martin et al. described transformative learning as when teachers can examine new ideas and content in conjunction with their beliefs and expectations. According to research, mandatory PD only sometimes leads to a positive outcome. However, allowing educators to engage in different forms of PD based on experience and what their students need can help improve

student achievement. Transformation occurs when there is cohesion and alignment between

### **Collaboration**

Mofield's (2020) research examined collaboration in co-planning and co-teaching with general education teachers. Good collaboration links theory and practice and cultivates a learning community. To help address the needs of students in the classroom, collaborate with various educators, including general education teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators. A teacher needs to interact with various people with different qualified relationships in a collaborative network (Mofield, 2020). Teachers' collaborative efforts encourage them to support one another, so continuous PD should provide teachers with opportunities to practice collaboratively and get feedback and reflect (Njenga, 2023; Sancar et al., 2021). In an inclusion classroom, it is recommended (Ziernwald et al., 2022) that the general education teacher and the special education teacher increase their collaboration to determine the most effective way to differentiate instruction to meet all students' needs. However, in some schools, such as the school network used for this study, the inclusion classroom does not always have a special education teacher. General education teachers often need support in differentiating classroom diversity. Collaboration also allows teachers to address issues related to underachievement and develop modifications for students with learning disabilities.

Collaboration should be viewed as a skill and fostered in PD. Collaborating with other teachers within the school network is one-way teachers believed it would help them feel more prepared to teach students with learning disabilities because this allows



teachers to brainstorm together and discover best practices that are proven effective in the inclusion classroom. Researchers note that there are so many mandates put on teachers. However, collaboration among colleagues should be a priority because collaboration among teachers and staff is viewed as an approach that leads to a positive school culture. Providing teachers the space and time to collaborate to create tiered lessons is a way to incorporate differentiation into the inclusion classroom.

### **PD on Differentiated Instruction**

One topic of training participants agreed to was PD on differentiated instruction. Special education is not a one-size-fits-all approach; therefore, instructional differentiated methods are needed to help students succeed. Differentiation is a philosophy of teaching rooted in a deep respect for students and an acknowledgment of their differences, which implies that teachers must proactively modify curricula, learning needs, and their teaching methods to meet the student's learning needs better (Tomlinson et al. 2003 as cited in Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Participants of this study expressed that learning to differentiate to meet a student's needs was essential to success. If teachers learn and understand how to adapt to students' immediate needs in unplanned situations, this can help with the trajectory of a student's learning curve.

Many different forms of differentiated instruction include ability grouping, tiering, and individualization. Teachers should be fully aware of the different forms and what kind of impact on student achievement would be most impactful to their class. Didion et al. (2020) explained that PD is effective if it is relevant or coherent and operates in conjunction with student and teacher characteristics.

## Project Description

Participants suggested incorporating more PD to provide resources and strategies to drive their instruction. After listening to participants during the virtual video interviews, I designed a 3-day PD (see Appendix A) to address the deficits identified by participants. The title of the PD is *Learn Differently, Succeed Brilliantly: A Guide to Preparing Teachers for Exceptional Learners*. The following topics were covered in the PD sessions: (a) Overall Vision of Special Education, (b) Vision for Inclusive Classroom (Who, what, and why), (c) Understanding IEPs/504, (d) Knowledge of Classifications, (e) Classroom Collaboration and Support, (f) Accommodations/ Modifications, (g) Differentiation in Lesson Plans, and (h) daily instructional practices. Many participants specifically cited that they would like different methods of PD instead of just lectures because they felt like modeling, observations, live coaching, and collaboration across stakeholders would allow PD to entail ongoing discussions to share ideas. Therefore, the 3-day PD plan will include a variety of styles to allow teachers also to be able to apply what they learned in a session. The PD will be a network PD held at one designated elementary school where the participants were recruited. This allows all teachers to attend, although they are not participants in the study.

I planned a 3-day PD from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Each day will start promptly at 8:30 a.m. with a warmup or icebreaker and end at 3:00 p.m. with an exit ticket/survey. Special education teachers, assistant principals of special education, service providers, and veteran inclusion classroom teachers will assist in facilitating this PD. Each day, the sessions will start at 8:00 a.m. and conclude at 3:00 p.m., including a 30-minute lunch

and two ten-minute breaks to decrease the mental fatigue that can occur from long sessions. With this allotted time frame, the total hours for the 3-Day PD will be 21 hours. Many participants asked for PD that included intensive collaboration across their peers and network; therefore, work time is included so that participants can plan lessons, share ideas, and interact with one another.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timeline**

The proposed plan will be presented in June 2024 to the leadership/ head of special education, with a plan to present on-site to staff in August 2024. I will need to meet with the site's leadership team, which includes the school leader, the special education vice principal, the learning specialist, and the school's network Head of Special Education before the end of the school year to execute thoroughly. This is important because, as a network, PD is planned and executed both network-wide and site-specific. I must ensure the school makes room for me on their PD schedule. Teachers usually return from summer break in early August to prepare for the school year, so the PD sessions are planned around that time. During the meeting with the other stakeholders, I will view the PowerPoint and resources and allow them to give insight. To ensure an understanding of the topics addressed each day, I will debrief with the people mentioned above at the end of each session, allowing me to make any changes or adjustments if needed.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

I am the creator and facilitator of this 3-day PD; however, the school leader, special education vice principal, the learning specialist, and the school's network Head of Special Education are all essential to this project's support. The project was designed

contingent on the data gathered from the interviews conducted in this study. I am responsible for the overall logistics of the PD, and my responsibilities include coordinating meetings with the school leader and all other parties mentioned previously. It is also my responsibility to create the daily PowerPoint slides, agendas for each meeting, any follow-up action items, and program evaluations that will be used to rate the effectiveness of the PD sessions. Finally, I am responsible for setting up all measures of success so that participants have what they need during the sessions.

Principals play a vital role in their schools' environment because culture helps determine staff success (Dinsdale, 2017); therefore, the school leader will ensure that PD is aligned with the network goals and individual school vision. The school leader is not only ensuring the environment for staff is created for success but also ensuring that I have everything I need to succeed. I will create a checklist.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

#### **Type of Evaluation**

I will use formative evaluations to decide the effectiveness of the project. The participants will be instructed to do exit tickets throughout the 3-day PD. These exit tickets will vary in form. Participants will also be required to fill out a survey daily to describe key takeaways and provide grows and glows of the session. On the last day, I will ask the grade-level managers to meet with their teams to draft a list of things they would keep or change about PD regarding the structure, time, and activities used, in addition to getting feedback from the grade-level managers on how they intend to execute

the information further on their teams to be successful through the first quarter of the school year.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals and Stakeholders**

Using formative evaluations helps presenters such as myself receive immediate feedback. Feedback transmits evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The feedback provided through the formative evaluations will help determine whether the goals of the daily PD were achieved. Further, the formative evaluations will aid in improving this PD plan by allowing me to see what was beneficial and nonbeneficial to the participants. Lastly, this will allow all participants and stakeholders to reflect on their instructional practices and what can be automatically applied to the classroom.

The key stakeholders for this project included the head of school, teachers, support staff, and other school-specific leaders. The head of the school and specific leaders will become knowledgeable on what should be done at the beginning of the school year to ensure that teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in inclusive classroom settings are set up for success. Moreover, it will help them explore the content further so that they can provide continuous assistance throughout the year. This will directly benefit teachers because they will learn more about inclusion, special education, evidence-based strategies, and the opportunity to cross-collaborate and plan with other colleagues.

## **Project Implications**

### **Social Change Implications**

The project was created to facilitate positive social change for teachers and students in inclusion classrooms. The developmental reason for creating this project was to provide general elementary teachers who teach students with learning disabilities with resources and an opportunity to understand how to be successful in the classroom and collaborate with others exclusively. When teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom have the tools to succeed, the outcome is high-yielding academic results, increased classroom engagement, higher self-efficacy, and a better understanding of the whole child. The PD sessions can be used as a yearly foundation launch to ensure educators can start the school year being equipped and decrease some of the challenges that unfold in an inclusion classroom. The information from this 3-Day PD can be revisited as needed throughout the school year.

### **Importance of Project**

This project was created due to the needs expressed in participants' responses, which showed that they believed general elementary teachers like themselves needed to be effective. The project was created to provide teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom the opportunity to learn effective evidence-based inclusion strategies, effectively plan, gain additional insight on the students they serve, conceptually understand the components of an IEP, and have time to plan and collaborate with other stakeholders. Not only do participants gain a new sense of understanding of

special education through this 3-day PD plan, but they also have the chance to gain a new sense of confidence in the classroom.

### **Summary**

In Section 3, I provided a brief description, rationale, goals, evaluation plan, timeline, and existing supports about the proposed PD project, as well as the social implications of the project and its importance. In Section 4, I explained my project's strengths and limitations. The following topics were also discussed in Section 4: (a) recommendations for alternative approaches, (b) scholarship, (c) project development, (d) leadership, (e) reflection of the importance of the work, (f) implications/applications, and (g) directions for future research.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Many policies and laws have been created for special education that have aided in creating inclusive classrooms. As I began to lay the foundation for this study, I learned that this local problem has been ongoing in education in many parts of the world. Many researchers have tried to determine what general elementary teachers who teach students with a learning disability in an inclusion classroom may need to be successful. The findings of this study are similar to those of the research I discovered, which indicated the lack of training and continuous PD needed to be successful, the lack of knowledge provided on the preservice level before field experience, and the need for more experts in special education.

The participants stated that the lack of resources and exposure to special education knowledge affects their confidence in success. All the participants believed that PD should be provided multiple times a year and include everyone in addition to what topics and types of PD they would like to receive to be successful in the inclusion classroom. Participants wanted more than the traditional PD structure. As a result, I created a 3-day PD plan to help address the concerns participants expressed during interviews.

In this qualitative study, I conducted interviews as part of my data collection process. A second literature review was completed after my data analysis, contributing to the PD project. The project is projected to be delivered over a 3-day period to address the participant's desires to cover topics needed and time to collaborate with others. The 3-day structure with opportunities to receive informal and formal feedback helped ensure the



overall development of this project was successful. In this section, I present my reflections and conclusions.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The problem addressed in this study was the teachers' lack of preparedness to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Teachers felt they did not receive enough PD to effectively teach or meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. The project deliverables will help teachers acquire more knowledge about special education and enhance the skills needed to feel better prepared. It is essential to understand that all research, including this study, has strengths and limitations.

#### **Strengths**

The PD plan created for this project has some strengths. The purpose of this project is to provide general elementary teachers who teach students with learning disabilities to be more prepared for their jobs, which is an overall strength. One strength of this proposed PD project is that participants indicated a need for specific PD and ongoing development that will help them improve their teaching in the classroom. Moreover, providing PD on inclusive practices is important for the development of teachers to be successful in an inclusive classroom, which is a strength.

The first strength is understanding the importance of an IEP and its components. The general elementary school teachers who participated in this study stated that they either had one general, special education class or none during their teacher education programs; therefore, having the participants know and fully understand the purpose of an

IEP and what is included in the student's plan is important. Teachers are responsible for fully knowing what is stated in a student's Individual Education Plan to serve them.

The second strength of this project is the collaboration and practice that will be provided for teachers. Having allotted time to collaborate with peers within the school and the network was an essential topic raised by participants of the study. Teachers will have time to brainstorm together and share techniques and ideas they found successful in their classroom. Teachers will also be able to gain a greater understanding of policies and components of an IEP by engaging with their peers who may have more experience. This will enable participants to solve problems with one another.

Another strength is providing differentiation instructional practices. Every student has their own needs in an inclusion classroom, so having a more extensive repertoire of tools to determine the best way to meet students where they are is essential. Providing teachers with evidence-based practices to employ in the classroom is critical to the success of inclusive classrooms. Participants in the study did emphasize that they understand that not everything works for every student, so one practice should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach.

### **Limitations**

When considering this project's limitations, one of my biggest challenges was identifying the correct person to approve my study for the network. Since this was not a public school, there was so much uncertainty about who to contact. Many emails were sent to many people with no direct response. It took over a month to determine who would be the necessary person. The second limitation of this project is that it requires

dedicated time to provide the 3-day PD because of these school networks. School networks like the one used for this study begin summer PD months in advance since PD starts in early August. This is a limitation because there is no guarantee that they will be able to grant me three days to deliver this PD. The goal is to conduct this PD before teachers receive scholars for the start of the school year to have a solid foundation to start the school year.

Moreover, the limited number of participants in this study is also a limitation because a more significant number of participants may have been able to provide different results on the type of PD needed. Lastly, a limitation of this project is that it does not reach enough teachers who may benefit from this PD. Although teachers expressed a need for training regarding best practices for working with students in an inclusion classroom who have a learning disability, if this PD is provided as a breakout session, then those who genuinely need it may attend another session.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

There could be many alternative approaches to help with this local problem. One recommendation that could be beneficial is incorporating feedback from parents about how they interpret the needs of their child being met in an inclusive environment. This would allow all stakeholders to address what they think will benefit the child's success in the classroom. This could be an alternative approach to gathering the participants needed for this study. Participants agreed that continuous PD would improve their skills as classroom teachers. Therefore, one recommendation would be to determine how this project study can be extended for teachers at other times of the year or have school

leadership provide additional hands-on support from the feedback gathered over the 3-day duration.

I chose a basic qualitative design as the most appropriate research design to answer the research questions for this study. This approach permitted me to examine participants' perceptions about the lack of PD and training provided in their school network through semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study may probe researchers to apply mixed methods or quantitative approaches in the future.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

As an educator who started the teaching journey working diligently with students with learning disabilities, I knew nothing about their needs. I worked diligently to support my students and the teachers I worked with by learning to advocate for their needs. As a result, special education holds a special place in my heart. I have grown tremendously as an educator and advocacy leader throughout this research process. This process proved that I was resilient, although it was laborious, and many times, I thought I would give up. Some of the coursework prepared me to conduct research, but nothing mentally prepared me for the journey after the initial coursework.

I have learned to view things from a scholarly perspective, although sometimes I still find it difficult. In my master's program, I did a research paper with several components, but nothing compared to the research required to complete this project study. This was my first experience conducting a qualitative study. Recruiting the participants and gaining approval for the site was an overwhelming challenge. Findings from this study support the need for specific PD for teachers who teach students with

learning disabilities. The findings from this study also helped me realize that I will always support teachers even though I am no longer in the classroom. It has strengthened my leadership skills to continue to advocate for those who need support.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

As a former teacher who worked with students with learning disabilities, as the researcher, I understood the importance of this work from many lenses. PD is an ongoing educational experience that is needed to allow educators to improve their instructional skills and learn new pedagogy. This was a long journey, and as I reflect on its importance, I am reminded that nothing comes easy and that life is about having the ability to pivot when needed. There were many quarters that I was reluctant to continue the journey.

This journey was arduous, but I knew the result would be me obtaining my degree. I have obtained a great depth of knowledge and expanded my leadership capabilities. Knowing that I committed to the journey and invested much time, and finances helped me continue when I saw no end. The project study is critical to both teacher and student; as the demand for students to be placed in inclusion classrooms has increased, teachers must be prepared to meet their needs. The findings from this project study denote that teachers feel unprepared, and PD is needed to help them meet the needs of students with learning disabilities in the inclusion classroom.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This project study may contribute to social change by providing general elementary teachers who teach students with learning disabilities with the training and

resources to help them succeed in the inclusive classroom setting. This project was designed to meet the needs described by the participants of this study. Although this project was specifically designed for elementary teachers, the training provided is adaptable and can apply to any teacher in secondary education. Providing training geared towards improving pedagogy and increasing instructional strategies can be used by many different teachers outside of this study. Students are more likely to have greater academic gains when they have prepared teachers who know how to meet their needs.

This qualitative study displayed the perceptions of general education elementary teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusive classroom environment regarding PD in their school. Participant recruitment focused on general education teachers who currently teach or taught students with learning disabilities within the last five years in the inclusion setting. Twelve teachers participated in the study. However, future researchers may wish to explore the perceptions of additional participants and expand the recruiting methods to middle school or high school teachers who educate students with learning disabilities in inclusive settings.

### **Conclusion**

There should be an increase in teacher preparedness as the number of students classified with learning disabilities are placed in inclusion classrooms grows. I investigated how elementary general education teachers who teach students with learning disabilities in inclusion classrooms perceived the effectiveness and quality of the PD they received. Findings from this study aid the need for additional PD to prepare teachers to meet the overall needs of students with learning disabilities. All 12 participants provided

insight on the topics that should be addressed in PD to help them feel more prepared.

This PD aimed to provide teachers with resources and instructional practices to enhance their skills and pedagogy. As a result of this study, I created a PD training to address the suggestions provided by the participants. I desire that this project will contribute to social change by providing general education teachers who teach students with learning disabilities the necessary resources for students to reach their academic goals.

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## Appendix A: The Project

## Professional Development Agenda

## Learn Differently, Succeed Brilliantly: A Guide to Preparing Teachers for Exceptional Learners

## Day 1

Timeline	Activity	Notes
8:00 am- 8:30 am	Check-In	Participants will sign in and choose a table to sit at.
8:30 am – 8:45 am	Welcome and Overview of What's Ahead	Introduce Myself and explain the Purpose of the PD
8:45am – 9:00am	Day 1 Goals and Agenda	Today's goal is to build an understanding of Special Education and the Purpose of Inclusive Classrooms while understanding the importance of an IEP
9:00 am – 9:30 am	Balloon Pop Ice Breaker and Debrief	Explain rules: As a team, participants will work together to pop the opposing teams' balloons without using your hands
9:30 am – 10:00 am	Table Talk Discussion & Gallery Walk	Collaborate with participants to create a definition of Special Education and a learning disability. Conduct a gallery walk
10:10am – 10:20 am	Share out	Participants will share out some similarities they observed during the gallery walk
10:20 am – 10:30 am	Break	
10:30 am – 11:00 am	Brief History	Discuss when Congress enacted the IDEA
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	What is Special Education What is a Learning disability	Defined by research / Observations and how a disability is evaluated

What is an Inclusive  
Classroom/ Who is  
Included and its Purpose

12:00pm-12:30pm	Collaboration Time	Participants will watch a video clip and discuss
12:30pm-12:45pm	Whole Group Discussion	Share out somethings your group mates shared
12:45pm-1:30pm	Lunch Break	Enjoy your lunch
1:30pm- 1:45pm	Activity- Kahoot	In teams' participants will answer 10 Kahoot questions
1:45p-2:45pm	Understanding an IEP	Purpose
2:45pm-3:00pm	Review/Exit Ticket/Survey	Use the Padlet to Post your answer to the question. Complete Survey
3:05-3:15pm	Dismissal	

Day 2 Agenda

Timeline	Activity	Notes
8:00 am- 8:30 am	Check-In	Participants will sign in and choose a table to sit at.
8:30 am – 8:45 am	Key Take Aways from Day 1	Review take aways from Day 1 on Padlet and discuss Today's goals
	Day 2 Goals and Agenda	
8:45am – 9:45am	Components of an IEP	Discuss the many components listed in an IEP and what they entail
9:45am – 10:30am	504 Plan 504 vs IEP Benefits of IEP	Discuss what a 504 plan is, who gets it. Th difference between at 504 and IEP plan
10:35 am – 10:45 am	Break	
10:45 am – 11:45am	Practice Drill	Participants will practice drafting an PLAAF and creating Annual Goals  Using an IEP Draft Tool online, participants get to

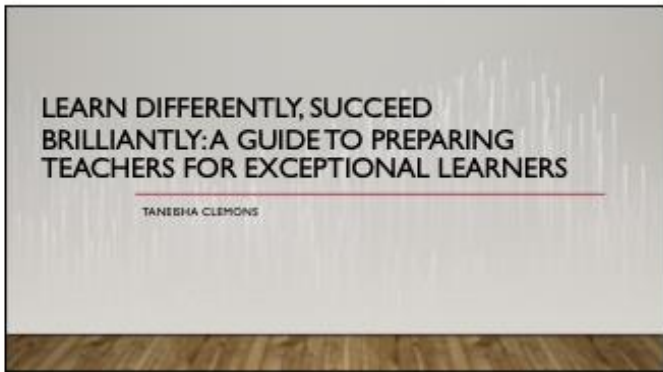
		view how a student would view an IEP if they participated in creating it.
11:45am – 12:15 pm	Name the Acronym Jeopardy	Participants will split into teams and play the name the game. Team with the most points wins.
12:15 pm – 12:45pm	Lunch Break	
12:45 pm – 1:30pm	Classifications	State the 14 classifications the state of NJ uses and deep dig into 6 of them
1:30 pm – 2:00pm	Turn and Talk/ Share Out	Discuss the difference between equality and equity.
2:00 pm – 2:30pm	Role Play	Act out a Scenario
2:30 pm – 2:40pm	Break	
2:45 am – 3:00pm	Review/Exit Ticket/Survey	Use the Padlet to Post your answer to the question. Complete Survey
3:05-3:15pm	Dismissal	

### Day 3 Agenda

Timeline	Activity	Notes
8:00 am- 8:30 am	Check-In	Participants will sign in and choose a table to sit at.
8:30 am – 9:00 am	Ice Breaker	
8:45am – 9:00am	Key Take Aways from Day 2 Day 3 Goals and Agenda	
9:00-9:30 am	Turn and Talk True or False Game	
9:30 am – 10:15 am	What are Accommodations What are Modifications	Define the terms and provide an in-depth review of the different types of accommodations that can be provided
10:15am – 11:00 am	Modification Exercise Activity	Participants will modify the exercises provided



	Monitoring Accommodations	Discuss the purpose of monitoring accommodations and implementing with fidelity
11:00 am – 11:10am	Break	
11:15 am – 12:00pm	Collaboration and Support	Rate the different collaborators in the order of important to you. Let's discuss their roles and the benefits for their support in an inclusion classroom. Break up into new groups based on the color sticky note provided to you
12:00 pm – 12:30pm	Lunch	
12:30 am – 1:15pm	Activity Work Time	In your new groups- annotate the lesson plan Determine what Evidence based practice could be used & how you would differentiate the lesson based on the classification your group received.
1:15pm – 1:30pm	Share Out from Work time	
1:30 am – 2:45pm	Evidence Based Practices/Differentiation	Understand types of Evidence Based Practices and ways to Differentiate without lowering the rigor
2:45pm-2:55pm	Overall Program Evaluation	
2:55pm-3:00pm	Dismissal	



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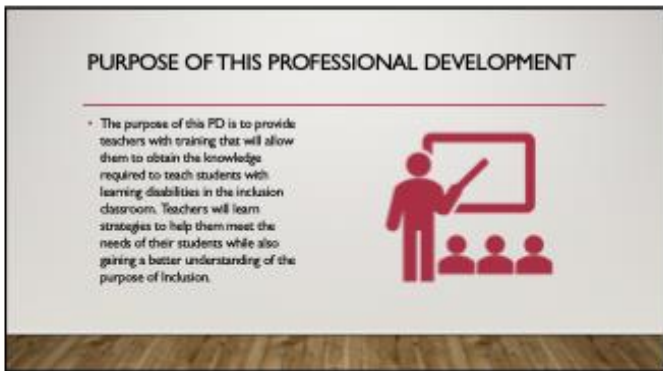
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**DAY 1**

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- Defining Special Education
  - Defining Inclusion and its Purpose
  - Vision of Inclusive Classrooms
  - Understanding an IEP
  - Components of an IEP



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**WHAT TO LOOK FORWARD TO THE NEXT 3 DAYS**

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- Information provided about the following topics:
  - Vision of Inclusive Classroom
  - Understanding IEPs/504s- FLAAFP Goals
  - Classifications
  - Classrooms Collaboration & Support
  - Accommodations/Modifications
  - Differentiation in Lesson Plans and Daily Instructional Practices
  - Daily Exit Tickets and Evaluations

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**ICE BREAKER-  
BALLOON POP**

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- GOAL: Teams of 4 or 5, tie two balloons end to end then tie to your ankles. Pop the opposing teams balloons. The team with a least one remaining balloon wins.



**What do I need?**

- Two balloons a person
- Ribbon, cut 1" x 12" (not long, some ribbon can spring for every balloon)

**How Does it Work?**

Split everyone into equal teams (two or three) and hand out the balloons, one each per team. Each person needs two balloons. Each person stomp up their balloon, break the balloon's end, and tie a balloon to each of their ankles/wrists using the ribbon/cord. Once everyone is done, explain the rules. When you say "go", the players must stomp and pop other teams balloons. You cannot use your hands. If both balloons have been popped, you must sit out of the boundaries and are out of the game. The remaining team with at least one balloon intact wins the game!

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**ICE BREAKER- BALLOON POP DEBRIEF**

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- What was challenging about this task?
- How did you approach it?
- Was teamwork necessary?
- Did your teammates have different approaches? If so, how did you decide what was best?
- How do you think this relates to our students with learning disabilities?

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**TABLE TALK DISCUSSION/ GALLERY WALK- 10 MINS**

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- At your table, create a collective definition of Special Education and learning disability.
- You will write it out on chart paper and post up around the room.
- Walk around the room and read the different definitions created in the room

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**INTRODUCTION- BRIEF HISTORY**

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- Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), later named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, in a 1990 reauthorization. The law was last reauthorized in 2004.
- Purpose: to support states and localities in protecting the rights of meeting the individual needs of and improving the lives of people with disabilities.
- The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a law that makes available free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

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### INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

- As of 2020-2021 the United States has progressed from excluding 1.8 million children with disabilities from public schools to providing special education services to 7.5 million children since 1975.
- The IDEA carries out 14 disability categories under Part B.

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### WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?

- Special Education is an instruction that is designed specifically to respond to the learning needs of an individual with disabilities REGARDLESS of environment. As defined by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Composed of a range of teaching practices implemented by well-trained special education teachers.

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### WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

Learning disability/difficulty- difficulty in learning in one or more areas. A condition in the brain that causes difficulty comprehending or providing information. Barriers cause the disadvantage or restriction of activity. Not all disabilities are visible but observable in characteristic behavior:

- Social
- Mental
- Physical

Some observations that may be seen in the classroom are indicators:

- Trouble connecting letters and sounds
- Confusion of basic words
- Letter reversals, transpositions, and substitutions
- Basic math computation
- Trouble remembering information (short-term memory, active working memory)

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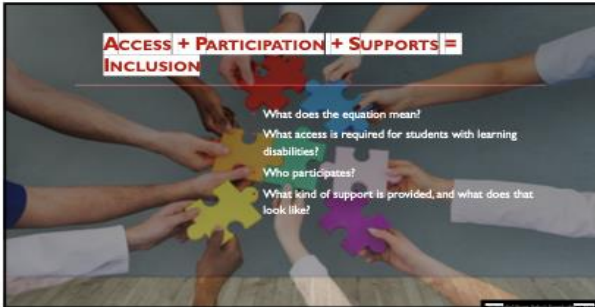
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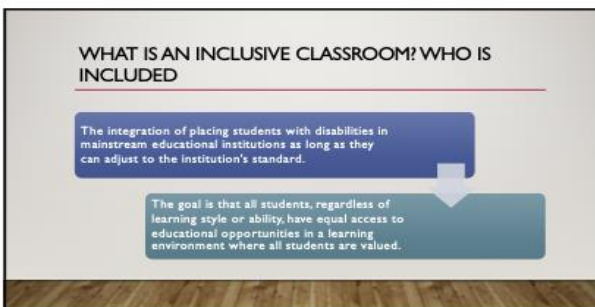
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**TIME TO COLLABORATE**

- Watch this clip - [LEA Methods on Book Review](#)
- In your group, discuss if any of the mentioned methods have been used in your classroom and what results you received.
- Listen as your peers tell their stories, and what feedback can you provide? Keeping in mind that just because it worked with Student A doesn't mean it will work for Student B.



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**QUICK INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY- KAHOOT**

- Please use the QR Code or link below to sign in to the game.
- <https://kahoot.it/challenge/008142583>



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### UNDERSTANDING AN IEP



- What
  - A written legal document, so this, IDEA remains the most important legislation regarding special education
  - Not every IEP is the same, so every IEP is individualized to the student for whom it was written, hence why they are called an individual education plan
- Purpose
  - Individual Education Plan: gives children with a learning disability or disorder the tools they need to succeed; differs for every child.
- Who writes it?
  - A collaborative effort from stakeholders that include teachers, parents, social workers, and other school personnel.
- Who is responsible for making sure it is implemented?
  - All parties involved ensure that the student's individualized plan is followed, especially the teacher and the parent. IDEA requires, at a minimum, the participation of key stakeholders in the development and implementation of IEPs. In addition to the required multidisciplinary team members, other personnel are frequently brought into the team to address the child's individualized needs and provide support.

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### THE IEP PROCESS

- 1. Referral
- 2. Evaluation- Initial comprehensive assessments to include both academic and functional performance
- 3. Eligibility Determination
- 4. IEP Development
- 5. IEP Implementation
- 6. Annual Review
- 7. Re-evaluation

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### EXIT TICKET

- On the Padlet link below, submit your answer to the following questions. What was the purpose of today's session? Do you think the purpose was fulfilled?
- After the Padlet, please fill out the Survey.
  - [Exit Ticket Padlet Day 1](#)
  - [Day 1 Survey](#)

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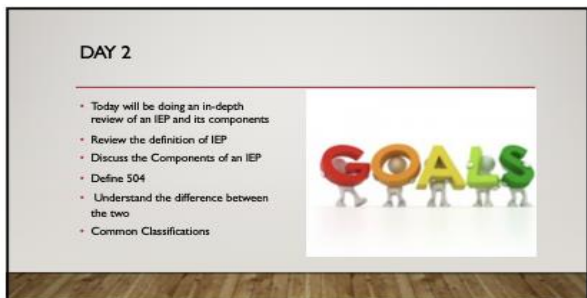
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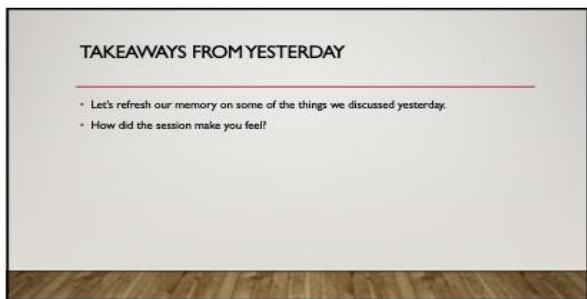
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### UNDERSTANDING AN IEP- COMPONENTS

- 1. Current Skill Level/Present Level of Academic Achievement
- 2. Annual Goals
  - SMART GOALS
- 3. Progress Tracking
- 4. Special Education Services
- 5. Duration of Services
- 6. Participation in Mainstream Classroom
- 7. Testing Adaptations

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### SMART GOALS

- Jordan will be play with others at lunch.
- He will sit in his seat.
- Kim needs to know all 26 letters of the alphabet.
- She will add and subtract numbers.

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### 504 PLAN

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, commonly referred to as Section 504, forbids discrimination against individuals with disabilities, specifically in programs that receive federal funding.

Under Section 504, FAPE consists of the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services designed to meet the student's individual educational needs as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students are met.

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**IEP VS 504**

- Changes in the classroom environment to remove the barriers to learning that are due to a child's disability
- They "even the playing field" and give a child equal access to the regular things they need to do and learn in school.
- They do not change what your child is learning but rather how they learn, Your child will be held to the same expectations as all other students.

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**IEP VS 504**

- For students with a confirmed disability.
- Includes accommodations to help the child follow the general curriculum
- Includes specialized instruction or services, which may include learning specialists, etc. Can also include accommodations Based on Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act. This is a civil rights law that requires students with disabilities to have equal access to public education and extra-curricular activities based on IDEA

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**BENEFITS OF IEP**

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**PRACTICE**

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- Now is the time to draft your own IEP using the first two components
  - Determine a classification you have knowledge of
  - Plan with a student in mind
  - Draft a PLAAF
    - Click the link to view an IEP sample template [Model IEP Template](#)
  - Create Two Annual Goals
  - Switch with a partner and provide feedback

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**NAME THAT ACRONYM**

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ADHD    CI    LD    HI  
SLD    CP    ADD    TBI  
OHI    ED    SLD    ASD  
LFA/HFA

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**CLASSIFICATIONS**

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- Classification is not permanent. It can change whenever the nature of the student's disability warrants it.
- A scholar can have multiple classifications, and the IEP team must identify which disability is most impacted in school. However, that does not mean the other goes unaddressed.
- Oftentimes, as educators, we suspect disability based on what we see the scholar struggle with in class before the scholar is evaluated to
- The state of NJ has 14 classifications

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### CLASSIFICATIONS IN NEW JERSEY

- Auditory Impairment-** (Deafness/ Hearing Impairment- fluctuating inability to hear)
- Autism** - pervasive developmental disability that impacts social interaction and ability to communicate. Scholars with autism need a routine and struggle with environmental changes.
- Emotional Regulation Impairment-** Shows- inappropriate feelings or behaviors under normal circumstances - inability to build satisfactory interpersonal relationships
- Communication Impairment-** Language disorder
- Other Health Impairment-** Medical assessment required -limited strength and alertness- ADHD /ADD
- Specific Learning Disability-** severe discrepancies between intellectual ability and current function and achievement (psychological process)

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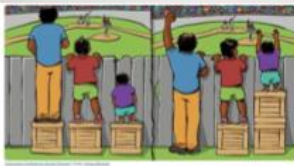
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### LET'S TALK: EQUALITY VS EQUITY



Turn and Talk

- What should we strive for in education?
- Is Equity or Equality more valuable?
- How does this play out in the inclusive classroom?
- What approach are you aiming for in your classroom? And WHY?

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### EQUITY VS EQUALITY

1. Acknowledging diverse needs and learning styles, resources are distributed differently, with some students receiving additional, digital options, or adapted versions of textbooks.
2. Each student in a classroom is given the same textbook, regardless of their individual learning needs or styles.
3. Each student in a classroom is given the same textbook, regardless of their individual learning needs or styles.
4. Additional resources like braille, large print, non-reading headphones, or access to a scribe and class materials are provided to students who lack these resources at home.
5. The teacher spends extra time with students new to the classroom.
6. Every student in a school is given the same type of assignment without considering their individual circumstances or resources at home.
7. The teacher divides time equally among all students.

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**EXIT TICKET**

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- On the Padlet link below, submit your answer to the following questions. What was the purpose of today's session? Do you think the purpose was fulfilled?
- After the Padlet, please fill out the Survey.
  - [Exit Ticket Padlet](#)
  - [Survey](#)

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**DAY 3**

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**DAY 3**

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- Define Accommodations
  - Types of Accommodations
- Define Modifications  
(Addressed the Difference between the two)
- Collaboration and Support
- EBP: Daily Instructional Practices
- Differentiation



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### TURN & TALK



- Read the Quote and discuss it with your partner.
- How does it make you feel?

"The teachers are faced with an amalgam of possible accommodations and modifications to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities, without evidence of effectiveness, that can decrease expectations and standards, without guidance for implementation, while simultaneously being expected to assure high standards and being held accountable for student progress and demonstration of mastering grade-level content standards" (Harrison & Geomer, 2020).

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### TRUE OR FALSE

- A student having a different version of a test is an accommodation.
- An accommodation and a modification are interchangeable terms that are not a problem in education.
- Using manipulatives to complete a test is an accommodation.
- You can apply a modification to all students in your class without an IEP.
- Grading based on work completion or pass/fail is an accommodation.



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### ACCOMMODATIONS & MODIFICATIONS

- Schools with adequate accommodations ensure that children with disabilities have access to equal and quality education. Accommodations can be made in three ways: instructional, environmental, and assessments.
- Intervention refers to changes made systematically to develop or improve knowledge, skills, behaviors, and cognitions. (First step)
- Accommodations refer to the changes to practices in schools that hold a student to the same standard as students without disabilities but provide a different approach to mitigate the impact of the disability on having access to the general education curriculum. - Changes to HOW students access information and demonstrate learning
- Modifications are referred to as changes to practices in school that amend or reduce expectations (i.e., lower grade curriculum or a grade below for struggling students). Presents to WHAT the student is required to know or do
- NOT ALL students with IEPs have modified curriculum

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**MODIFICATION ACTIVITY- LET'S GET MOVING**



• Activity- Look at the Exercise below with a partner, determine the modification for each, and perform it.

- High Knees
- Jumping Jacks
- Jump Squats
- Squats
- Push-ups

After, reflect on how this applies to instructional modifications.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

- Alternative workspace
- Strategic seating/preferential seating
- Proximity to instructor
- Reduction in audio/visual stimuli
- Minimizing background noise
- Quiet setting

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**NOT ALL ACCOMMODATIONS ARE APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATIONS BASED ON THE CHILD**



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### INSTRUCTIONAL ACCOMMODATIONS

- Graphic Organizers (Supplemental Aids)
- Peer tutoring
- Visual Cues/ Schedules
- Repetition
- Chunking assignments
- Rewording information
- Extra time to process
- Manipulatives



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### TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

- Separate room for less distraction
- Refocusing prompts
- Test Read Aloud to Student
- Verbatim Scribe
- Extended time (days)
- Alternate test formats (audiotapes, oral, computer-based)
- Reduced task to access skill (i.e. multistep problems)
- Use of a calculator



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### MONITORING ACCOMMODATIONS

- You should always monitor an accommodation the same way you would monitor interventions.
  - Collect data on how the student is using the accommodation (routine, effectiveness, independently or with support)
  - Collect data on the success (improves academic or behavioral performance)
  - Analyze the results (achievement and feelings about the accommodation)
  - Assess (implementation, adjustments or continuation)
- Major Key is making sure the accommodations are implemented with fidelity.

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### COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT

- Parents
- Related Service Providers
- Learning Specialist
- Resource Teacher
- Administration
- Special Education Teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Other teachers across grade levels

"Good collaboration links theory with practice". Moffield (2020)

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### WORK TIME

- During this time, you will work in your group (3) to read and annotate a lesson.
  - Determine how you would differentiate the lesson based on the classification you received for your group.
  - What Evidence-Based Practices would you implement in class?
  - What accommodations or modifications would best support the scholar in successfully accessing the knowledge required to understand the lesson.

[https://youtu.be/bchcr1DulbrQ?si=7e1K\\_c0bustTMM](https://youtu.be/bchcr1DulbrQ?si=7e1K_c0bustTMM)

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### DAILY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES/ STRATEGIES

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- Instructional strategies are the tools and techniques that teachers use to help students overcome obstacles to learning and reach higher levels of understanding and knowledge
- Direct Instructional Explicit Teaching
- Differentiation
- Scaffolding
- Chinking
- Think Pair Share
- Spaced Repetition (repeated reads)
- Problem Based Learning
- Inquiry Based Learning

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### DIFFERENTIATION

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- Differentiation- to tailor instruction to meet individual needs.
- Ex-Flexible Grouping (Low, Med, High)
- Differentiation can occur at different points in a lesson because not all students learn the same skills and concepts at the same level of complexity.

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### DIFFERENTIATION IN LESSON PLANS

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- **Concepts and Skills**- Skills and concepts that students should be able to do or know at the end of the lesson can be differentiated.
- **Assessments**- demonstration of what was learned in which daily progress monitoring strategies are helpful
- **Activities and Materials**- quality materials are important for all students to engage in authentic work with activities that promote higher-level thinking. Differentiation can start here based on a teacher's information about a student's learning style.

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### EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES TO USE IN DAILY INSTRUCTION

- Modeling
- Direct Instruction
- Prompting
- Reinforcement
- Response Redirection
- Visual Supports (tactile)
- Exercise and Movement
- Sensory Integration
- Task Analysis
- Technology-aided Instruction
- Peer-Based Instruction
- Learning Stations

Stoddard et al. (2010)

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### END GOAL

- It is with great hope that this PD has provided you with:
  - The knowledge that you can implement right away in your classroom.
  - Information that is in alignment that supports school improvement efforts.
  - Time to reflect and Collaborate
- As teachers, please know that you are given the autonomy of choice to meet students' and your own learning needs.

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### EXIT TICKET

- Please complete the program [Evaluation Form](#)

Thank you!

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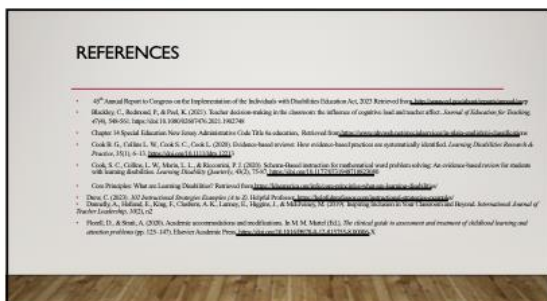
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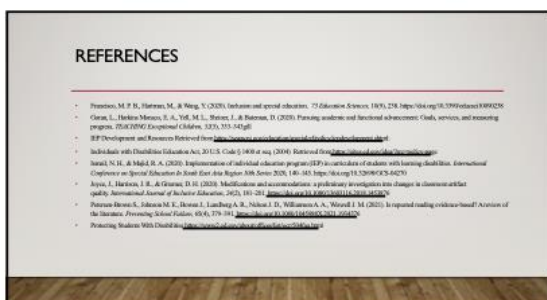
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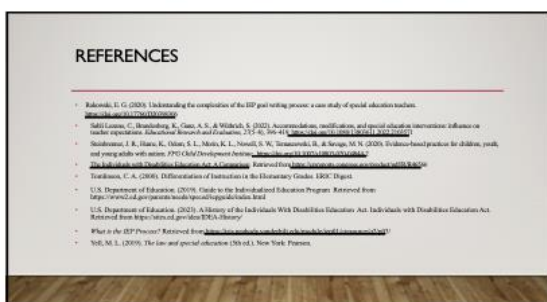
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Appendix B: Program Evaluation Form

Date:

PD Title:

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4=Agree. 5= Strongly Agree

The goals and agenda of each session were clearly communicated. 1 2 3 4 5

The goals were relevant to my learning. 1 2 3 4 5

The activities in each session helped me to understand the goals better. 1 2 3 4 5

The activities of the sessions met my learning style as an adult learner. 1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator met the stated purposes of each session. 1 2 3 4 5

Please specify the areas of strength. Specifically, what did you find effective from this professional development experience?

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2. Please specify areas of improvement. How could the professional development experience be improved?

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## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### **Interview Guide**

20-30 minutes in length

### **Opening Statement**

The purpose of this interview is to investigate general elementary teachers' perceptions about their preparation to support the needs of students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and about the resources and training needed to improve their practices. All information gathered is used to complete my project study in a doctoral program in Special Education. None of the information will be bought or sold, or used against or to harm you in any way. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, feel free to refuse to answer. If the interview becomes distressing in any way, you may choose to withdraw or stop the interview, and the debriefing will begin. During the interview, although there are standard questions, most questions will have follow-up questions to gain more of your insight.

### Demographic Questions

- a. What grade do you teach?
- b. How long have you been teaching?
- c. How old are you?
- d. What race(s) do you identify as?
- e. What gender do you identify with?
- f. What is your highest level of education?



### Interview Questions

IQ1. What resources were/are you given as a general education teacher who teaches students with learning disabilities to be successful in the classroom? Are they easily accessible?

IQ2. Were you exposed to any special education classes while becoming a teacher on the pre-service level? How many?

IQ3. Is professional development provided by your school geared specifically towards special education?

IQ4. Are there any trainings you wish you could participate in that will be beneficial to you in the inclusion classroom?

IQ5. How accommodating is your school for children with disabilities?

IQ6: What do you think is the biggest challenge facing special education students today?

IQ7. How could your leadership team improve your professional development? (What topics would you be interested in?)

IQ8. If a professional development session is given, are there follow-ups about how to apply the strategies in the classroom, or is it discussed and often not revisited? Why do you think schools lack follow-ups?

IQ9. Do you think ongoing professional development should be provided throughout the school year? If so, what styles do you think are best?

IQ10. If the district does not provide professional development to you regarding best practices for an inclusion classroom, do you seek personal development on your own? Or do you believe the district should pay for teachers to take courses to be effective?

IQ11. Does the school staff collaborate on solutions to provide effective learning?

IQ12. How would you describe your overall experience as a teacher who teaches students with learning disabilities? Why?

### **Debrief:**

This study is concerned with teachers' perceptions of how prepared they feel to teach students with learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom and what training or resources they think they need to be successful. Throughout the years, research has shown that teachers feel unprepared to teach students with learning disabilities, and having ongoing professional development geared to meet these students' needs would be effective.

#### How was this tested?

In this study, you were asked questions about your perceptions of preparation to support students with learning disabilities and what you need to be successful. Probing questions were followed depending on your response to the initial question.

#### Expectations and main questions:

I expected to find teachers to discuss what they need to feel prepared and what they currently receive in their school to help support them and accommodate special education students.

Why is this important to study?

By understanding perceptions of teachers' preparation, a professional development plan can be created to help general education teachers feel more prepared to teach students with learning disabilities and help close the achievement gap.

Further, help

If this interview caused you any traumatic thoughts or distress, please reach out to a mental health professional or contact your local authorities. For immediate crisis, contact 911 or Lifeline Crisis Text Line: Text SIGNS to 741741 for 24/7, anonymous, free crisis counseling.

Thank you for your participation in this study.