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# Promoting Inclusive Schools: A Case Study of Leadership Experiences of the Middle School Chairpersons for Special Education Service

Juvinell Baylis  
*Walden University*

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Dr. Peter Kiriakidis, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Oran Stewart, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Patricia Anderson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

David Clinefelter, Ph.D.

Walden University

2011

Abstract

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Juvinell A. Baylis

M Ed, University of Houston, 1983

BS, University of Houston, 1977

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Education  
Administration of Teaching and Learning

Walden University

October 2011

## Abstract

Federal and state guidelines direct students with disabilities to the least restrictive environment (LRE). The inclusion of students with disabilities in the LRE (general education) has been an issue for many public schools. In an effort to promote inclusive education for students with disabilities, many special education teacher–chairpersons experience opposition from the general education teacher and their administrator regarding LRE placement. The purpose of this qualitative case study, grounded in the theory of leadership, was to examine the leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education services in middle schools and their perception of the LRE decision-making process for placement for students with disabilities in their school. The primary research question that guided this study involved understanding how leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education services impact decision making about instructional placement in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. Data were collected from 5 teacher–chairpersons for special education service from a middle school who were purposefully selected to participate in face-to-face interviews. Data were analyzed using a thematic within-case analysis. The findings included the need for instructional leadership for (a) the decision making process, (b) staff development, and (c) socialization of students with disabilities to improve LRE placement of students with disabilities. Providing insight into the leadership experiences of the chairpersons for special education service may have implications for positive social change including addressing misunderstandings about LRE placement and instructing more students with disabilities in the LRE.



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## Dedication

This study is dedicated first to my children, Taz and Luci, whose love, support, and encouragement helped me complete this terminal degree. You shared the ups and downs of this doctoral journey with your patience and understanding and redirected me with words of wisdom and truth when times were tough. I love you and I wish you both future successes in the name of Jesus Christ.

A special dedication goes to my loving parents, Daddy and Momma, who are no longer with me. They were role models for confidence and success no matter what obstacles they faced. Their love nurtured my brothers and me to have a sense of service and pride in our work. God blessed us to have them together with us for so many years. Daddy and Momma, you are dearly loved and missed.



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## Section 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The legal mandate driving inclusive education in the United States, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990, provided the initial impetus for creating inclusive education. This mandate has become a leading force in the design and implementation of inclusive education. (Falvey, 2005, p. 4)

The practice of providing support and service to students with disabilities in general education is known as inclusion (Murawski, 2009). The reauthorization of IDEA, in 1997 and 2004, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), supports a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. IDEIA authorizes that students with disabilities receive academic instruction in the general education class with nondisabled peers, to the extent appropriate for the disability (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). The general education class is considered the least restrictive environment (LRE) for most students (Murawski, 2009).

Allowing students with disabilities to remain in the general education setting for academic service has met some resistance from many general educators. The inclusive education guidelines for service to students with disabilities in general education are often viewed as promoting an educational initiative that is parallel or counter to other curricular and instructional reform efforts (Udvari-Solner, 2005). Successful inclusion requires educational practices designed to support the unique development of each child within the general education setting (Kugelmass, 2004, p. 12).

Because of the IDEA (2004) and IDEIA (2004), states and educational leaders are now challenged to find ways to maintain instruction for students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

In this qualitative study, chairpersons for special education services conveyed their leadership experiences to promote inclusive education for students with disabilities in general education classes. When asked to reflect on their leadership practice, the instructional chairpersons, as teacher leaders, articulate the values and beliefs that underlie their practices (Kugelmass, 2004, p. 12). No research has been conducted at the study site using a qualitative case study design to explore the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education nor on their challenge to promote inclusion. The site's urban K-12 district struggles to meet the state compliance guideline to maintain an LRE ratio no greater than 25% above the state average LRE placement ratio. This study was necessary to address placement decisions and the instructional support for LRE services provided by the chairpersons for students with disabilities.

In order to understand the efficacy of leadership to promote inclusion, I examined the personal leadership perspectives of select chairpersons for special education services. According to Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2004), collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential to meet the challenge of successfully educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. School leaders must have a shared understanding of, and commitment to, improving achievement for students (Hawley, 2007). Allowing students identified with disabilities to assimilate in an inclusive class



will create a real-world environment (Hawley, 2007) where students and teachers begin to acknowledge and appreciate each other's skills and talents. Students in a learning environment may increase their level of learning and eagerness to learn (Willis, 2007). As society moves toward a more inclusive environment, school leaders must move their teaching environment toward a more inclusive learning environment to deliver meaningful and effective instruction to all students.

### **Problem Statement**

Students with disabilities are underserved in general education classes. Within the past 6 cycles many K-12 state school districts in south central United States have failed to meet the local state ratio for instructional service to students with disabilities in general education classes. Each year, the state monitors the LRE placement of students with disabilities in the general education classes to determine the state LRE ratio. The LRE placement ratio is designed to regulate the LRE placement of students with disabilities in the state's public schools. The district's ratio must not be 25% higher than the statewide LRE average ratio (ESC-20, 2010). The results of the bi-annual LRE placement ratios for the state school districts that exceed the bi-annual state-aggregated LRE placement ratio are published by the state (Table 1). Public school districts in the state that exceed the aggregated LRE placement ratio over 2 consecutive years are in jeopardy of reduced educational funding from the state. Table 1 shows a district's placement ratio for LRE instructional service that has been higher than the state-allowed LRE ratio over the past 6 cycles.

Table 1

*State vs. District LRE Placement Ratio*

	District ratio	State ratio	District ratio	State ratio
Cycle	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2
2002-2004	0.27	0.27	0.28	0.26
2003-2005	0.28	0.27	0.28	0.26
2004-2006	0.28	0.26	0.27	0.23
2005-2007	0.27	0.23	0.25	0.22
2006-2008	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.19
2007-2009	0.23	0.19	0.22	0.18

Note: Data compiled with the permission of the state education agency's, Division of IDEA Coordination, 2010. The values are read as percentages.

This research took place in an urban K-12 school district where the instructional efforts to improve the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE failed to reduce the district's LRE placement ratio to meet the state's requirement. Students with disabilities make up approximately 8% of the school district's student population. The urban school district in Table 1 is noncompliant with the state LRE placement ratio and is at risk of losing state instructional funds. Table 1 shows the state LRE ratio is 0.18, while the LRE ratio for the K-12 district is 0.22 (TEA, 2010). Limiting the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE may impact the students by restricting academic opportunities and social development afforded to their nondisabled peers.

Contributing factors to the inclusive problem in the urban school district began with federal and state accountability guidelines to educate students with disabilities (Voltz & Fore III, 2006). These guidelines are designed hold students with disabilities to the same standards as their nondisabled peers and the students with disabilities must participate in accountability assessments along with their nondisabled peers (NCLB, 2001; Voltz & Fore III, 2006, p. 329).

This placement ratio draws attention to inclusion practices in the state and the district. The statewide percent is considered a floating target because the aggregated ratio changes from year-to-year due to the overall results of LRE instructional values throughout the state. Results of the recent years' ratio are presented in Table 1, where the placement ratio values have been rounded to the nearest hundredth for the purpose of this study. Instructional data input values are collected from the district's student database that include Average Daily Attendance (ADA) information for the instructional service of students placed in self-contained settings compared to students placed in less restrictive instructional settings (general education, resource room, or mainstream settings).

Chairpersons for special education services perform duties as teacher leaders at the study site. The chairpersons are expected to benefit from the examination of their leadership experience, individually and the expressed knowledge of leadership strategies to address the LRE requirements and the instructional needs of students with disabilities. The purposes of the study were (a) to conduct an analysis of the chairpersons' leadership experiences and to promote inclusiveness of students with disabilities; (b) to dismiss any

miscommunication and misunderstanding about inclusive practices of the chairpersons for special education services; and (c) to gain an understanding of the leadership role of the chairpersons for students with disabilities. The stakeholders at the study site may find value in the research to improve instructional leadership decisions for LRE placement of students with disabilities in the LRE and to become compliant with the state required 125% LRE placement ratio.

### **Nature of the Study**

I selected a case study to explore the leadership experiences of special education chairpersons to address the LRE placement of students with disabilities in the LRE. The participants were interviewed using open-ended questions to generate in-depth responses that described their leadership experiences of promoting an inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities and thus meet the state's bi-annual LRE placement requirements.

This study reflected the leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education services for the middle schools. The analysis of the research study focused on the collective views of the participants to gain a systemic understanding of the chairperson's leadership role. Each case was important to understand the chairperson's thoughts on their leadership experiences for instructional support to students with disabilities. The administrators at the study site, in the urban K-12 school district, report the district's total student population is 80% disadvantaged and special education population is 8% (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Upon IRB approval, the study site was purposively selected for current, non-probationary, or former chairpersons. The participants selected have at least 3 years in the leadership role for students with disabilities on a middle school campus. After receiving the consent to conduct the study from the school district administrator, a purposive sampling procedure was used to identify the participants to be interviewed for the study. An invitation to participate at the study was sent via email. A follow up email message and phone call was provided to schedule an interview within 7 days. Thereafter, a follow up email and phone call occurred 4 days following the initial invitation. The notification of consent to the interviews was provided at the interview session. The individual 20-minute interviews were conducted using seven open-ended questions and one general question and conducted over a 3-week period to develop a meaningful description of each participant's experience. A 3-week follow-up was allowed for transcribing data and the participant's review of the transcript. Interview data were transcribed and coding and emergent themes. The analysis of the data occurred using the identified codes and themes. Personal reflections on the interview process were documented.

### **Research Question**

The primary research question that guided this study was: How do the leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education services impact decision making about instructional placement in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities?

An interview protocol was used to ask the following research subquestions:

1. What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?
2. How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?
3. What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?
4. How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?
5. How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?
6. How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?
7. What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?
8. What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

The research questions addressed the LRE placement of students with disabilities. LRE could be impacted by the leadership experiences of the special education leaders in terms of their responsibilities and practices in promoting inclusion in the public schools.

Leadership and decision making skills are important in addressing the placement issue of inclusion for students with disabilities.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this case study research was to examine the leadership experiences of the teacher leaders as chairpersons of special education services to promote inclusion in the LRE for students with disabilities and to bring awareness of the state compliance LRE requirements. Leadership is a necessary condition for effective reform relative to school-, teacher-, and student-level factors (Marzano, 2003). Analysis involved the exploration of personal and professional feelings on inclusive instruction and how the chairperson embraced the leadership service.

The awareness that leadership behaviors and attitudes may impact inclusive education of students with disabilities was addressed. Since many students with disabilities are expected to receive their academic instruction in the LRE, exploring the leadership experiences of the special education chairperson helps identify how the experiences and perceptions influence instructional inclusion for students with disabilities in general education classes.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Concepts on leadership and organizational management are discussed next to evoke understanding leadership strategies and the perceptions of leadership and frame the leadership experiences shared by the special education chairperson. The idea of the learning organization (Senge, 1994) guided me in understanding how leadership can be

strengthened in an organization to assess the leadership experiences shared by the chairpersons of special education in the district. Understanding the learning organization principle will help the chairpersons transform their leadership strategies understand better how to address problem areas of LRE they must address. Transformation and collaboration theories in leadership are particular areas reviewed, also. Transformational leaders help develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture, foster teacher development, and help teachers solve problems more effectively (Cooper 2002, p. 39). Rubenstein, Miles, and Bassi (2009) explained that transformational leadership presupposes that the goal of the leader is to promote change and improvement for the betterment and with the assistance of the followers (p. 91). Lindsey (2005) stated that in a diverse community, the school leader, who holds a transformational perspective, focuses on leadership and school practices to meet the generative opportunities and needs the community (p. 21). The effectiveness of a collaborative relationship between the special education teacher leader and the general education staff can facilitate the challenge of successfully educating students (Duff, 2004). I selected the conceptual theory of leadership and its components to be used as a guide to build on the nature of leadership experience for inclusion efforts shared by the study participants.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions were provided to facilitate comprehension of terms used in this study.



*125% LRE Placement Ratio:* A ratio of students with disabilities in segregated settings that is 25% higher than the statewide average ratio (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

*Collaboration:* A purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to accomplish a shared outcome (Rubin, 1998).

*Inclusion/inclusive education:* The placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom with nondisabled students as a right and implies that the right is an absolute (Douvani, 2005).

*Individual Educational Plan (IEP):* The unique instructional plan to meet the educational needs of one child; describes how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning and what teachers and service providers will do to help the student learn more effectively. The IEP is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U S Department of Education, 2010).

*Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):* IDEA's mandate that children with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with nondisabled peers (Douvani, 2005).

*Mainstream education:* The child will be educated with nondisabled peers when appropriate, bnot necessarily exclusively in general education (Douvani, 2005).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitation, and Scope**

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that the selected participant would reflect on the responses they gave on the experiences and leadership strategies used to promote inclusion. I also assumed that the selected participant would accept the interview process as a learn opportunity to enhance their role as special education instructional leader.

### **Limitations**

Creswell explained that purposive sampling decreases the generalizability of findings (p. 148). This study will not be generalized to reflect the leadership experiences of all the special chairpersons in other school districts.

### **Delimitations and Scope**

This study was delimited to instructional leaders for special education on middle school campuses who experienced difficulty with placement of students in the general education classroom.

The research study was designed to focus on middle school campuses that need support promoting decisions to place students with disabilities in instructional settings with their nondisabled peers or the LRE to support them in improving the district's LRE placement ratio identified by the state. There has not been a study conducted to address the district's LRE compliance requirement for students with disabilities. The scope of this study was specific to the special education leaders and their study site. I had no authoritative position over the participant selected from predetermined criteria.

### **Significance of the Study**

Each participant in this study represents a unique situation; therefore, these findings add to the body of research by including a specific demographic often not represented in studies of instructional leadership. Although a small sample participated in this study, the findings have implications for (a) research on leadership for inclusive instruction to students with disabilities and (b) school administrators to leadership styles and concepts of a learning organization (Senge, 1990) that can be applied for structuring teacher leadership. The findings may generate new knowledge that will relate to how inclusive strategies are implemented on a campus. School administrators at the study site may use the findings to address problem areas of inclusive instruction or inclusive strategies.

The research outcomes have implications for improving instructional leadership for inclusive practice. The findings in the study can be used to create a framework for support of the campus chairperson for students with disabilities relative to the campus's vision for inclusive practices. The findings are based on the instructional leadership experiences of the special education chairpersons to promote inclusion at the campus. The findings provide the school district administrators and instructional leaders with valuable insight about the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education services regarding support for instructional inclusion of students with disabilities and how to address and benefit from the leadership challenges faced by the chairpersons of special education services. Overall, the findings on the leadership experiences shared by

the chairperson for special education help the district and campus leadership address special education LRE issues influencing the district's potential loss of state instructional funds due to noncompliance with the state LRE guidelines on instruction to students with disabilities.

A synthesis of the special education chairpersons' experiences of instructional leadership to promote inclusive instruction might lead to social change to mobilize educators around the vision of instruction for all students in general education regardless of their learning differences. Ultimately, positive social change will be impacted by the chairperson for special education by embracing the leadership role to provide service and decision making strategies that effectively promote inclusion for students with disabilities in the LRE and community at large. The learning organizational approach will help chairpersons become more equitable in instructional leadership to improve inclusive practices on the campus. Therefore, findings also provide a framework to guide the campus instructional leaders as they seek positive social change in leadership practices for inclusive instruction in their schools and throughout their district.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings may affect implications for positive social change within the participants' schools and be generalize to other similar campuses in the district where the placement for LRE is challenging. My goal was to develop an understanding of the instructional leadership role of chairperson for students with disabilities and to make recommendation to promote inclusion based on the learning organization approach

Senge's (1990). A learning organization approach could promote changes in how chairpersons for special education service focus on the LRE compliance issue for students with disabilities in the urban school district. It was the intent of this study to identify what impacts the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education services to address the LRE placement in the K-12 public schools so that students with disabilities have the opportunity to learn and to function in a socially acceptable environment. Implications for positive social change evolve around the expressed leadership experiences of the special education chairpersons. The participants identified and discussed perceived barriers of collaboration between general education and the special education staff faced with the placement decisions to educate students with disabilities in the LRE. I believe that implications for positive social change are encourage when educators transition to a school wide culture of collaboration for inclusion and the instructional staff undergoes a transformation of knowledge and skills to identify important elements that strengthen the school's collaborative network for students with disabilities. I also believe an acknowledgement of the leadership experiences of the special education chairperson will help the instructional staff identify efficient use of teacher leadership for students with disabilities. Finally, this study has an impact on social change by increasing awareness of the leader's attitudes toward the public education policy on inclusion of students with disabilities. I believe that the campus leaders' attitude to improve inclusion of students with disabilities, when

transferred beyond the classroom, will have an impact on socialization of students with disabilities in the community at large.

### **Summary**

In this section, I reviewed problem in the study and the intent to explore the leadership experiences of special education chairpersons as they facilitate the LRE placement of students with disabilities in the general education setting. IDEA and IDEIA drive the placement of students with disabilities in general education classes. Because of federal funds, school districts are challenged to provide and maintain a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities. Understanding the experiences that chairpersons for special education have to promote inclusion on the campus has an impact on the academic and socialization issues of both students with disabilities, their nondisabled peers and the educators involved. In section 2, I review the current literature on leadership theories and organizational strategies. In section 3, I discuss the research design, population and sample, and methodology for the data collection and analysis of this case study research.

## Section 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership experiences of educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. In this section I focused on literature about organizational leadership to promote inclusion and instructional strategies to address the LRE placement decisions of chairpersons of middle schools special education departments. The Learning Organization (Senge, 1994) was reviewed to gain an understanding of organizational leadership. Transformation and collaboration theories were studied to support the any conceptual differences in leadership attributed to the participants in the study. The concept of teacher leadership was also examined.

Matzen, Ryndak, and Nakao (2010) conducted a mixed method design using three selected middle school students, their parents, and the educational team. Interviews with parents and educators concerning students' experiences and progress during the year as well as their own experiences were conducted. Matzen et al. (2010) found that several emerging themes were expressed by the education team providing general education services to students with disabilities in the secondary school (p. 287). Kauffman, McGee, and Brigham (2004) reported that positive effects of inclusion include holding special education students to the same standards as nondisabled students. Scholars who conducted studies on inclusive education of students with disabilities considered the instructional design or strategies for these students.

While recognizing the attention on accountability due to NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004), the chairperson for special education services discussed their leadership strategies

to promote inclusion for students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in order to address the state LRE requirement. In this section, I discuss the essence of experiences shared by the special education department chairpersons. I also present a review of literature on inclusion concepts for students with disabilities.

### **Strategy for the Literature Review**

The following databases were used to locate peer-reviewed articles and dissertations between 2005 and 2010: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sage Journals Online, Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest. The following keywords were used: *Senge, leadership, special, education, collaboration, inclusion, co-teaching, chairperson, and transformation.*

### **Senge's Learning Organization**

Public educational institutions are governed by federal and state guidelines and often held accountable for the academic service offered to its students. When discussing an organization of teaching and learning, Blankstein (2004) wrote that failure is not an educational option (p. 2). Therefore, federal and state accountability guidelines offer few exceptions for failure in the delivery of instructional service for students with disabilities. According to Senge (2000), there are five disciplines of the Learning Organization that must be developed as an ensemble (p. 11). Peter Senge describes discipline as a 'succession of principles and practices we study, master and integrate into our lives' (Smith, 2001). Several disciplines described are (a) systems thinking, (b) personal mastery, (c) mental models, (d) building shared vision, and (e) team learning (pp. 6-9).



Each discipline provides a critical measure of the function of an organization and each discipline connects to the other to aid learning in the organization (Smith, 2001).

Systems thinking is identified as the fifth discipline. Systems thinking is the discipline that fuses the other disciplines into a logical body of theory and knowledge. Systems thinking keeps them from becoming separate gimmicks or change fads in the organization (p. 12). Senge (2006) explained:

Systems thinking also needs the disciplines of building shared visions, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery to realize its potential. Building shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term. Mental models focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world. Team learning develops the skills of groups of people to look for the larger picture beyond individual perspectives. (p. 12)

Senge's (1990) views on leadership in organizations focus on decentralizing the leadership roles to elevate the potential for all people to work proficiently toward common goals (Smith, 2001). According to Senge (1990), learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (p. 12).

Senge (1990) acknowledged that in situations of rapid growth, only people that demonstrating flexibility, adaptability, and productivity excel. To encourage change

Senge (1990) suggested that organizations need to discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels (Smith, 2001).

### **Leadership**

Strong leadership is a crucial element for successful whole-school reform (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 219). For school improvement to occur, more teachers need to function as leaders (Phelps, 2008) and to address the challenge of supporting teachers in leadership roles. Although leadership is a necessary condition for effective reform relative to the school-level, the teacher-level, and the student-level factors (Marzano, 2003), special education leaders have indicated that they do not feel adequately prepared in some areas involving support for inclusive instruction to students with disabilities (Voltz & Collins, 2010, p. 71).

According to Schmoker (2006), schools will not improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teacher chairpersons in a way to meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality. The role of administrative support is crucial and "it is better to tell them what I wanted, why I thought it was beneficial to students and the school, and specifically what I required from them to make my efforts successful" (Murawski, 2009, pp. 78-79). Administrators play a significant role by providing leadership that translates into academic success. Leaders who go along instead of leading perpetuate mediocrity or inferior practice while implying their program of instruction is effective (Schmoker, 2006, pp. 29-30). Scholars stated that effective teacher leadership is important to overall academic success of the students and learning

institutions. Epley et al. (2010) described how administrative structures provide support to families of young students with disabilities. While Epley, Gotto IV, Summers, Brotherson, and Turnbull (2010) addressed support for families of young students with disabilities, I sought to research leadership of the chairpersons in middle schools for students with disabilities. Recognizing influencing factors on the chairperson's leadership in middle school will be significant in my research study.

### **Leadership Concepts**

Leadership has been identified as one of the components necessary to make policy a practical reality for children (Porter, 1996, p. 69). There is not one overarching leadership theory described in literature (Rubenstein et al., 2009, p. 89). According to Rubenstein et al. (2009), a description of approximately 90 brands of leadership currently found in the leadership literature today and leadership theories vary in explaining how leaders become leaders or how leaders work when they are leading people (p. 89). Three styles of leadership activity include: (a) the situational approach is a theory that suggests leaders adapt their styles and behavior based on understanding the full content and context of the situation in which they are operating, their role, the goals of the situation, and the resources they have to use and direct; (b) the contingency theory suggests that the relationship between the leaders and the followers should have a strong impact on the leader and the appropriate leadership styles that will be effective in the situation; and (c) transformational leadership is a process where leaders and followers work together in a way to change and transform individuals and groups. The transformational leaders assess

the followers' needs and motives and seeks input of the followers at each state in the leadership process. This leadership style assumes that the assistance of the followers and the goals of leaders are to promote change and improvement (p. 91).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Through transformational leadership, educational leaders can develop and implement innovations in schools (Nienke, Daly, & Slegers, 2010, p. 623). Leaders engaged in transformational activities build on the experiences of their students and direct their own leadership activities in ways that involve all members of the school or district community able to meet the challenging problems they encounter together (Lindsey, 2005). Transformational leaders engage followers in understanding the mission and vision of the organization by connecting follower self-concept (Kark & Shamir, 2002; Wang & Rode, 2010, p. 1108). Transformational leadership happens when leaders elevate the interests of the followers to focus on the good of the organization, acceptance of the group's purpose, and motivates followers to look beyond their own self-interest (p. 1108). Conderman and Pedersen (2005) asserted that the daily stressors involving teaching secondary students with disabilities (p. 90). Conderman and Pedersen (2005) also examined the students, the learning structure, and the instructional designs for students' success (p. 91). Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, and Spagna (2004) described a model of change to promote inclusive practices in two southern California school districts. Interviews were conducted with the instructional staff to document the change process and the effect of related activities at the site and in the school district

(Burstein et al., 2004). According to the findings, all sites involved in the study showed improved inclusive practices and reported successful outcomes for both students with disabilities and the general education students. Burstein et al. (2004) indicated that the percentage of students with disabilities educated in general education has risen steadily (p. 105).

To address the compliance nature of inclusive instruction required in the state, my research is intended to create a change process to address the instructional placement decisions made for students with disabilities and improve the instructional practices of both general educators and special educators in the school district. The aforementioned theories are selected to examine leadership the behavior and strategies for chairpersons for special education service.

### **Collaboration**

Special educators are more accountable, more specialized, and more collaborative (Sayeski, 2009, p. 38; Turnbull, 2005; Yell et al., 2006). Scholars also explained how a collaborative relationship between general educators and special educators support educational inclusion efforts. Increased collaboration among the educators, parents, and students can help meet a student's needs in whatever setting is appropriate to the individual. Collaboration and team approaches have always been important in special education (Chamberlain & Spencer, 2005, p. 296). Researchers have studied collaboration extensively and clarify that educational collaboration requires preparation, commitment, and time to develop the trust and purpose needed for a true collaborative

effort to meet the special needs of all students not just those with disabilities (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Friend, 2007; Murawski & Dieker, 2008; Paulsen, 2008; Villa & Thousand, 2005). A new range of collaborative activities designed to promote teaching and learning includes instructional techniques such as communication, preparation, and conflict resolution can help co-teachers work together and achieve greater satisfaction in the classroom (Ploessi, Rocks, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010, p. 158) Collaboration is not only helpful for teachers working together in the inclusion class setting, the strategies applied to teaching and knowledge of the standards are useful for teachers of students in the separate special class setting (Idol, 2006; Paulsen, 2008; Villa & Thousand, 2005). High quality services to students with disabilities and their families increases when collaboration, places direct emphasis on the necessary knowledge and skills to bring stakeholders together (Voltz, 2010, pp. 75-76). Gates and Robinson (2009) offered description and interpretation for understanding the exercise of leadership in teacher collaboration. Observation data and interviews were collected from two urban high schools with finding that contributed to emerging theory on leadership to include evidence in teacher teamwork (Gates & Robinson, 2009, p. 145).

### **Teacher Leadership**

Brownell (2009) described the role of the special education teacher as quite complex (p. 392). Teacher leadership is a process rather than a positional concept (Pounder, 2008, p. 533). Teacher leadership refers to a set of skills demonstrated by teachers that continue to teach students (Danielson, 2006). Special education teachers are

educators who have different training and frame of reference to teach students with disabilities (Murawski, 2009, p. 41). As the teacher leader, the chairperson must demonstrate a set of skills that have an influence beyond the classroom to others within their own school (Danielson, 2006, p.12). In the leadership role of chairperson, teachers must display the expertise and skill in engaging others in complex work. Chairpersons of special education services must be informed and persuasive to mobilize and energize others with an unwavering passion for the core mission of the school and courage to confront obstacles to achieve that mission (Donaldson). Decision making is an important skill the teacher leader must demonstrate for students with disabilities. Teacher participation in school decision making has become an important topic for discussion in recent years (Ho, 2010, p. 613). There was no link between leadership and decision making because reasons for defining leadership are to promote teachers' sense of leadership while eliminating their powerlessness (Emira, 2010, p. 594). The school leadership role also is an important part of the diversity of experience shared by all educators especially those having essential prerequisites of understanding of student learning conditions. "Diversity provides complexity depth, multiple perspectives, and equity to relationships, thereby extending human and societal possibilities" (Cooper, 2002, para. 3). Berry (2010) interviewed and surveyed preservice and beginning teachers to understand what educators needed regarding working with students with disabilities in the general education setting. The teachers involved reported that general education

teachers need information regarding disability categories and effective instructional strategies for working with students with disabilities.

### **Leadership Vision and Inclusion**

Changes in an organization could trigger a search for leadership vision (O'Connell, 2011). Federal guidelines on inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education class has become a trigger for developing the leadership vision. Chairpersons for special education service must have a vision and leadership skills to guide all educators to deliver instruction to meet the needs of students (Voltz & Collins, 2010, p. 80) of diverse students with disabilities. Visionary leadership in overall program and policy is required in creating an inclusive school system (Porter, 1996, p. 70). On a school campus, there must be a shared understanding of the vision and a commitment to improving achievement for students (Hawley, 2007). Leadership must build commitment, enthusiasm, and excitement to address a shared vision. The strength of evidence implies that leadership behavior is probably influenced by a leader's personal traits and characteristics (Lunenburg, 2008). Accordingly, Lindsey (2005) reported, "Leaders, who are administrators and teachers, are aware of the power of person-to-person communication. They understand that building effective relationships involves guiding their colleagues to understand the 'why's' of individual and group behaviors" (p. 128). Burstein et al. (2004) reported evidence to indicate that feelings of being inadequately prepared to teach students with disabilities existed among general and special educators (p. 105).



The NCLB Act of 2001, which applies to special education teachers, defined the quality of the teaching force. The Reauthorization of NCLB, 2004, requires special education teachers in secondary schools to demonstrate competency in the content area they teach because many teachers were not highly qualified to deliver instruction in core content areas (Drame & Pugach, 2010). Special education teachers must provide quality instruction in the content subject equal to the instruction provided by their general education peers (Drame & Pugach, p. 67). Chairpersons of special education service in the large urban school district have regular classrooms or small groups of student to whom instruction is given. Middle school chairpersons for special education services in the district where this study will be conducted are not assigned to a class or group of students with disabilities, however; the chairperson's resourcefulness of experience and knowledge of instructional strategies for students with disabilities serves to benefit both the teachers and their students (Danielson, 2006, p. 14).

Literature disclosed that students with disabilities benefit from instruction in the general education setting due to the social learning situations that arise (Vygotsky, 1962). In mathematics education and special education journals, a sociocultural theory was more often the basis for articles in the mathematics education journals (Garderen, Scheuermann, Jackson, & Hampton, 2009). Other researchers have cited Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a framework for research examining learning in the general education setting for learners of all abilities (Berry, 2006; Carnell, 2005; Shamir, 2007; Vacca, 2008). Berry (2006) stated, "Inclusion depends on classroom climate factors as

well as effective instructional strategies” (p. 520). The historical focus on inclusive instruction for students with disabilities has been on the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the benefits and deficits of inclusion. Since legislative agendas have emphasized achievement outcomes (Yell, 2006), more researchers have examined the impact of inclusion on student achievement.

### **Leadership Culture**

The K-12 campus culture is described as an essential enabling factor for a successful instructional program. There is a mutually beneficial relationship between culture and learning. Cultural discord among educational leaders can lead to less than desirable learning outcomes (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). A diverse community has a school leader who holds a transformational perspective and focuses on leadership and school practices to meet the generative opportunities and needs the community (Lindsey, 2005, p. 21).

Chairpersons of students with disabilities function as school leaders for students with disabilities. Leadership in school is a catalyst for creating the school culture, a sense of professional community and partnership with parents and the community (Hawley, 2007, pp. 144-145). Teacher leadership includes the campus attitude, which is an intangible factor, will take time to develop if it has not been present, previously (Danielson, 2006). The results of this study are intended to impress upon educators to identify their leadership style, attitude toward leadership, effective leadership skills, and

collaboration efforts among the instructional staff factor into the placement of students with disabilities in the general education.

Providing high quality professional development opportunities for teachers is one way to improve instructional practices (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010, p. 1). Teachers and their chairpersons must begin to identify with the role they play in the delivery of instruction and begin to focus more on developing ideas and implementing strategies that have a positive effect on students' achievement (Sergiovanni, 2005, pp. 142-143). Smith (2010) revealed that most students with disabilities spend the majority of their school days in inclusive settings and suggest that all teachers must be prepared to meet the academic and social needs of students with disabilities (p. 38).

### **Inclusion and Co-Teaching**

#### **Inclusion**

Inclusion in the mainstream environment of students with disabilities is one of those obstacles that instructional leaders must face in today's schools. Teacher collaboration as an inclusion issue, state testing, expanding skill levels, and challenges in scheduling, although accepted in elementary schools, are serious obstacles to full inclusion in secondary schools (Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009). Quality instructional design and implementation for inclusion at the secondary levels have been challenging, also (Kozik et al., 2009, p. 77). Leaders direct their own leadership activities in ways that involve all members of the school or district community to meet the challenging problems they encounter together (Lindsey, Roberts, &

Campbelljones, 2005, p. 21). An inclusion program, whenever possible, allows students with disabilities to receive special education services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which is usually the general education setting rather than removing the student from class to receive the service. Matzen et al. (2010) conducted a mixed method design using three selected middle school students, their parents, and teachers. Interviews with parents and educators concerning students' experiences and progress during the year as well as their own experiences were performed. Scholars who conducted studies on mainstream instruction for students with disabilities reviewed the instructional design and strategies for these students. The studies bring attention to accountability due to NCLB (2001) and Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) (2004) (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006).

### **Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching is one instructional model of inclusion. Co-teaching takes many forms but a broad definition involves a general education teacher and a special education teacher, equally, working together to provide instruction to students with disabilities in the general education setting (Bouck, 2007a; Gordon, 2006; Murawski & Dieker, 2008, Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). A high degree of expertise is required from both general education and special education teachers when implementing co-teaching (Wilson, 2008). When students with disabilities are placed in the general education class, special education teachers are asked to provide support in the general education classroom (Kamens, 2007, p. 155). At the middle school level, the special

education chairperson provides the expertise to address issues of students with many different learning needs (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Paulsen, 2008). Chairpersons for special education need to strengthen their leadership to compensate for the weaknesses of co-teachers (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Chairpersons for special and general education teachers need to combine duties, and achieve balance and equity (Bouck, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Duties can include co-teaching to collaborate and share responsibilities (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Collaboration and team approaches in educating students have always been important in special education (Chamberlain & Spencer, 2005, p. 296). Each teacher needs to commit to make the time for regular planning sessions. This study looked at issues identified by chairpersons for special education service in middle schools to prepare and support the instructional staff while managing an inclusive culture for co-teaching on the campus. Gray (2009) examined support for educators and students in need of special education services (p. 4). Gray reported finding after implementing a co-teaching setting that co-teachers wished to continue the practice of co-teaching and to receive additional training and support in co-teaching. Teacher attitudes and efficacy increased as well as student efficacy and student achievement in co-teaching class (Gray, 2009, p. 4).

### **Inclusion and Student Achievement**

With accountability due to NCLB and IDEA (Yell et al., 2006), special education chairpersons need to focus on the effect of inclusion and special education on student achievement (Doran, 2008; Fore et al., 2008; Ghandi, 2007; Jameson et al., 2007;

Johnson, 2007; Landrum, 2008; Mackie, 2007; McCullough, 2008; Rollins, 2007). Both NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) focus on not removing students with disabilities from general education (Kauffman et al., 2004). Will (1986) reported that the regular education initiative was the perception that special education programming had lowered expectations of students with disabilities.

Voltz and Fore III (2006) suggested that centrally controlled standard-based decisions, generally at the state level, suggest what all students should know and have the ability to do at various grade levels (p. 330). Strategies such as publishing the standardized test scores of local schools and districts in the newspapers became a popular way to make this information public. The belief is this strategy would serve to promote competition among schools and, theoretically, to promote higher performance out of fear of embarrassment. For example, monitoring the achievement levels between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers is intended to reduce achievement gaps (Voltz & Fore III, 2006, p. 330).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2009) reported scores for public school students, by status as students with disabilities; however, there is no indication of the number of hours of special service or whether the service is provided in the general education or special education setting (USDOE, 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics reported the percentage of students receiving education services for the disabled but only as a percent of the school day spent inside general classes (USDOE, 2009). In the state where this study was conducted, there is no reporting

method identifying whether or not students are receiving special education services in the general education setting.

Application of accommodations for students with special needs is inconsistent and complicates any compilation and presentation of standardized achievement data, and generates controversy over the use of those accommodations on standardized achievement testing (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Capizzi, 2005). Guidelines for the use of accommodations (Cortiella, 2005); however, states are free to determine which accommodations are allowed for their chosen assessment (Cortiella, 2005). Another literature review reveals that there are inconsistent results for the effect of special education placement on achievement outcomes for students with mild to moderate learning disabilities. A review of the literature between 2005 and 2010 in the previously mentioned databases using the aforementioned keywords uncovered limited research studies on the impact leadership by the chairperson of special education services on the academic inclusiveness of students with disabilities. The literature review also revealed a limited number of research studies focused on placement of and academic outcomes for middle school students with mild to moderate learning disabilities in general education.

Rea et al. (2002) investigated the relationship between student achievement for inclusion and resource pullout for middle school students using quantitative and qualitative methods. A study of achievement, behavior, and attendance and related factors for eighth graders at two middle schools was completed by Rea et al. One middle school utilized an inclusive model and the other utilized the pullout model. The results of

this study showed that the students in the inclusion program had higher achievement scores for language and mathematics on the Illinois Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and earned comparable subtest scores for reading, writing, and math on this state proficiency test. The inclusion school students also earned higher course grades, had comparable rates of disciplinary action, and attended more days of school than counterparts in the resource-setting middle school. Leadership of the chairperson responsible for encouraging placement of students with disabilities in the LRE was not addressed in Rea et al.'s (2006) research.

### **Inclusion and Social Learning**

Inclusion, as an educational concept, carries positive connotations of belonging. Students were once placed in “special” facilities for education but now enroll in classes with their siblings and friends. While separated in the past, many students with severe disabilities did not gain the benefits of developing social relationships with their nondisabled classmates. The outcome was an inability to participate with the larger group of heterogeneous community where they live and work throughout their lives (Willis, 2007). The findings shed further light on inclusion including the recognition that special education needs to hold students with disabilities to the same standards as nondisabled students (Kauffman et al., 2004).

Full inclusion is the beginning for instructional programming according to legislation and policy in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. The force of policy is that children, with and without disabilities, shall enroll in school with assurance to be



placed in the regular classroom. Alternatives to general education placement may be necessary on a case by case basis, but only after efforts have been made to accommodate the student in the regular classroom, and only with an understanding that an alternative placement is clearly favors what is best for the student (Porter, 1996, para 9).

Similar policy in the United States, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), requires public schools to make general education available to all eligible children with disabilities when general education is appropriate to their individual needs (Willis, 2007). Between 1994 and 1995, a record number of students with disabilities, which was 43% was about serving primarily in general education classes, with many more spending at least some time in general education (Council for Exceptional Children 1997; Hockenbury, Kauffman, & Hallahan, 1999,2000). Secretary Spellings stated:

The days when we looked past the underachievement of these students are over. No Child Left Behind and the IDEA 2004 have not only removed the final barrier separating special education from general education, they also have put the needs of students with disabilities front and center. Special education is no longer a peripheral issue. It's central to the success of any school. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008)

Doran (2008) concluded that while students with disabilities in the inclusion setting did not score as high as their nondisabled peers, they did score higher than their counterparts in pullout classes. Doran examined the end-of-course-tests for high school students enrolled in geometry, biology, and American literature classes at four schools in

one school system. Doran used Vygotsky's social learning theory as the theoretical foundation for his study to support the use of co-teaching as a method for students with disabilities. Doran reported that students with disabilities benefit from instruction with their general education peers due to support provided by the nondisabled students.

McCullough (2008) researched the resource and inclusion setting in a quantitative correlation study using 5 years of pre and post inclusion achievement data for eighth graders at one school. The findings suggested that "the more inclusive setting was able to serve a variety of students with disabilities and do so at least as well as the resource setting perhaps even better" (McCullough, 2008, p. 48). The research findings showed that, for mathematics achievement, the inclusion students improved more than the resource pullout students, although admittedly not at a slower rate than their non-disabled peers. "The data further supported that change in the academic setting has caused the mean scores of special education students at [this school] to improve over time" (McCullough, 2008, p. 47). These results were inconsistent year to year and illustrate that the effort needed to sustain the effectiveness of inclusion services requires a commitment from educators, parents, and students including an inclusive school community, support from administrators, and cooperation between teachers.

Fore III, Hagan-Burke, Burke, Boon, and Smith (2008) utilized a quantitative study to examine inclusive versus non-inclusive classroom placement for secondary content area classrooms, and found, "No statistically significant differences in the academic performance of students with specific learning disabilities for reading or math"

(Fore III et al., 2008, p. 64). Fore III et al. (2008) surmised that there were several limitations that may have provided an explanation including the difficulties with defining the inclusion program and the disparity between the abilities of the students in the inclusion and resource groups.

Landrum (2008) examined data covering a 3-year period to compare middle school students in the inclusion setting to middle school students in the resource setting using a mixed-methods approach. Landrum found that students with disabilities earned higher achievement test scores when they were educated in the general education setting; however, students in the pullout classes had higher grades than students in the inclusion classes. In a similar study using a single-group interrupted time-series design,

Johnson (2007) found a correlation between the amount of time middle school students with disabilities spent in the general education setting and their scores on the state achievement test. Additionally, Swindler (2007) used a qualitative collective case study research design to examine the relationship between teacher training and student academic achievement. The results demonstrated that students in classes with trained teachers showed more improvement on academic assessments. Rollins (2007) employed quantitative methods in a study examining 6-weeks of data to compare the academic achievement and self-concept of two groups of students, one in an inclusion class and one in a resource class. The students in the inclusive setting had higher achievement test scores, but students in the pullout setting had higher self-concept. The research showed that students benefitted when they had a range of services available.

### **Leadership for Special Education Inclusion**

The review of literature supports my thought that leadership for special education service is identified as a valuable and difficult process for chairpersons of special education service. Chairpersons of special education services are in position to address the instructional needs of the students with disabilities along with the instructional delivery of the general education campus staff. The chairpersons often facilitate the development of effective individual educational plans (IEPs) for students identified with eligible disabilities and communicate federal and state compliance and accountability guidelines to ensure that the educational needs of the students with disabilities are met at the campus level. I believe the chairpersons' style of leadership, confidence as an instructional leader, knowledge of instructional pedagogy and special education guidelines are necessary components in meeting the academic and social needs of students with disabilities. I contend that leadership displayed where instructional decisions and learner progress are ignored can be a troubling experience.

This case study research was used to explore the leadership of chairpersons as teacher leaders of special education service in terms of placement for students with disabilities in the LRE to address the state identified placement ratio. An inquiry into special education teacher leadership may allow for understanding of their daily tasks in decision making and instructional support for students with disabilities. Through daily interactions, dialogue, and inquiry, special education teachers add to the process of improved teaching, learning and instructional accountability at the campus. The

professional relationships must be ensured by actively creating, nurturing, and promoting a supportive environment (Gabriel, 2005). The efficient use of human resources helps to support teacher leadership (Murphy, 2005)

### **Differing Methodologies**

Opportunities to experience leadership included responsibilities such as the establishment of curriculum direction, providing leadership in pedagogy, assessment, and school-community relations. Miller, Graham, and Paterson (2006) recognized that difficulties in staffing rural schools were increasingly common for early career teachers to experience school leadership roles (p. 31). Eighteen early career teachers were interviewed to discuss their experiences of leadership in rural schools (Miller et al., p. 31). Four emergent categories were leadership opportunities, responsibilities, the personal and the professional, and fishbowl. The quotes from the participants constructed categories for an understanding of the opportunities and challenges accompanying early career experiences of leadership roles (Miller et al., 2006, p. 31). Contrary to Miller's et al. (2006) study, I conducted interviews in an urban school district with chairpersons for special education to their school leadership experience. Berry (2010) interviewed and surveyed preservice and beginning teachers to understand what educators need regarding working with students with disabilities in the general education setting. Participants agreed that general education teachers need information regarding disability categories and effective instructional strategies for working with students with disabilities. Inclusive practices benefit all students, both disabled and nondisabled learners, and the

same collaborative effort is applicable to students in the resource setting, since they are integrated into the general education setting for part of their school day (Berry). Similar to Berry's study, my research involved interviews of teacher leaders identified as chairperson of special education service. The interviews are designed to identify leadership strategies and instructional needs of the chairperson for special education services in the middle school.

Epley et al. (2010) researched the support for families of young students with disabilities. Epley et al. recruited participants from two early intervention agencies that provided diversity and met three specific criteria; including vision/leadership, organizational climate, and resources. Epley et al. found connections among the administrative design, service providers, and family supports and services (p. 20). Epley et al. did not emphasize leadership specific to special education administrators or chairpersons for special education service public schools. Epley et al.'s findings included: (a) leadership knowledge and vision as persuasive measures for service; (b) the significance of cooperation within the organization for applying and analyzing supportive practices; (c) familial services and support impacted by resources; and (d) accountability necessary to guarantee effective leadership practices and support services to families.

Emira (2010) used questionnaires and interviews to identify how teachers in Egypt defined leadership and whether their definition is connected to the length of their teaching experience. Emira explored how they perceived the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making. The sample included a variety of 20 Egyptian

teachers of English language. Emira found that leadership was defined based on a leader's characteristics, leadership styles, and the performance of teacher leaders in and out of the classroom (p. 591). Emira found a link between leadership and decision making and generally felt their views were not impacted by the length of experience.

Kozik et al. (2009) explored: "In order for inclusive adolescent education to be successful, what values, skills, and knowledge should teachers demonstrate?" Thirty-five participants represented higher education, school districts, the State Education Department, and technical support networks. Values such as Social justice, passion, and courage for change, and the notion that other skills are offset by listening and communication were topics of discussion. The outcome depicts that development of adolescences including investigation of practices in secondary school reflect the most necessary knowledge (Kozik et al., 2009, pp. 89-90).

A central component in securing and sustaining school improvement is effective and purposeful leadership (Mujis & Harris, 2007, p. 111). Mujis and Harris (2007) reported on 3 case studies in the UK that can be characterized as exhibiting developed, emergent, and restricted teacher leadership. Mujis and Harris examined the differences and similarities between the schools, concluding that purposive action by the head, school culture and school structures were the key distinguishing factors (Mujis & Harris, 2007, p. 111). Findings indicated also a culture of trust and collaboration is essential, including a shared vision of where the school is headed, clear line management structures, and strong leadership development for programs (Mujis & Harris, 2007, p. 111). Additional

findings indicated that barriers to teacher leadership exist mainly outside the school while in the school; internal factors were key barriers of restrictive teacher leadership (Mujis & Harris, p. 111). Mujis and Harris suggested that further interaction of research and practice is needed to help develop the potential that teacher leadership has to offer (p.132).

Villa and Thousand et al. (2005) described improvement in curricula, instruction, and assessment practices by middle and secondary school educators wanting to address students needs through increase collaboration and responsiveness. Instructional and reorganization strategies used contributed to successfully educating the diverse student population. Field-based interviews were conducted using inclusive high school educators; administrative support, continued staff development, communication strategies, academic responsiveness, and dependable assessment processes revealed six “best practices” for collaboration

Voltz and Collins (2010) examined standards used to prepare special education administrators and provides new insights into the knowledge and skills needed to facilitate the inclusion of diverse students with disabilities in standards-based classrooms (p. 70). Data were drawn from other research on administration of special education service. Wigle and Wilcox surveyed 240 special education administrators and asked the participants to rate their levels of competency with respect to each of the Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC’s) standards for special education administrators (p. 71). Defur (2002) and Goldstein (2004) reported that administrators and the teachers



expressed the same lack of confidence in their ability to assist students with disabilities in reaching state standards. Voltz and Collins shared results of a nationwide survey involving 400 each general educators and special educators. Some of the findings underscore the need for special education administrators to be prepared to rise to the important challenge as leaders (Voltz & Collins, 2010, p. 71).

Voltz and Fore III (2006) shared available data for the 39 states reporting 2002–2003 assessment results reflected that 30 states reported in fourth grade reading, a 30 percentage point and higher scores between the general education student's scores and the percentage score of students with disabilities. Reports from 26 of the 39 states showed discrepancies from 30 percentage points and higher for fourth grade proficiency in math than the percentage points of students with disabilities (Olson, 2004; Voltz & Fore III, 2006, p. 330). These figures reflect significant gaps that will need to be addressed in reform efforts. Qualitative observations presented in the study were drawn from the comments of a national sample of general and special educators who were asked about the rewards of teaching in an urban setting (Voltz, 2000; Voltz & Fore III, p. 330).

### Summary

In this section, I provided several conceptual reviews of leadership for inclusive instruction to explore the role of the chairperson for special education services. The literature reviewed included Senge's Learning Organization, leadership, leadership concepts, vision, culture, and inclusive practices are considered elements for this research. Additional information provided details the academic achievement and social

effects on students with disabilities in the general education setting are provided, also. Key instructional leaders must begin to find common ground among its members for them to feel connected and see the value of sharing insights, stories and techniques (Wenger, 2002).

In section 3, I discuss the research method of this study and why other methods and designs were not chosen. I describe the participants, selection process, the research questions, data collection process, data analysis, and interpretation of the study.

### Section 3: Research Method

The purpose of the research was to explore the chairperson's leadership to support inclusive instruction to students with disabilities in general education classes. In this section, I begin by discussing the research design as a case study and why I chose case study as the research design. The research question and its subquestions are presented to support selected the research method.

Qualitative case studies are about meaning and understanding (Merriam & Associates, 2002, pp. 178-179). The qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study because this design allows interviewees to describe their leadership experiences and helps the researcher extract meaning from the information provided by the participants. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 5). As a qualitative researcher, I was interested in understanding how the participants interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 5).

According to Yin (2009, p. 26), a case study is used to contribute to understanding an individual, group, or organization. Yin (2009) recommended developing propositions or ways to bind a study (pp. 26-27). The first proposition examined in this study was bound on understanding the leadership views to promote inclusive practices by chairpersons for students with disabilities in middle school.

Chairpersons for students with disabilities were interviewed over a 4-week time period. Only the perceptions of the participants selected for this case study were examined.

I sought answers to how and why the campus chairpersons of students with disabilities currently perceive the way they participate in the leadership role to provide special education service and how the district currently promotes and supports LRE instruction as a special education service. The issue of educating special needs students in the LRE continues to be a contemporary topic requiring more research in the field.

Individual interviews were conducted at the location selected by the participants (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008). The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008). Interviews allowed participants to discuss their views on the chairperson leadership role with me. Participants shared their views on being an instructional and special education program leader for students with disabilities.

### **Other Research Methods Considered**

Many individuals within the urban independent school districts have been educators for 6 years or more and could provide an account of the leadership efforts on inclusion within the district during that time period. When deciding the type of qualitative study to complete that would best answer the research questions, careful consideration was given to other types of qualitative approaches that were not chosen.

Biography was not chosen because my focus is not on the life of an individual or reported stories that detail the individual's life. I believe that this type of study would be one-sided and not provide enough information about the topic (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008).

In an ethnographic study, researchers focus on interpreting a cultural or social group (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008). I did not collect data to be used to study an entire cultural or social group. Ethnography provides a description, an analysis, and an interpretation for the cultural behavior of the group. I did not select this design because culture of the school district is not the focus of the study and observations are not part of the data collection process.

Phenomenology focuses on the first person perspective and on the philosophy of how things happen in certain situations (Moran, 2000). I did not choose this research design because I did not want a focus on the philosophical views of the participants in everyday life (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 7) as a chairperson. For example, the essence of isolation, being respected as or just being the chairperson for students with disabilities and the chairperson's subjective reflection on their leadership ability are not the focus of this study.

Other research designs were considered; however, they were not selected for this study. Using grounded theory tradition also is not considered since constant comparison of the data collected will not be used to discover approximations of social reality (Hatch, 2002, p. 26). Lastly, a narrative tradition was not considered due to its use of an individual's story of personal experience methods (Hatch, 2002, p. 28).

### **Research Question**

The research is designed to answer the following primary research question: How do the leadership experiences of chairpersons of students with disabilities impact

decision-making for instructional placement in the LRE for students with disabilities?

Participants will be asked the following eight subquestions:

1. What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

2. How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

3. What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

4. How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

5. How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

6. How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

7. What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

8. What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

### **Study Traditions**

The case study was defined as an intensive analysis bounded by a social unit involving at least one individual, or people in groups, institutions or communities (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 8). The unit of analysis characterizes a case study, not the topic of investigation (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 8). Promoting inclusive instruction for students with disabilities is the case for this research. The case study modeled the following two types of traditions: socially constructed knowledge claims and intrinsic case study. In a socially constructed knowledge claim case study, Creswell (2003) noted that researchers seek “understanding of the world in which they live and work. Constructivist researchers often address the process of interaction among individuals trying to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (p. 8).

### **Context of the Study**

I carefully chose the context for this study by aiming to interview the participants to answer the research question (Hatch, 2002). To ensure that the data were current, the participant pool was limited to those who meet the selection criteria (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008). Those participants who agreed to participate in this study were invited to be interviewed (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008). The time and place of the interviews were chosen for the convenience of the participants (Kiriakidis, 2009, 2008).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Appropriate steps were taken to ensure that the participants are treated suitably throughout the duration of this research study. The identity of the participants was kept

confidential during and after completion of the results' phase of the study. An appropriate request to perform the study was obtained from the district's administrator. After approval (IRB# 06-01-11-0082043), to conduct the research was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) a consent form was signed and obtained from each participant. The participants were informed of their rights to fully understand their participation and given specific instructions for withdrawal from the study at any point. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, that they would not be rewarded or compensated for their participation, and that no negative consequences would occur because of their involvement in the study. Participants had an opportunity to review the purpose of the study and to ask questions prior to the study.

The potential impact of the study along with the benefits was fully explained to participants in the informed consent letter. Each participant received a brief review of the study in person before the start of each interview. Participants were allowed access to the interview questions prior to their individual scheduled interview and were allowed time to reflect on the questions, write down some notes, and to think about their answers. An alpha letter code was assigned to participants to identify their data and to ensure protection of the participant's privacy and confidentiality. The data collected for this study will be maintained for a minimum of 5 years.

### **Researcher's Role**

I am a retired educator with 30 years' experience working with students with disabilities and students at risk of academic failure. I ended my K-12 education career



with 8 years as a district Coordinator for Special Education Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and Compliance. As the Coordinator, I provided consultation service, technology in-service training, and educational support to the district's instructional personnel; including superintendents and other school administrators, seeking to meet the state and federal guidelines on instruction to students with disabilities. My past professional relationship with teacher leaders and campus chairpersons for students with disabilities was described as an encouraging, yet responsive experience. My role as the district's coordinator also included direct contact with the local LEA and state education agency to ensure that the district met compliance issues for instruction to students with disabilities. As coordinator, I was allowed access to the campuses instructional staff to provide personal one-on-one support or follow up in-service for issues in special education impacting the service provided to students with disabilities at the campuses. This past relationship with district instructional staff did not have an impact on data collection for the research study.

Methods of establishing a research-participant working relationship to conduct this study included an introduction to the district's administration and the district's special education department. As researcher, I have educational experience as an advocate for instruction in the LRE to students with disabilities. During this study, I continued to uphold the effort of an educator to see that students with disabilities receive an educational experience best suited for their individual mental, physical and academic development.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study was located in an urban school district with an 8% population of students with disabilities. Ten participants, with middle school experience, were invited to participate using purposive sampling to choose subjects for specific reasons related to the study design (Patton, 1990). The participants were current, non-probationary, or former chairpersons of special education instructional service for middle schools where inclusive placement of students with disabilities may not meet the state LRE ratio compliance guidelines. The sample of nonprobationary chairpersons for special education is preferred because there is an expected familiarization of the state compliance guidelines for LRE service on the individual educational plan (IEP) and working knowledge of placement determination of students with disabilities. Both male and female participants were invited to represent the sampling group.

Five participants were interviewed about their experiences in leadership for inclusive practices and instructional decision making for students with disabilities. Seven guided open-ended interview questions with one general open-ended question at the beginning of the session were used to elicit responses for data collection and analysis. Participants had an opportunity to review and follow up on responses at a later date.

### **Data Collection and Instrumentation**

The participants interviewed in this study were chairpersons with special education leadership experience in the middle school. Participants had participatory knowledge of the instructional leadership role as chairperson for special education

services. Data collection was conducted at the campus site or location selected by the participant. Initially, there was an introduction and warm up conversation followed by an overview of the interview process. A consent form was presented for signature as an understanding and agreement to continue with the formal interview process. The formal interview session involved the use of a researcher-developed interview protocol with eight open-ended questions based on the research topic. The purpose of questioning was to permit the chairperson to converse about their leadership actions to promote LRE instruction for students with disabilities. Each interview was audio-taped. Audio data were transcribed concurrently over a period of 5 days with follow-up audio replays and revisions to the transcribed data to ensure accuracy of the responses.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once the data were transcribed, the analysis process consisted of reading through the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2003). Inductive analysis with open coding contributed to the data analysis process. Data were analyzed and a detailed description of the setting and individual with an analysis of the themes and issues evolved (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994).

I reviewed each interview question to get the main idea while reading the transcript to find significant statements or codes relating to the question. Grouping the code words around a particular concept in the data, called categorizing, reduces the number of code words with which to work (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 149). The code theme/category identified relating words, phrases, or ideas are identified from the data

script and associated with the code theme/category. Keywords or phrases were selected as appropriate code segments of the text (Creswell, p. 192). Taking apart an observation by a line, a sentence, or a paragraph of transcription, each discrete incident, idea, or event was given a name or code word that represented the concept underlying the observation” (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 178).

Creswell (2003) wrote, “Generating a description of the setting or people as well as categories are themes for analysis is an important part of the coding process” (p. 193).

The responses that were provided by the interviewees were carefully reviewed for keywords, phrases, or ideas (e.g., “chunks”) that helped me to identify themes.

Organizing data into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Rossenman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171) proved very useful. The end result provided a large collection of information or responses that connect to the research question. Highlighting, as part of the coding process, aids in the description and categorization of data. The analysis leads to the final step of making an interpretation or meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003, pp. 193-194). The results of the interviews were analyzed and sorted by strengths and weaknesses. Also, data collected and analyzed were integrated during the interpretation phase to provide support for future staff development and leadership training for chairpersons of students with disabilities. Codes emerged from the interview transcripts. For example, the code for staff development is (SD), and socialization issues is (SI). An example of the complete coding is located in Appendix D.

Qualitative data analysis identified as member checking was utilized in this study to ensure the external validity of rich, thick, detailed descriptions. This method allowed the informant to serve as a check throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2003, p. 204). The method supported the transferability of a solid framework on leadership based on the participant's responses and researcher's interpretation (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 204).

### **Discrepant Data**

I considered discrepant data by searching the data set for data that contradict the potential findings. I followed Hatch's (2002) suggestions and explain data contrary to the predominant findings. I determined if any of the evidence supported my case study.

### **Validity and Reliability**

#### **Validity**

Validity is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the presentation of the researcher and the participants of the account (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000). To gain openness of true feelings in responses, participants will be assured of their confidentiality in participating in the study. Data were viewed in several ways through triangulation to connect the participant's information, emergent themes identified by me, and the concepts of leadership by other researchers presented in the section 2. Participants responses were studied according to the time served as chairperson and length of time assigned in the middle school. Thereafter, during the analysis phase, the interview findings were summarized. Validating responses involved

allowing the participants some follow-up time to review and clarify their scripted response for accuracy prior to the analysis phase. Follow-up contact was made by telephone, email, and in person. Final validation included the use of peer debriefing for clarification of methods, meanings, and conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2003, pp. 207-208). I was interested in understanding the individual leadership experience of the chairperson of special education services. Also, I wanted to learn the density of each case or cases reviewed (Stake, 1995). Generalizations from this study may not be transferable to other schools or districts.

### **Reliability**

Reliability is supported by completing the data analysis using member checking with inductive analysis for the coding process. A narrative summation of the data analysis is part of the case study database. The coding and transcript narratives will be maintained for a period of 5 years.

Yin (2009) noted that the goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study (p. 179). I minimized errors and bias to increase consistency and reliability of the study by following an interview protocol and suggestions by Yin (2009). The suggestions selected were: (a) an overview of the case study project; (b) a letter of introduction to the participants and obtaining permission to research from the gatekeeper; and (c) field procedures-including researcher credentials, letters gaining access to key organizations and interviewees, a schedule of data collection activities and expected timelines, providing for unanticipated events (pp. 79-83).

## Summary

In this section, I explored the steps to preparing and conducting a qualitative study. General characteristics of the case study procedures are outlined. Case study method and other research designs considered are reviewed. The data collection took place in the natural setting with the researcher as the instrument for participant interviews. The role of the researcher includes statements about background experience and connection between the researcher and participants. Ethical procedures for data collection were followed to protect the rights of the human participants. Data collection procedures identify purposefully selected sites and individuals for the proposed study. The data analysis was discussed. The method of data collection included identifying rich detailed description of leadership experiences provided by the participants. In the next section, the results of the interviews are presented in descriptive, narrative form. Thick descriptions are provided to express a holistic picture of the leadership experiences (Creswell, 2003). This case study approach allows for the development of improved and efficient use of leadership strategies and training for chairpersons of students with disabilities.

## Section 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to examine the leadership experiences of middle school chairpersons to identify the issues that impact the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE in K -12 public schools. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the interviews. Data analysis, emergent codes and themes, and findings for this research are presented.

### **Process for Data Analysis**

The process for data analysis began with the data collection. An audio-interview protocol with eight questions was used collected details of the participants' leadership experiences to promote LRE service for students with disabilities. Taped responses were transcribed and member-checking was used to verify the statements in the transcripts. Rich details in the responses and inductive analysis were used to identify emergent codes and themes (Hatch, 2002, pp. 161-173). Open coding of the taped interviews was used to name and categorize the phenomena (Merriam, 2002, p. 149). Related words, phrases, or ideas were identified and associated with a coded theme or category (Yin, 2009). Grouping the code words reduced the number of code words with which to work (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The findings were associated with principles of organizational learning including; systems thinking, mental models, individual mastery, shared vision, and team building with respect to the role of the chairperson for special education services.



## Research Questions

I conducted this study to seek answers to the research question, How do leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education impact their decision-making for instructional placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment? An interview protocol with eight subquestions generated responses related to the research question. Six themes (Appendix D) emerged from the analysis of the transcripts: (a) staff development, (b) student placement, (c) socialization issues, (d) student participation or engagement (SE), (e) teacher collaboration; and (f) mental awareness/vision (AV) for inclusion support.

The responses were analyzed to identify leadership issues related to the range of leadership experiences expressed by the chairpersons for students with disabilities. The interview questions were:

Q1: What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

Q2: How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

Q3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

Q4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

Q5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

Q6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

Q7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the campus?

Q8: What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

### **Findings**

I believe the leadership experiences shared through interviews with the chairpersons for special education services, at the study site, revealed some discrepancies to support inclusion efforts on the campus. Participants' responses are presented in the section, sorted and interpreted based on the research subquestions. Follow-up questions were asked for clarification of some responses. When presented with:

**RSQ1:** *What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?*

Participant 1 (P1) responded, "My role has been just staff development and training. The people need to be informed and they need to understand the reasons behind the decisions that are made." P1 reported, "The decision was made to promote inclusion

and we had to go out and explain and equip them with the necessary tools and strategies to work with the students in the general education classroom.” P1 asserted, “Because the fear is, ‘I don’t know what to do with them. I don’t know how to handle students with disabilities.’ P1 concluded, “My role is to give them the information and the tools necessary to educate the students in the classroom and be successful at educating students with disabilities.”

P2 responded, “My experience was a wonderful one.” P2 added, “I have been at the same school for 30 years and because we were willing to accept change much earlier than the rest of the campuses we have helped a great number of students be successful because of our inclusive campuses.” P2 also stated “I have been the Department Chair on and off during those years but have remained the chair steadily for at least the last 15 years.” P2 continued, “Our campus was the first campus in the district, under a new special education supervisor, to open a Content Mastery Center.” P2 reported, “Middle schools were ‘self containing too many students so our district joined the LEA in the BISI program (Building Inclusive Schools) and opened our first co-teach classes in Social Studies and Science.” P2 asserted, “Our first co-teacher later became the ‘Inclusion Coordinator’ for the entire school district. Our campus has now, for at least five years, had co-teachers in all core areas and support facilitation as well.” P2 concluded, “Within this year the program has become in jeopardy because the district has cut many special education personnel.”

P3 responded, “The leadership experiences I had was in setting up an inclusion schedule for those students, scheduling students in a general education classroom, including a coordinator at my school who helped me.” P3 asserted that the coordinator “set up the schedules of the inclusion teachers and to go into the general education teacher’s classrooms and see what their needs were.” P3 added, “Then, I give a little in-service to help teachers work with the general education teachers, get the general education teachers to understand what the inclusion teachers were there to do.”

Participant 4 (P4) stated, “The teachers and administrators here have tried different instructional strategies to meet the needs of the students as well as of the teachers in the class. Our effort is to find out how best to help the teachers.” P4 added, “I met with the teachers as often as I could to find out what kind of help they needed to work the special education students in the general education class. The meetings were quick sometimes but meeting with teachers did help some of them.”

Participant 5 (P5) declared, “This year has been a busy year for our department. The school had a lot of new teachers and there were several in-services held to help them understand what they need to do as far as inclusion was concerned.” P5 continued, “New teachers always seem to be the biggest problem. I try to get to them and invite them to come in a talk if they have any questions about working with the special education students.” P5 continued, “I try to get the special education teachers involved in helping the new teachers too.”

**RSQ2:** *How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?*

P1 replied, "I believe the placement is very significant!" P1 stated, "Number one, principals and their instructional staff can't just randomly pull students out of the general education classroom because they've been identified as a student who needs special education services." P1 added, "Again, my belief is once you start pulling the kids, the kids never have the opportunity to catch up no matter how much you accelerate instruction is done to help the students. The kids still have pieces missing." P1 stated, "Because often times when we pull the kids, we're pulling them because teachers are modifying the kid's curriculum." P1 continued, "Teachers don't cover as much because of the time spent on modifications, skills, and objectives to ensure that students with disabilities master goals or gain the needed academic skills." P1 stated, "Special education teachers just don't cover everything in the resource room and general education teachers need to keep special education kids in the general education curriculum so they can be exposed to the full range of skills, and objectives."

P2 responded, "Placement is very important. In the general education class, students are introduced to the general education curriculum." P2 stated, "In regular classes they have positive role models both behaviorally and academically. The students do not feel isolated from their peers and self concepts soar."

P3 responded, "Well depending on what the needs of the students were, where students were placed, especially with a teacher who had any significant amount of

experience working with students with particular disabilities, I understand general education placement helps.” P3 stated, “I think LRE is impacted a lot. I think the students would be helped more working with professionals trained in servicing students based on the students special needs.”

P3 continued, “Whether teachers have had students with special education placed in their class before, whether all teachers have gotten in-services that would help them know how to meet the needs of the students, I think the teaching experience is important.” P3 asked “How do teachers identify problems, modify lessons to meet the students’ needs and still be able to meet the needs of the other general education students in the classroom?” P3 also stated, “The teaching experience could help the teachers learn to identify special problems the students might have after integrating into the general education classroom.”

P 4 responded, “When the ARD committee meets the members try to discuss the best place for the students to learn. Placement is important because first the committee tries to keep the student in the general education class, if possible.” P4 added, “Depending on the reports from the teachers at the ARD meeting, the ARD committee will consider what is best for the student and the teacher sometimes.” P4 continued, “With the right modifications and accommodations the committed can decide to keep the student in the general education class.”

P5 stated, “Placement is important and decision makers have to make sure when the students are placed, students are placed in the right class and the teacher is willing to

work with them.” P5 added, “Placing students is so important, especially when the students get into a class that encourages student academic growth.”

**RSQ3:** *What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?*

P1 responded, “I think some mindsets have changed a little bit. People have become a little more open to the idea of inclusion.” P1 asserted, “Again, with education and staff development on the inclusion process, the importance is to know that students deserve a chance they, deserve the right to remain in the general education classroom.” P1 stated, “No longer do teachers live in the day where students would qualify for special education services and then get pulled out of general education class.” P1 asserted, “Students are expected to know more, to know more than they’re ever needed to know before with the standardize test.” P1 asserted, “If we as educators are going to present our students with these test, the educators need to expose the students with disabilities to the curriculum. The best way to do that is to keep them in the general education classroom.”

P2 responded, “To do inclusion right, all administrators, especially the principal, should be behind the concept. Administrators and teachers too must believe that inclusion will work and that when a teacher walks in that door they know they are there for all kids.” P2 stated, “The principal makes clear if teachers are not up to applying accommodations/modifications our campus may not be the place for you.” P2 asserted, “I did my best throughout the years to keep inclusion as big a part of the school as the gifted

and talented program.” P2 asserted, “I was a member of the leadership team of the school and SDMC (School Decision Making Committee) was lead by me and other members who were not only special education teachers. My kids mattered and everyone knew how I felt.”

P3 responded, “I, at first, worked as an inclusion teacher in the classroom. I visited the classroom that was the general education classroom to see the class setup and to see how receptive the general education teachers were to inclusion.” P3 continued, “I sat down with my staff of special education teachers that worked as an inclusion teacher and talked to them about some of the things I had observed.” P3 continued, “Some of the ways I felt they could best use their skills and talents to work with those teachers and yet be as unobtrusive as possible and yet be effective.” P3 asserted, “The inclusion teachers must arrive on time, to be available to work with the general education students as well as the special students and to let them know about the different ways to give the general education teachers support.” P3 added, “Are teachers going to be receptive or how much help the teachers did or did not want? Sometimes what seems to be the greatest problem is getting the general education teacher to not feel intruded upon.” P3 continued, “But to welcome in the inclusion teacher and to understand the instructional strategy could be co-teaching in a class. General education teachers could see how the inclusion teacher could help in the class as a whole and help to include the special students in the general education class. P3 added, “So working together will be a comfortable situation for



everyone.” P3 continued, “I try to make myself available to any general education teacher who wanted to speak with me privately about any concerns they have.”

P4 stated, “I think having the special education student in the general education class is important because they get to spend more time with nondisabled students. The students will have role models to follow and to learn from.” P4 added, “The students are exposed to more of the general education curriculum and the students are better prepared for the state test.”

P5 responded, “My vision is to get the general education teacher to understand that inclusion teachers are here to help general educators work with the special education students.” P5 added, “If general education teachers have a question about the students, they can come to the special education teacher or me for help.”

P5 added, “I would like to see more of the students in general education classes and not be pulled out so often just because they have been identified as a student with a disability.” P5 added, “Especially those I felt would be mature enough to handle the general education class. My vision is to keep students in the regular class depending on how well students are able to work in a classroom with a larger population.”

**RSQ 4:** *How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities [in the least restrictive environment (LRE)] impacted your views of inclusion?*

P1 responded, “I find the decision-making process to be educating. The instructional leaders have to educate and guide the staff on how to make the most appropriate decision look at all pieces of data and make an informed decision.” P1

asserted, “Don’t just make the same blanket decision again. “Those students are in special education; you need to pull the students out. Yes, the instructional staff may have pulled students out of class for years, but educators no longer live in that time.” P1 added, “Instructional leaders have to make the decision based on the data because so many things depend on it. The district has an over representation of the African American male. We have too many kids self-contained in the resource class.” P1 added, “The district has too many kids taking the modified test. That’s because the educators are not making the decisions based on all pieces of data.” P1 added, “Using the data helps in the decision-making process.”

P2 responded, “ARD committees have always been accepting of the inclusive setting at my school. When we ran into glitches in this area, I was finally allowed to be the only one to do schedules for special education students.” P2 added, “If the students needed a regular education class, I put the student in the class.” P2 replied, “ARD committee decisions took precedence, always. I have not waived about how I feel about inclusion.” P2 stated, “I still feel there must be a continuum of services for students that continue to struggle. Scheduling is very apparent when some students need to be placed where the instructor builds the skills to get the students ready for inclusion service.”

P3 responded, “Being able to attend the ARD meeting, being able to communicate with the general education teachers and the special education teachers along with other people who know of the students and the students needs can be helpful.” P3 added,

“Being able to discuss in a group how the instructional staff feels, how teachers could service those students, and whether students could be serviced best in an inclusion type situation; one that was more restrictive, is a focus of discussion.” P3 continued, “Sharing dialogues of course helped the decision-making. The committee members have to know what the assessment score is and the other things people know who have worked with that student before.” P3 added, “The total discussion of course contributed to the final decision on placement.” P3 concluded, “I’m not always satisfied with the conclusion of the decision making process for placement but I understand it is the consensus of the group.”

P4 stated, “The ARD committee is responsible for the placement decision. Placement is thought to be a group decision.” P4 asserted, “All the ARD members have their input but not all of the ARD members are present for the entire meeting. When a member leaves the ARD meeting, the decision for placement often depends on the remaining members.” P4 reported, “There are times when the meetings are very long and the administrators may leave before the meeting ends. When an ARD member leaves, that member may not have gotten all the information about the student but will let the remaining committee members know that the committee’s decision will be supported.” P4 concluded with, “Sometimes an administrator does and sometimes an administrator doesn’t accept the ARD committee’s final placement decision.”

P5 responded, “The decision to keep a student in general education is decided by the ARD committee members.” P5 added, “The ARD meetings are held to identify the

area of weakness the students may have and the committee will discuss those areas to decide if the students needs additional service and where student will be placed for special education service.”

**RSQ 5:** *How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?*

P1 responded, “Well when collaboration is good and positive collaboration changes mindsets. Collaboration guides the instructional staff in making better decisions for the students.” P1 reported, “Collaboration helps the general education teachers grow in the area of educating special education students. When teachers collaborate, ideas are exchange.” P1 also added, “Suggestions are made to see what will work.” P1 continued, “Collaboration allows students to achieve a better education because teachers pool resources. Teachers can learn from each other and figure out a way to help the students in the most positive way to be successful.”

P2 responded, “Collaboration is a powerful thing! You must be a part of the leadership team of the school and communicate with the general education staff to help them feel comfortable.” P2 reported, “Let the teachers know there is teacher support. You have to be picky about who your co-teachers (general education teachers) are and match them up with the appropriate special education counterpart.” P2 reported, “General education teachers must be accepting of the students and be willing to use inclusive practices.”

P3 responded, "I think collaboration has a great impact. If you can meet with the chairpersons of the English department, then you can go in and not only look at the chairpersons." P3 reported, "With several of the general education teachers serving students you can tell them a little about the special education program and how modifications will help. You can tell them how things can be done." P3 reported, "The general purpose of having an inclusion teacher in with the students is to get the general education teachers to see how relative inclusion is. You can get the teachers to understand why the inclusion teacher is in the class." P3 asserted, "The inclusion teacher is not an assistant but more of a co-teacher and if you can answer questions from the general education teacher, you could make the teachers feel free to ask questions in the future." P3 reported, "You can give information about the individual and what those students' needs are." P3 continued, "I think collaboration helps improve instruction quite a bit. The general education teachers will feel free to direct questions to the chairperson in the special education program." P3 reported, "If you care to answer their questions in a clear, concise, and honest way, I think collaboration improves more." P3 added, "Sometimes the general education teachers don't know who the special education students are. You invite the teachers to come in a talk about the number of students with disabilities in the class and how you can help support the students and the teacher." P3 reported, "The teacher is going to service those students unobtrusively and you're going to help by explaining what modifications may be used." P3 added, "I have found that collaboration helps a lot because many general education teachers don't understand the

importance of modifications and they want to avoid using modifications.” P3 said, “You have to explain modifications to them and how they can best utilize modifications without disrupting their class. P3 added, “Any kind of open discussion is actually a comfort to the general education teachers.” P3 continued:

Collaboration is very important when you meet your inclusion teacher before they begin their inclusion experience. In a very large school with a very large population, you find sometimes that an inclusion teacher only has 15 minutes in a class before moving on to another teacher’s class during that period. I found timing to be a problem; to think you can help any student in 15 minutes then you have to leave and go to another class. I would have liked to have seen a better way to schedule the time, to schedule those teachers into a classroom where at least a half an hour is spent in the general education classroom helping the students rather than their quick little run-in to sit, observe, and leave. I always thought inclusion teachers were more intrusive (...inaudible) coming in and looking at the students and teacher then running to another class. There’s a better way to set up an inclusion schedule and you have to talk with the counselors, administration, and the department heads of general education classes to get everyone to be on the same page about scheduling the inclusion teacher to help these students.

P4 stated:

I think collaboration is important. Collaboration is important for the teachers to work together and to plan together... (inaudible). Collaboration helps the students become successful. The teachers can share their ideas, get new ways to teach a lesson or even try a new way to teach a lesson. Chairpersons have to do everything possible to keep the students in the general education classroom. Working with the teacher, collaborating with the teacher can be a big help for everyone.

P5 answered, "In order to keep the students in and get more students in the least restrictive placement chairpersons and teachers have to collaborate together. Working with the general education teachers is important, especially if there are a lot of new teachers on campus." P5 added, "Collaboration is the one thing that helps the new teachers most." P5 stated, "New teachers don't feel so lost when another teacher is there to talk about the instruction and sometimes behavior problem that new teachers have to handle." P5 continued, "Sometimes the administrator will let me know when a teacher is having problem in the classroom and I will go to the teacher and to find out what I can do." P5 said, "When we sit down to talk, the communication is helpful most of the time...especially with the new teachers."

**RSQ 6:** *How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities?*

P1 responded:

You know, knowledge is power! The more I know the more information I can give out for my teachers and staff to be successful; things change. There's always some new program, there's always some new state law. "The more I'm informed, the better I can inform my staff and the better education the students receive.

"Then, the better the district's status will be. The district is on stage 3 because of overrepresentation, too many special education self-contained students. The more information I know the better decisions I can make. Then the information can be passed on to the principals and the teachers in order to move special education kids out of self-contained classes or provide the special education kids with accelerated instruction. The district has to make there is a response to intervention or instructional money that ensures students are receiving a quality education.

Follow-up Q: You mentioned the Response to Intervention and a couple of other programs for children. Do you feel your district allows you ample opportunity to participate in staff development so you can bring back those ideas to the district?

P1 responded, "Right and I know district administrators do a really good job in allowing us to attend training at the LEA in the state and out of the state." P1 reported, "With budget cuts, who knows what it will be next year but in the past 2 years they've done an excellent job allowing us and my colleagues to attend appropriate training."



P 2 responded, "Training is a must! If the teachers have adequate training and a place to go for help, I find the teachers are very receptive to inclusion."

P 3 responded, "If you have an administration that is open to having you do a really relative in-service for all of the teachers at the school. I think training will help quite a bit." P3 continued:

I have found through my experience that many general education teachers really do not understand the importance of using modifications, not only teach the students but also to determine their grades and recognize the overall achievement in general education class. The general education teachers should spend training time with the special education teachers themselves so everyone understands what the purpose is for modifications and which modifications are the most success for students. In a large public school, some modifications may sound good but they may be unrealistic for that particular school environment. You have to explain to the regular education staff why certain modifications are given. And, regular education teachers need copies of modification for each student and must document the use of modifications for each student. Every student isn't going to have the same modifications but will have modifications that meet their needs. Chairpersons and administrators can give an in-service to explain modifications.

Follow-up Q: Did you find that the teachers you work with were satisfied with the type of in-service or leadership training that they got on modification or inclusion in general?

P3 responded:

No I didn't. Overall I didn't feel most teachers were listening to us. Some of the older teachers seem to have the attitude that "I've already heard all this before. Just give us the modifications, we'll move on." Some of the lesser experienced teachers probably listened better because modifications was something new to them. What I found is the teachers in general education weren't always receptive to the special education trainers because many people perceived modifications as just something else to add to their workday. I didn't feel the staff was always receptive. Many of the in-services were on other school programs and the teachers were given information on a lot of other things so the focus was not on the special education program. I think if there had been separate training response levels, just about dealing with special education students that there would have been greater acceptance of the program. The regular education teachers would have focused more on special education topics. When the talk is about the overall school operations and you get a quick 5 minute presentation on something, I don't think teachers listen.

P4 responded, "Staff development is good. Training is important for teachers."

P4 stated, "I find that teachers like to hear about the topics he or she teaches and how to teach the subject area." P4 added, "Sometimes I think the teachers feel the special education information is not important because they have to focus on the state test most of the time and the special education students may not take the test." P4 continued:

To help teachers stay informed and up to date on special education issues and other instructional areas, staff development is very important. We have in-services on the campus, teacher workdays, and cluster meetings to keep the teachers informed. Our school doesn't have a lot of information shared about special education at all the in-services but it helps when we get to hear what special education is doing. The chairpersons get to attend workshop off campus and to bring back information to share with all the other teachers.

P5 explained:

All educators need to attend an in-service or staff development training. As a chairperson, special education chairperson, my office is open to training requests. When a teacher whose having any concerns comes in to talk to about what's been going on in their class or if they don't understand what to do for a student, you have to be prepared to answer questions or just provide some training when asked about the special education program or the students in the program.

**RSQ 7:** *What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?*

P1 responded,

Principals want more people. The principals thought is, you can't just bring special education kids in with my general education teacher and leave them if it's not going to work because special education kids are behind and they need some support. A challenge is getting principals to understand that it's not that students

with disabilities can't do it, they haven't been expected to do it or made to do it.

Let's try and let's give the kids a chance and see where we can go. P1 continued:

I say, it's really going to be challenging next year because we just don't have that teachers' support to go into the classroom like we would like them to or like we would need them to. We're going to have to rely heavily on differentiated instructions and other instructional tools and strategies.

Follow-up Q: So the administrators would like to have more special education teachers?

P1 responded, "Our district and campuses need more special education help to go in and do some type of co-teach or actual in class support. We need bodies." P1 added, "The administrators have to allow money and time for training, planning and back up! They set the tone for the school and if the tone is negative toward inclusive practices then all is lost."

P2 replied, "Administrative support is the most crucial part of making inclusive practices successful. If you do not have that there cannot be a successful program."

P3 stated:

It really depended on the particular administrator whether or not he or she has placed importance on the special education program as an educational program on the whole. Staff development depended also on whether the administrator felt special education was a place to put problem students out of the way than deal with rest of the group in the school. The training in-services really depended on if the principal viewed the special education program as an important part of the

campus instruction. Principals that see it as a more important part of the campus are able to be more supportive of your program and will sit and listen when you talk about problems or needs that you have for the special education program and the student body as a whole. It just depended on the particular administrator.

What's the principal's outlook on special education? Are they just looking to place students so the students can be self-contained? Do they really want to set up a program that going to meet the needs and provide the services for students with disabilities? I've had both types of administrators.

Participant 4 explained:

The administrators are getting better accepting students with disabilities in the general education setting. The administrators really have no choice. My administrator takes the time to listen to the concerns and plans for our students. Suggestions are made to help me work with the general education staff. I believe the administrator care but there is a lot going on to run a school. Principals just want what is best for all the students. In the end, they don't want their test scores affected in a negative way.

Participant 5 responded:

The principal is usually not involved. The assistant principal is the administrator of our program. The assistant principal is usually very supportive and tries to attend all ARD meeting to stay up on what is done for the kids in the special

education department. If I have a real problem with a student or a teacher, the administrator is usually very supportive.

**RSQ 8:** *What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?*

P1 responded, "I feel like if you give the kids a chance and let them know the expectations teachers will get a lot more out of them." P1 added:

For so many years the schools have had special education students in self-contained rooms and pullout rooms and teachers haven't been expecting a lot out of the special education students and the students have given the teacher very little academics. Now the schools are in a situation where the kids need to know more than special education kids have ever needed to know and schools need to place them back in that general education classroom to receive instruction. No longer do we have the SDAA modified state test that we can give to special education students.

P1 continued, "Schools have TAKS and STARS as state test and students with disabilities need to be exposed to the curriculum to be prepared for the tests." P1 added, "So, administrators and teachers have to shift the paradigm to inclusion." P1 stated, "My perception is schools will get the most student achievement if the students are in the general education classroom." P1 continued, "As far socialization issues, the students won't be stigmatized by being pulled out. Kids can be cruel, especially the older they get." P1 added, "The older kids get, the more they realize what's going on and some kids

will rebel. You know they don't want to go to Ms. So and So's class." P1 reported, "I use to work at the high school and this guy was so upset. His girlfriend found out he was going to the special education room and he came to me to get the class changed." P1 added, "His girlfriend didn't know the student was a special education student until she saw him going into the special education teacher's room. The student's girlfriend knew that teacher was a special education teacher." P1 asserted, "Pulling the student out of general education classes can have a negative impact on their socialization skills at school." P1 continued:

The more students with disabilities are with their general education peers I feel, the better the students are socially. There are students who can't function in a general education room but I believe that population is much smaller than what we know. The population of students that can't function socially in a general education class should be a small, small percent. If the state has a 3% cap on the district's special education population taking the alternative test, then why do we have 6 or 7 percent taking the alternative tests? You know, we have to change our way of thinking.

P2 responded:

In our campus's early years of co-teaching we found that the students in co-teach Social Studies were advancing academically, 2 to 3 years each year in the subject. Students who were behavior problems in the resource room were not in general

education. This was not 100% across the board but it sure made us notice and believe what we were doing was good for kids.

P3 responded:

Students are glad to be in that general education class. Many times, unfortunately they'll sit and pretend to be able to read a text or pretend to be able to do the lesson or they'll even pretend to be bored. Some students will sit quietly and not do anything, or do a minimum. Some students try to find someone to copy from. The inclusion teacher is an important part of the students' success to help get the students get started and to break the lesson down for them. I find that most special education students who are included in general education classes have a little sixth sense to know to be as kind of quiet and hidden as possible.

P3 added, "I think they socialize pretty well. If they're in with people they know, general education students who are friends of theirs, then they sit by them and they kind of socialize in their own little way." P3 responded, "The special education students are not usually the ones causing a lot of problems in the general education class." Lastly, P3 explained, "I think they're happy to be back in general education classes and not in little pull-out groups or special education classes. I think the students with disabilities are happy to get back into the general education classes."

P4 replied:

The academic achievement of the special education kids depends a lot on the special education and general education teachers working together. When the



chairpersons help the general education staff, most of the time the outcome favors of the student. The teachers want to do a good job in the classroom but sometimes teachers don't understand what to do to help the special education students or don't have the time help the student with an assignment. The academic modifications are important when the teachers need instructional help. The students can do better when the teachers use instructional modification strategies. When the students feel their class work can be done, usually the behavior is better. Students with disabilities will socialize better in the class and not cause problems when they can do the class work.

P5 replied, "I think our campus has some more work to do to get the students where they need to be with academics. The state tests and accountability guidelines adds pressure on the teachers to do a good job." P5 continued, "If the students are exposed to the curriculum and the IEP is used to help the students with their academics, I think the students can do better than anyone expects. Teachers just have to give more students with disabilities a chance to do the work with the general education teacher." P5 added, "The students' behavior usually changes in the regular education class. Most of the students want to stay in the regular class to be with their friends." P5 added, "Special education students will behavior better most of the time to stay in the regular class. Our campus should do more to help the students with disabilities improve academics and behavior to remain in the regular class."

### **Theme 1: Staff Development and Teacher Training**

The theme categories derived from the research questions relating to leadership experiences to promote inclusion of students with disabilities generated codes from several of the sub research questions. The theme of staff development for inclusion was referenced by several participants.

P1 responded:

The people need to be informed and teachers need to understand the reasons behind the decisions that are made. The decision was made to promote inclusion and chairpersons had to go out and explain and equip them with the necessary tools and strategies to work with the students in the general education classroom. My role is to give the teachers information and the tools necessary to educate the students in the classroom and be successful educating students.

P2 answered, "Teacher training is a must." If the teachers have adequate training and a place to go for help, I find the teachers are very receptive to inclusion."

P3 stated, "I give a little in-service to help those teachers work with the general education teachers and get the general education teachers to understand what the inclusion teachers were there to do." P3 also made reference to (a) "observe how best a chairperson could use their skills and talents;" (b) "work with teachers and be as unobtrusive as possible;" and (c) "be available for teachers in the chairperson's office."

Lastly, P3 stated:

The special education staff tried to do a small type of program that meets with the needs of the students as well as of the teachers in the class to find out how the special education staff could best help the teachers.” I found that all participants reflected on the importance of staff development and teacher training to promote inclusion for students with disabilities.

## **Theme 2: Student Placement**

All of the participants acknowledge the importance of placement decisions and socialization issues for students with disabilities in general education classes.

P1 stated, “I believe [it] is very significant and we need to keep them in that general education curriculum so they can be exposed to the full range of skills, objectives and etc.” P1 continued, “I find that it’s educating. We have to educate and guide the staff on how to make the most appropriate decision look at all your pieces of data. We have to make the decision based on the data.”

P 2, P3, P4, and P5 acknowledged the ARD committee’s role in determining the best placement for the students with disabilities. P2 stated the placement decision as the role of the Admission, Dismissal, and Review (ARD) committee, “ARD committees have always been accepting of the inclusive setting at my school.” P2 stated, “ARD committee decisions took precedence over all, almost always”. P3 also talked about the ARD process as a medium to the decision making for placement of students with disabilities.

P3 responded:

To be able to attend the ARD meeting, being able to communicate with the general education teachers and the special education teachers and other people who know of the students and the students needs, being able to discuss as a group how we felt we could to service those students and whether they could best be serviced in an inclusion type situation or maybe one that was more restrictive.

P3 added, “The sharing in discussion of course helped the decision-making. The overall total discussion of course contributed to the final decision-making.” P4 added, “All members [ARD] have their input in the placement decision.” P5 explained, “It is so important to get the students into the class where they can do their best.”

P2 also shared strong feeling about decisions made for placement of students with disabilities when commenting, “I have not waived about how I feel about inclusion but I still feel there must be a continuum of services for those that continue to struggle.” P2 reported, “It is very apparent that students with disabilities need a placement to help build academic skills and get the students ready for inclusion.” P3 stated that there was not always a level of personal satisfaction with the conclusion of the ARD committee decision making process for placement of students in general education but acknowledged, “I understand that the placement decision is based on the consensus of the group.” P5 responded that students with disabilities are kept in the LRE based on the ARD committee decision.

### **Theme 3: Socialization Issues**

When talking about socialization, the response from P1 was “As far socialization issues, the students won’t be stigmatized by being pulled out. Kids can be cruel, especially the older they get. P1 reported that pulling a special education student out of the general education class can have a negative impact on their socialization skills at school. P1 added, “The more they are with their general education peers I feel, the better they are.” P2 and P4 shared common views on providing the students positive role models both behaviorally and academically in the LRE. Participant 4 stated, “I think it is important to have the special education student in the general education class because they get to spend more time with students not like them. They have role models to follow and learn from.” P5 stated:

The students behavior usually changes when the go into the regular class. Most of the students want to stay in the regular class to be with their friends. Students with disabilities will behave better most of the time to stay in the regular class.

P3, interestingly; mentioned how placement and socialization of students with disabilities may be impacted by general education teachers depending on experience or training in working with students with disabilities.

P3 stated:

Well depending on what the needs of the students were, where the students are placed, especially with a teacher who had any significant amount of experience

working with students with a particular disability. I think LRE placement is impacted a lot.

#### **Theme 4: Student Achievement**

No adverse effects are reported on student academic achievement of students with disabilities or their peers in general education classes (Kalambouka et al., 2007, p. 367). P1 stated, “We need to keep them in that general education curriculum so they can be exposed to the full range of skills, objectives and etc.” P2 replied, “In the general education students are introduced to the general education curriculum.” When referring to the experience level of the teachers, P3 responded, “I think the students would be helped more working with professionals trained in servicing them for their needs.” P4 asserted, “They are exposed to more of the general education curriculum and they are better prepared for the state test.” Lastly, P5 added, “I think our campus has some more work to do to get the students where they need to be with academics. The state tests and accountability puts a lot of pressure on the teachers to do a good job.” P5 added, “If the students are exposed to the curriculum and the IEP is used to help the students with their academics, I think the students can do better than anyone expects.”

#### **Theme 5: Teacher Collaboration**

According to Danielson (2006), exercising leadership usually involves working with colleagues to discuss an issue and create a workable plan address it (p. 133). The skill of collaboration is an important factor toward a teacher leader’s success. All of the participants understood that teachers must understand collaboration to improve the

learning outcome among students. “Collaboration is good and positive, collaboration changes mindsets; teachers can exchange ideas,” responded P1. According to P1, “Collaboration helps the general education teachers grow in the area of educating special education students.” P1 reported, “Collaboration allows students to achieve a better education when the two collaborate because they can learn from each other and figure out a way to help the students in the most positive way for the student to be successful.”

P2 stated, “Collaboration is a powerful thing! Being a part of the leadership team of the school helps you communicate with the general education staff and makes them feel comfortable. Collaboration let’s teachers know there is help.” P3 shared, “I think collaboration is a great impact. Any kind of open discussion is actually comfort to the general education teachers.... Any kind of open discussion is actually comfort to the general education teachers.” P4 stated, “The teachers can share their ideas, get new ways to teach a lesson or even try a new way to teach a lesson.”

### **Theme 6: Mental Awareness and Leadership Vision**

Senge’s (1990) concept of mental awareness and personal mastery suggests that leaders have a sense of purpose to meet goals and are able to see and connect their vision to others around them. Leaders maintain an awareness of how the world works. “I think some mindsets have changed a little bit” was the response from P1. P1 continued, “The buy in increased; has the buy in increased to a degree I would like no, but the buy in has increased some.” P1 also stated the administrators wanted “more people” to work with general education teachers in an inclusive classroom. P 4

expressed the need to help the teachers get more information to become more understanding and accepting of students with disabilities. When asked about her experiences, P2 acknowledge early acceptance in the instructional program to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

P2 continued:

To do inclusion right it takes all administrators, especially the principal, to be behind the concept. Administrators too must believe that inclusion will work and that when a teacher walks in that door the teacher is there for all kids. I did my best throughout the years to keep inclusion as big a part of the school program. My kids mattered! Administrative support is the most crucial part of making inclusive practices successful. If you do not have the administrative support, there cannot be a successful program. The administrators have to allow money and time for training, planning and back up and much, much more.

Administrators set the tone for the school and if the tone is negative toward having inclusive practices then all is lost.

According to P3, “The greatest problem seems to be is getting the general education teacher to not feel intruded upon, but to welcome the inclusion teacher.” P3 reported, “To understand that it could be co-teaching in a class, and to see how the inclusion teacher could help in the class as a whole and help to include those students. The vision, according to P3, was to see how receptive the general education teachers were to inclusion. P 3 continued:



I sat down with my staff of special education teachers that worked as an inclusion teacher and talked to them about some of the things I had observed and some of the ways I felt they could best use their skills and talents to work with the general education teachers and be as unobtrusive as possible. Then, there would be a comfortable situation for everyone. The vision for special education really depended on the particular administrator; whether or not the importance was placed on the special education program as an educational program.

Administrators that see special education service as an important part of the campus are able to be more supportive of your program and will sit and listen when you talk to the administrator about problems or needs that you experience.

P4 replied, “The academic achievement of the special education kids depends a lot on the special education and general education teachers working together. When we help the general education most of the time the outcome is in the favor of the student.” P4 also stated, “I would like to see the general education teachers get more information on inclusion to help them understand and be more accepting to our students.

P5 responded:

I think we have some more to do to get the students where they need to be with academics. The state tests and accountability puts a lot of pressure on the teachers to do a good job. If the students are exposed to the curriculum and the IEP is used to help students with their academics, I think the student do better that

anyone expects. We just have to give more of students a chance to do the work with the general education teacher.

An analysis of the participants' common emergent code responses addressing the theme category is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Analysis of common theme code responses by each participant(P)*

Thematic category	P1 code response	P2 code response	P3 code response	P4 code response	P5 code response
Staff development	Informs and teaches	Informs and teaches	Informs and teaches		Informs and teaches
Placement decision	ARD decision	ARD decision	ARD decision	ARD decision	
Socialization issues		Student behavior	Student behavior	Student behavior	Student behavior
Student achievement		Teacher and classroom	Teacher and classroom		Teacher and classroom
Teacher collaboration		Suggestions and support	Suggestions and support	Suggestions and support	
Awareness and vision	Administrator support	Administrator support	Administrator support		

Note: P = Participant

### **Discrepant Data**

The findings of this study were not opposed by discrepant case analysis (Merriam & Associates, 2002, pp. 26-27). The study was conducted and the participants were consulted for clarification of their responses. Discrepant data did not emerge to

contradict the overall findings (Hatch, 2002, p. 157). Because, emergent codes were identified based on each research supquestion, excerpts of the participants' responses fit mostly into the theme categories assigned (Hatch, 2002, p.19). The responses were coded as they related to each theme (Hatch, 2002, p. 157). The Salient data strongly supported the relationship of the themes and codes.

### **Evidence of Quality**

I utilized the triangulation process to collect data. Data were collected from individual interviews. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and presented back to the participants for a review. The participants reviewed their interview transcripts. Participants were asked to reread their interviews, clarify transcribed statements, and add comments. I also had a brief follow-up discussion with each participant about their interviews and the transcriptions to insure that I understood the information they discussed. I used member checking to ensure all data were accurate. Additionally, the results identified from the data were shared with other district administrators who were familiar with the schools, the special education program in the district, and the delivery of instructional services for students with disabilities.

### **Summary**

In section 4, I presented the findings to answer the research question on leadership experiences of chairperson for students with disabilities. I recognize that the respondents provided a reflection on leadership experiences as chairpersons for students with disabilities. Open coding fractured the data to make a connection between a category

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Merriam, pp. 148-149). Each participant was able to explain events, feelings, and concerns on past and current events (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). In section 5, I will discuss the findings, provide concluding statements, and recommendations for further research based on this case study.

## Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Discussion**

This research was conducted to investigate the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education services in promoting the LRE placement of students with disabilities in middle school. In section 4, the participants' responses were presented for data analysis. This section will provide synthesize the results of the responses and data analysis to form conclusions and recommendations for further research. A review of the research problem and leadership concepts are discussed also.

The leadership performances of the participants varied according to the number of years participants had been a teacher leader or chairperson for students with disabilities. The findings reveal the impact of the chairpersons' leadership experiences on the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE. In this section, I will present an overview of the research problem; summarize the findings, and present recommendations for future research.

### **Review of the Problem**

I explored the problem of placing students with disabilities in general education, as evidenced by a state report on LRE placement ratio results. NCLB and changes to the IDEIA required that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and be educated in the LRE (Smith et al., 2010, p. 27). Any misunderstanding or misinformation about the LRE placement for inclusiveness appeared to be based on the general educator's (a) level of experience in working with students

with disabilities or (b) attitude toward supporting the inclusion efforts of the chairperson for special education services. Chairpersons in many urban public schools struggle to share the responsibility of promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities. Danielson (2006) wrote that teacher leaders can make a substantial contribution to a school's mission to educate all children (p.125). Improved preparation for highly trained special education teachers—those who are knowledgeable in the content areas as well as in students' learning styles—ensures that they have the versatility to implement new ideas and to discuss LRE issues. To address the LRE placement ratio, factors that inhibit the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE, for example, conventional norms and community factors require examination. The findings showed that chairpersons for special education services have relatively strong views on promoting inclusion for students with disabilities and use their leadership practices to create a supportive environment for placing them in the LRE.

Research-based evidence on Senge's (1990) five disciplines of a learning organization supported this study. The five disciplines include: (a) systems thinking, (b) personal mastery, (c) mental models, (d) building shared vision, and (e) team learning (Smith, pp. 6-9). Systems thinking represents the decentralization of leadership that is found in many K -12 school districts, today. Chairperson as campus leaders are allowed the opportunity to have input in the organizational program they represent. Another concept, transformational leadership, addresses the focus a leader must have to increase the performance outcome and the level in which educators as followers extend their

leadership abilities to instruct students with disabilities in general education. The chairpersons as transformational leaders build on the experiences of their students as they direct their own leadership activities in ways that involve all instructional members of the school to address the LRE placement issues (Lindsey et al., 2005, p. 21). To become effective transformational leaders, chairpersons for special education have the responsibility to focus on and manage the instructional needs of students with disabilities at their campus. A summary of the research subquestions to address the conceptual themes are reviewed next.

### **Leadership Experiences**

Research subquestion 1 elicited responses that expressed the personal commitment of the instructional leader to achieve the goal of placement for students with disabilities in general education classes. A primary role of the team leader is instructional leadership (Gabriel, 2005, p. 125).

Each participant offered responses to support their ability to act as an instructional resource for support to general education teachers of students with disabilities in the LRE. Their leadership experiences allowed them to schedule students, visit classrooms, collaborate with teachers, and provide training on special education issues to expand the LRE placement of student with disabilities. All participants were generally concerned for upholding the efficacy of the LRE placement based on situational perceptions of the campus administrator or the general education teacher. The leadership experiences shared by the participants reflected the practices, level of support and resourcefulness as

leaders for the general education teachers needing an encouraging environment to educate students with disabilities placed in the LRE.

### **Student Placement and Decision Making**

Research subquestions 2 and subquestion 4 addressed student placement and decision making, respectively. The understanding of the LRE placement of students with disabilities differs among the general educators. According to Smith et al. (2010) many general education teachers already instruct students with disabilities along with their nondisabled peers (p. 29). Twenty percent of the participants referred to the ARD committee as the deciding factor for decision-making on placement of students with disabilities. The ARD committee collectively discusses and review instructional data presented to determine the best placement for the student. P2 felt the placement decision was not always acceptable, but acknowledge the “consensus” of the committee was final. A significant finding was the strong focus on both the student placement and the instructional support to the general education teachers in the process of implementing an inclusive program that would benefit the students with disabilities in the LRE. It is suggested that the interpretation of the state data results of the LRE ratio become an essential part of the accountability discussion for the site administrator and the instructional staff to address LRE placement of students with disabilities. The availability of instructional placement data is often aligned with the efforts to promote inclusion of students with disabilities. Special education colleagues must work together with data driven assessments to engage the students in the LRE instructional community.



All participants provided responses to support the need for better knowledge of the LRE placement by general education teachers and the campus level administrator. Therefore, it may be concluded that any reflections on and concerns for the general education teacher working with students with disabilities in the LRE may have a subconscious and negative impact on the decision-making process to get more students in the LRE. Understandably, having a negative impact on placement of students with disabilities at the campus level could result in a district level LRE placement ratio that exceeds the state LRE ratio. Engaging the general education staff in quality staff development and in-service training on strategies such as co-teaching and collaboration could aid the LRE decision-making process. Regarding co-teaching, Ploessi et al. (2010) wrote, “As increasing numbers of students with disabilities are taught in general education classrooms, co-teaching has become an established method of special education service provision” (p. 158). Utilizing the strengths of both the special education teacher and the general education teacher in the classroom can deeply benefit the students and the teachers involved (Ploessi, 2010, p. 158).

### **Leadership Vision**

Research subquestion 3 asked about leadership vision on LRE placement for students with disabilities. Defining the vision for LRE placement of students with disabilities gives the chairperson a start on how to address the dilemma (Phelps, 2008, p. 120) of LRE placement on the campus. Administrators demonstrating a positive vision for LRE placement would be an asset to the chairperson promoting inclusion of students

with disabilities. School administrators must the mental mastery to meet the needs for all students and demonstrate leadership skills to meet the needs of all students (Kiriakidis, 2011). In my view, all participants appeared to utilize a transformational leadership style. Developing a different or new vision for thoughts and perceptions about including students with disabilities in the LRE can begin to improve the social and academic outcomes of students and teachers. I believe that the vision and leadership skills of the school administrator lends credence to the chairperson to improve staff development the general education staff and improve collaboration for instructional strategies to students with disabilities in the LRE. Administrators should envision longer and more frequent quality campus level staff development and on-site teacher training sessions for compliance issues on special education service (Kiriakidis, 2011). The increase time for training sessions on special education issues will address the concern of short or limited informational sessions stated by P3. Understandably it is important for administrators to create and demonstrate a positive vision in promoting inclusion for academic and social success of the students. Administrators must begin to prepare themselves for what they must experience in program changes for students with disabilities. Administrators must encourage effective leadership efforts and a review of all program data of all programs to issues impacting instruction of all students. An interpretation on leadership experiences of the chairpersons reveals their commitment to place and educate students with disabilities in the LRE.

In a learning organization, educators should have the ability to improve their opportunities to create the learning that people envision (Kiriakidis, 2011). When working to foster shared mental models among members the leaders' own mental model outlines their analysis of the situation and their vision (O'Connell et al., 2011, pp. 103-105). In each case the chairperson's leadership role was considered necessary to create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities on the campus. Senge (2005) wrote, "Creativity can be brought into our lives by 'paying attention to it' and by building capacity to suspend the judgment that arise in our mind ("You can't do that") to limit creativity (p. 31).

### **Collaboration and Staff Development**

Collaboration and staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities was addressed in research subquestions 5 and subquestion 6. Collaboration and staff development together provide the instructional staff with education and practical skills to complement the instructional process already in place for the general education teacher. Collaboration allows the leader to direct the followers to new levels of understanding and a willingness to try something new (Mamlin, 1999, p. 47). Collaboration for the inclusion process is a component that offers general educators and special educators the chance to "exchange ideas" according to P 1 and "to make them feel comfortable" as stated by P 3. Co-teaching helps to provide a balance in collaboration on content and process to deliver instructional services to students with disabilities (Wilson, 2008, p. 240). The teaching experience can be enriched in the inclusive setting while helping to

manage the challenges of instruction in the general education setting (Chmiliar, 2009, p. 81).

Teacher attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities may be related to the intensity of the professional development. When teacher are engaged in special education in-services more often or for longer periods of time, the link between having more positive feeling about students with disabilities and the level of instruction for the students in the LRE is likely to improve (Ernst, 2009, p. 318). Staff development and in-service training can help teacher maximize the resources available for instruction to students with disabilities in the LRE (p. 319). Five out of five participants agreed that collaboration and staff development are essential sessions to expose teachers to inclusion issues for students with disabilities.

### **Administrative Support**

Research subquestion 7 guided the responses on administrative support for the leadership of the chairperson for students with disabilities. Reeves (2008) wrote that schools are hierarchical organizations often having clear lines of authority and the limitations of hierarchy in leadership may be a barrier to the organizational change (p. 60). To add value to teacher leadership, there must be an investment in training administrators to delegate and network for organizational change. All participants found value in the support of the administration on their campus. Differences in personalities and the uncertainty of some administrators to go forward with inclusion efforts was not recognized as a barrier to developing an effective inclusion program on the individual

campuses. Based on the responses of the participants, the administration of special education services in public schools is shared surprisingly by the building leaders (Crockett, 2009, p. 55). The leadership of the chairperson for special education cannot emerge as successful if there is administrative reluctance or an atmosphere of fear (Danielson, 2006, p. 129) in placing students with disabilities in the LRE.

### **Student Achievement and Socialization**

To address research subquestion 8, the participants discussed student achievement but only to the extent that the students and general education teacher receive the instructional support they need in the general education class. Willis (2007) wrote, “The principal goal for all students is to achievement their own highest level of success in supportive classrooms, taught by teachers who give them the tools to overcome obstacles and learn to their fullest potential” (p. 16). Experience in providing general education teacher support weighs heavily on the chairpersons as leaders for students with disabilities. P1 mentioned that all students today are expected to meet state academic standards within the realm of the student’s academic abilities. Teachers are expected to teach to all students’ level of learning by accessing staff development and professional growth in areas focusing on multiple learning style or brain-based learning strategies (Kiriakidis, 2011).

In general, socialization of students with disabilities in the general education setting did do appear to pose a problem for the teachers or their nondisabled peers. All

participants felt the student with disabilities preferred to be in the general education class to socialize and not feel isolated from the regular learning community.

### **Recommendations for Further Action**

Chairpersons for special education services should recognize and address issues impacting the LRE placement of students with disabilities in order to strive toward a more inclusive learning community. The findings will incorporate improved staff development and teacher support for the chairpersons responsible for supporting LRE instruction to students with disabilities. The following recommendations are for the stakeholders at the research site:

1. Chairpersons and their administrator should increase their professional knowledge of LRE guidelines.
2. Chairpersons should use the findings of this study to review opportunities to use that increase and improve staff development and training on inclusive instruction.
3. Chairpersons and their site administrator should foster collaboration between general education and special education teacher to increase co-teaching activities in general education classes.
4. Chairpersons should encourage the school administrator to allow more time during campus faculty meeting or on inservice training days to address misunderstandings and misinformation on special education guidelines.

5. Chairpersons should present themselves to colleagues as the knowledgeable resource for instructional support to educate students with students with disabilities in the LRE.
6. Chairpersons should use the findings of this study to consider a future study that examines how their leadership role impacts instructional service to students with disabilities.

The findings for this study are significant for teachers and campus administrator where inclusive instruction is a challenge. The research findings provide a description of the chairpersons' leadership experiences for special education service to address the LRE placement. Today, all students are expected to meet state academic standards within the realm of the student's academic abilities. When necessary, teachers are expected to teach to all student levels of learning using modifications and accommodations. The recommendations may be used design staff development and professional growth sessions in areas that focus on instructional strategies for multiple learning style or brain-based learning.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings provide an outcome for social change by bringing awareness to the chairperson's leadership and the impact the chairpersons leadership may have on the LRE placement of students with disabilities. Campus chairperson's leadership role may directly impact the district needs to meet the state LRE placement ratio. Therefore, the findings of this study on the middle school chairperson's leadership experience to

promote LRE placement may be used by other chairpersons and educators to improve staff development, instructional collaboration, and co-teaching strategies for inclusiveness in the K-12 learning environment. Focusing on leadership for service to students with disabilities, improving the academic and social impact of the LRE placement for students with disabilities in K- 12 public school has the potential to increase the focus to improve inclusiveness of students with disabilities in the community at large.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

In this section, I will share my experience with this research process. I will discuss any bias that may have surfaced while conducting this research. I will also reflect on any influence this research may have had on the participants or me.

I selected this research because of my previous experience as an instructional leader for special education services who provided assistance to chairpersons for students with disabilities. Many middle school chairpersons have a special education population that exceeds 100 students and too often for the middle school chairpersons for special education services the leadership role is centered around “office work” to manage the special education “paperwork” required by the state. Because the state monitors the instructional placement of students with disabilities in the LRE, I was driven to find out about the chairperson’s experience to manage the instructional placement of students with disabilities and to provide instructional support the teachers serving students with disabilities. I wanted to see a connection between district’s noncompliant LRE



placement results and the instructional leadership experience of the chairperson for special education service. Listening to the participants, I found the responses to be genuine and the focus of the responses represented the instructional concerns of the chairpersons. Responses did not generate any statements about the paperwork task the middle school chairperson performs. I was pleased to find that the chairpersons viewed themselves as a teacher with a strong focus on student success and instructional support.

I anticipated that conducting this research would be a challenge. The interview process proved to be the most challenging because it was the end of the school year that the participants were notified of the research. Many participants stated they were too busy performing school closure tasks to make time to conduct an interview. I found that the interview participants who agreed to share their experiences with me were excited to talk about their role to assist students with disabilities in the LRE. I have known two of the participants for over 10 years and not seen them in over 4 years. This research created a renewed acquaintance with the two participants.

Learning the research process was interesting and the process allowed me to find out how the chairperson viewed their experiences as leaders on school campus. Each case is a reflection on the individual participant's campus. I believe that any personal bias or preconceived ideas or values I may have had regarding the participants' leadership role and efforts to promote inclusion in their individual campus did not impact the outcome of the findings. I have had no personal authority over any participant so it was impressive to find that the participant seemed enthusiastic about the research and

provided responses to the questions with a great degree of comfort. The interview process made me aware of the level of communication between two people. Conducting this research allowed me to use my people skills to open a dialogue. Learning the interview process has taught me to construct questions to derive responses that generate rich details shared in a response. I believe qualitative research is a design I feel capable to continue to do.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Scholars should replicate this study by collecting data from chairpersons in other secondary schools and school districts where an increasingly diverse population of students with disabilities impact the LRE placement decisions. Further research could include a mix-method study that could be beneficial improving LRE placement of students with disabilities in K-12 public schools throughout the state. Additional research could be done to address leadership experiences for students with disabilities in school districts throughout the United States.

### **Conclusion**

This research was intended to explore and review the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education services to promote inclusion of students with disabilities in the LRE. For the purpose of understanding federal and state guidelines that support the LRE placement of students with disabilities, each case provides an insight into the leadership activity for teacher support, staff development, collaboration for-teaching issues, and student success issues regarding placement in the LRE. Any

reflections on and concerns for the general education teacher working with students with disabilities in the LRE may have a subconscious and negative impact on the decision-making to place more students with disabilities in the LRE. Understandably, having a negative impact on placement of students with disabilities at the campus level could result in a district level LRE placement ratio that exceeds the state LRE ratio. This study was intended to gain insight in the leadership experiences of chairpersons for special education in middle schools. The research provides information that is relevant for continued social change to promote inclusion. The findings of this study are significant for teachers and campus administration where the LRE process for inclusive instruction is hard fought. The findings provide a description of the chairperson's leadership experiences for special education service to address the LRE placement. Therefore, I challenge the site leaders to further explore the leadership experiences of special education chairpersons and the placement issues they encounter for students with disabilities in the LRE.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

This interview will be conducted with the current or former campus chairpersons for special education services.

Research Question: How do leadership experiences of chairpersons of special education impact their decision-making for instructional placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

Subquestions:

1. What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

Opportunities to experience leadership include teacher responsibilities such as curriculum direction, providing leadership in pedagogy, assessment, and school-community relations (Miller et al., 2006). Miller et al (2006) interviewed eighteen early career teachers to discuss their experiences of leadership in rural schools (p. 31). Four categories that emerged from the transcribed data were Leadership Opportunities, Responsibilities, the Personal and the Professional, and Fishbowl. The categories and quotes from the participants constructed an understanding of the opportunities and challenges accompanying early career experiences of leadership roles (p. 31). Burstein et al. (2004) described a change model that was developed over 3 years in two southern California school districts to promote inclusive practices. The change process and the impact of related district and site activities through interviews with general and special educators, administrators, and parents were documented (Burstein et al., 2004). The

finding showed that all sites moved toward inclusive practices with reported benefits for students with disabilities, the general education student population, and educational practices of general and special educators. Burstein et al. (2004) indicated that the percentage of students with disabilities educated in general education has risen steadily (p. 105).

2. How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

Doran (2008) reported that students with disabilities benefit from instruction in the general education classroom due to the support of the nondisabled students. Students with disabilities benefit from instruction in the general education setting due to the social learning situations that arise (Vygotsky, 1962). In the past, many students with disabilities were placed in separate classes for educational instruction which limited their ability to participate with the larger group of heterogeneous community where they live and work throughout their lives. These students missed out on the benefits of having long-term social relationships with their classmates did not also have severe disabilities (Willis, 2007). The thrust of policy is that all children, including those with the most severe disabilities, should enter school with an assured right to placement in the regular classroom (Porter, 1996). In a research study, Doran (2008) concluded that while students with disabilities in the inclusion setting did not score as high as their nondisabled peers, they did score higher than their counterparts in pullout classes. Doran (2008) also

reported that students with disabilities benefit from instruction in the general education classroom due to the support of the nondisabled students.

3. What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

O'Connell, et al. (2011) shares the following authors' definitions of vision descriptions of how vision supports the development of an organization. The suggestions include, "an agenda (Kotter, 1982), a map for members to follow (Barge, 1994), and an image of what needs to be achieved (Baum et al., 1998). It may include both long-term, future-oriented goals and emotional appeals embedded in a set of values (Collins, 2006; Frese, Beigel, & Schoenborn, 2003); it is focused on change (van der Helm, 2009) and depicts a future that is credible, realistic, attractive, inspiring, and better than the status quo (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Nanus & Dobbs, 1999)" (O'Connell et al., 2011, p.105). There must be a shared understanding of the vision and a commitment to improving achievement for students (Hawley, 2007).

4. How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

Emira (2010) explored leadership is defined by Egyptian teachers and senior teachers to determine whether the length of teaching experience has an effect on their views. The research also explores the perspective between teacher leadership and

decision-making. The key finding shows a link between leadership and decision-making and the length of experience does not have a major impact on their views.

5. How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

Sayeski (2009) reported that the role of special educator has changed so that they are more accountable, more specialized, and more collaborative (Turnbull, 2005; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). Special educators must define the principles and practices of the field and then determine how those principles can be translated into collaborative partnerships with general educators (Sayeski, 2009, p. 38). Villa et al. (2005) reported that six best practices emerged from interviews with inclusive educators: administrative support, ongoing professional development, collaboration, communication, instructional responsiveness, and expanded authentic assessment approaches in a field-based study of a high school (Villa, 2005, p. 33).

6. How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

Special education leaders have indicated that they do not feel adequately prepared in some areas related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based settings (Voltz & Collins, 2010). As leaders, special educators need new skills in order to provide the vision and leadership necessary to guide educators in both general education

and special education to deliver instruction that meets the needs of students with disabilities. According to Voltz and Collins, the findings of researchers such as Defur (2002), Goldstein (2004), Wigle and Wilcox (2002), and Carlson et al. (2002), new knowledge and skills acquired by special education administrators will elevate the challenge of facilitating the successful inclusion of diverse students with disabilities in standards-based classrooms (Voltz & Wilcox, p. 70-72).

7. What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

According to Schmoker (2006), schools won't improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teacher chairpersons in a way to meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality. Administrators play a significant role by providing leadership that translates into academic success. Providing high quality professional development opportunities for teachers is one way to improve instructional practices (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010, p. 1). The results of this study are intended to impress upon educators the attitude toward leadership, effective leadership skills, and collaboration efforts among the instructional staff that factor into the placement of students with disabilities in the general education.

What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

In a study conducted by Ruijs et al. (2009), the relation between inclusive education and academic achievement and socio-emotional functioning of students

without special education needs revealed no differences for academic achievement in inclusive and non-inclusive classes. The sample included 27,745 students without special education needs in Dutch primary education. Some differences for socio-emotional functioning were found, but the significance of the differences was unclear due to the small effect size. The study's conclusion states that arguments against inclusive education assume there are adverse effects on typical students when the research finding addressed hardly any differences. This study will strengthen the evidence in support of inclusive education.



## Appendix B: Confidentially Agreement

During this research I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, lend, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Electronic signature on file

Date: May 5, 2011

## Appendix C: Data Use Agreement

This Data Use Agreement, effective as of 2011, is entered into by and between the researcher and the independent school district. The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set (“LDS”) for use in research in accord with the HIPAA Regulations.

1. Definitions. Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the “HIPAA Regulations” codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.
2. Preparation of the LDS. XYZ School District shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA Regulations
3. Data Fields in the LDS. No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS). In preparing the LDS, XYZ School District shall include the data fields specified as follows, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research: Student’s Name and Contact Information.
4. Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Data Recipient agrees to:
  - a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;
  - b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
  - c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
  - d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and
  - e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.
5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.
6. Term and Termination.
  - a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.
  - b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.
  - c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.

- d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.
- e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.
7. Miscellaneous.
- a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.
- b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.
- c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.
- d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.
- e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER

DATA RECIPIENT

Signed: ISD representative signature on file

Signed: Researcher signature on file

Print Title: Coordinator/Teacher Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Print Title: Student

## Appendix D Sample of Thematic Codes

Staff Development (SD)	Student Achievement (SA)
Student Placement (SP)	Teacher Collaboration (TC)
Socialization Issue (SI)	Mental Awareness/Vision (AV)

**Interview with Participant 1**

RSQ 1: What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

P1 responded, “My role has been just staff development and training. (SD) The people need to be informed (SD) and they need to understand the reasons behind the decisions (SD) that are made. So, the decision was made to promote inclusion and we had to go out and explain and equip them with the necessary tools and strategies to work with the students in the general education classroom. (SD) Because the fear is, ‘I don’t know what to do with them. I don’t know how to handle them.’ So our role, my role is to give them the information and the tools (SD) necessary to educate the students in the classroom and be successful at it.”

RSQ2: How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P1 responded, “I believe it is very significant (SP). Number one, we can’t just randomly pull students out of the general education classroom because they’ve been identified as a student who needs special education services. Again, my belief is once you start pulling the kids they never have the opportunity to catch up no matter how much you accelerate instruction they still have pieces missing, because again most of the time when we pull the kids, we’re pulling them because we are modifying their curriculum. Again, we don’t cover as much because we’re spending more time on skills and objectives to ensure that they master them or gain those skills. So we just don’t cover everything in the resource room and we need to keep them in that general education curriculum so they can be exposed to the full range of skills, objectives and etc. (SA) I think you know some mindsets have changed (AV) a little bit. People have begun to be a little more open to the idea of inclusion (AV). The buy in increased, has it increased to a degree I would like no, but it has increased some. (AV) So again, with education and staff development on the inclusion process, the importance is that the student deserves a chance they deserve the right to remain in the general education classroom. (SA) No longer do we live in the day where just because they would qualify for special

education services we can pull them out. Students are expected to know more, to know more than they're ever needed to know before with the standardize test, so if we are going to present our students with these test, we need to expose them to the curriculum (SE) and the best way, again ,to do that is in that general education classroom.”

RSQ3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P1 responded: “I think some mindsets have changed a little bit (AV). People have begun to be a little more open to the idea of inclusion.(AV) The buy in increased, has it increased to a degree I would like no, but it has increased some.(AV) With education and staff development on the inclusion process, the importance of inclusion is that the student deserve a chance. They deserve the right to remain in the general education classroom. (SP) No longer do we live in the day where just because they would qualify for special education services we can pull them out. Students are expected to know more (SA), to know more than they're ever needed to know before with the standardize test, so if we are going to present our students with these test, we need to expose them to the curriculum (SE) and the best way to do that is in that general education classroom.”(SP)

RSQ 4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities {in the least restrictive environment (LRE)} impacted your views of inclusion?

P1 responded, “Again, I find that it's educating. (SA) We have to educate and guide the staff on how to make the most appropriate decision look at all your pieces of data. And make an informed decision. (SP) Don't just make the same blanket decision again. “They're in special education; you need to pull them out.” Yeah, that may be what we have done for years, but we no longer live in that time. We have to make the decision based on the data (SP) because so many things depend on it. We have over representation here of the African American male. We have too many kids self-contained in the resource class. We have too many kids taking the modified test. That's because we are not making the decisions based on all pieces of data. (SP) So that is the one thing that has affected the decision making here in the district.

RSQ 5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

P1 responded, “Well when it is good and positive collaboration changes mindsets. (TC) & (AV) [It] guides them in making better decisions for the students. It helps the general education teachers grow in the area of educating special

education students. (TC) When they collaborate they can give, they can exchange ideas. Say, 'This may work, this didn't work, this may work, try it this way.' It allows students to achieve a better education (TC) when the two collaborate because again, they can learn from each other and figure out a way to help the students in the most positive way for the student to be successful."(TC)

RSQ 6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities?

P1 responded, "You know, knowledge is power. The more I know the more information I can give out for my teachers and staff to be successful; things change. (AV) There's always some new program, there's always some new state law so the more I'm informed, the better I can inform my staff (AV) and the better education the students receive and then the better the district's status will be. We're on stage 3 because of overrepresentation, too many self-contained students, so the more information I know the better decisions I can make so that the information can pass on to the principals and the teachers in order to move these kids out or provide these kids with accelerated instruction.(AV) To make sure we have the response to intervention, or instructional money so that our overall education system here in the district is up to par and that the students are receiving a quality education."

RSQ 7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

P1R responded, "They (administrators) want more people; (AV) because their idea is, you can't just bring those kids in there with my general education teacher and leave them in there if it's not going to work. They are behind and they need some support. So a challenge is getting them to understand that the person that pulled them out for so long, the person you know that babied them, shortened assignments, most of the kids, it's not that they can't do it; it's that they haven't been expected to do it or made to do it. Let's try this, let's give them a chance and see where we can go. They are just use to the old way with the mindset. It's going to take more than two years for the mindset to completely change. (AV) So we are maybe a third of the way there, we still have a long way to go, actually. It's really going to be challenging next year because we just don't have that teacher's support to go into the classroom like we would like them to or like we would need them to. (AV) P1 added, "We need more help to go in and do some type of co-teach or actual in class support, you know; bodies." (AV)

RSQ 8: What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P1 responded, "... I just feel like if you give the kids a chance and we let them know we have expectations. We'll get a lot more out of them. For so many years we've had them in these self-contained rooms and pullout rooms and we just haven't been expecting a lot out of them and they've given us very little. And actually, now we're in a, you know, we're in a situation where the kids need to know more than they've ever needed to know and they need to be in that general education classroom (SP) receiving that instruction because no longer do we have a SDAA test that we can give them, we have TAKS and STARS, so they need to be exposed. (SP) It's really no way around it. It serves no purpose to have them in the rooms taking the rooms taking the test. What are they really getting out of this? So, we got to just shift the paradigm to inclusion not because.... We'll get the most student achievement if they're in the general education classroom, that's my perception.(SA) As far socialization issues, the students won't be stigmatized (SI) by being pulled out. Kids can be cruel, especially the older they get. ['Oh you pull them out because there're dumb.'] You don't...The older kids get, the more they realize what's going on. Some kids rebel.(SI) You know they don't want to go, they don't want to go to Ms. So and So.(SI) You know, I use to work at the high school and this guy was so upset. His girlfriend found out he was going to the special education room and so when he came to me, I was a diagnostician then. 'Can I please get my schedule changed, can I please get my schedule changed?' because she didn't know he was the special education and when she saw him going to this man's room she knew he was a special education teacher. So, it's those types of things. It can have a negative impact on their socialization skills at school. (SI) So like I said, the more they are with their general education peers I feel, the better they are. (SI) Yeah, there are students who can't function in a general education room but I believe that population is much smaller than what we have .now. It should be a small, small percent. It the state has only allowed 3% taking the alternative test, then why do we have 6 or 7 percent taking the alternative tests? Yes, you know, we have to change our way of thinking." (AV)

## **Interview with Participant 2**

**RSQ 1:** What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

P2 responded, "My experience was a wonderful one. I have been at the same school for 30 years and because we were willing to accept change much earlier than the rest of the campuses we have helped a great number of students be successful (SA) because of our inclusive campuses. I have been the Department

Chair on and off during those years but have remained the chair steadily for at least the last 15 years. We were the first campus in the district, (AV) under a new special education supervisor, to open a Content Mastery Center. (AV) A few years later when the district was being audited by state education agency because middle schools were ‘self containing’ too many of our students we joined the LEA in the BISI program (Building Inclusive Schools) and opened our first co-teach classes (AV) in Social Studies and Science. Our first co-teacher later became the ‘Inclusion Coordinator’ for the entire school district. We have now, for at least five years, had co-teachers in all core areas and support facilitation (SA) (TC) as well. It is within this year that the program becomes in jeopardy as the district has cut many special education personnel.”

RSQ2: How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P2 responded, “This is very important. (SP) In the general education students are introduced to the general education curriculum. (SA) There they have positive role models both behaviorally and academically. The students do not feel isolated from their peers and self concepts soar.” (SI)

RSQ3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P2 responded, “To do inclusion right it takes all administrators, especially the principal, to be behind the concept. (AV) They too must believe that it will work and that when a teacher walks in that door they know they are there for all kids (AV). The principal makes it clear if you are not up to applying accommodations or modifications this may not be the place for you. I did my best throughout the years to keep inclusion as big a part of the school (AV) as the gifted and talented program. I was a member of the leadership team of the school and SDMC (School Decision Making Committee) had an “Inclusion Committee” which was lead by me (AV) and members were not only special education teachers. My kids mattered and everyone knew it.”(AV)

RSQ 4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities {in the least restrictive environment (LRE)} impacted your views of inclusion?

P2 responded, “ARD committees have always been accepting of the inclusive setting at my school. (SP) Because we ran into glitches in this area I was finally allowed to be the only one to do special education students’ schedules. If they needed a class they were put in the class. ARD committee decisions took precedence all almost always. (SP) I have not waived about how I feel about inclusion (AV) but I still feel there must be a continuum of services for those that



continue to struggle (SA) and it is very apparent that they need a small placement where they can help build skills to help ready them for inclusion.” (AV)

RSQ 5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

P2 responded, “Collaboration is a powerful thing! (TC) You must be a part of the leadership team of the school and to communicate with the general education on the staff to make them feel comfortable and let them know there is help when they need it. (TC) You have to be picky about who your co-teachers are and match them up with the appropriate special education counterpart. They must be accepting of the students and be willing to use inclusive practices. (AV) This is also where a helpful administration comes into play.”

RSQ 6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities?

P2R responded, “Training is a must! (SD) If the teachers have adequate training and a place they know they can go for help, I find they are very receptive to inclusion.”(SD)

RSQ 7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

P2 responded, “As I said above, administrative support is the most crucial part of making inclusive practices successful. (SD) If you do not have that there cannot be a successful program. The administrators have to allow money and time for training, planning and back up and much, much more.(AV) They set the tone for the school and if the tone is negative toward (...inaudible) inclusive practices then all is lost.”(AV)

RSQ 8: What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P2 responded, “In our early years of co-teaching we found that the students in co-teach Social Studies were advancing 2 to 3 years per year in those subjects. (SA)

Students who were behavior problems in the resource room were not in general

education. (SI) This was not 100% across the board but it sure made us notice and believe what we were doing was good for kids.”(AV)

### **Interview with Participant 3**

RSQ1 What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

P3 responded, “The leadership experiences I had was in setting up an inclusion schedule for those students, scheduling students in a general education classroom, (SP) including a coordinator at my school who helped to set up the schedules of the inclusion teachers and to go into the general education teacher’s classrooms and see what their needs were.(SD) Then to give a little in-service to help those teachers work with the general education teachers, (SD) get the general education teachers to understand what the inclusion teachers were there to do.(AV) We tried to do a small type of program that meets with the needs of the students as well as of the teachers in the class to find out how we could best help the teachers? (SD) I hope that answers it.”

RSQ2 How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P3 responded, “Well depending on what the needs of the students were, where they were placed, especially with a teacher who had any significant amount of experience working with students with those particular disability; if I understand the question, I think it is impacted a lot. (SP) I think the students would be helped more working with professionals trained in servicing them for their needs.”(SA)

Additional Q: You were talking about teachers working with a significant amount of experience, how would you describe significant, experience of the general education teacher?

P3 responded, “Well whether they have had students with special education placed in their class before, whether they have gotten in-services that would help them know how to meet the needs of the students;(SD) how to identify problems, how to modify their lessons to meet the students’ needs and still be able to meet the needs of the other general education students in the classroom. If they have had experience even being able to identify special problems these students might have in integrating into the classroom and sending them out. (AV) This would help the student be a part of the class and be able to participate more.” (SA)

RSQ3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P3 responded, “I, at first, worked as an inclusion teacher in the classroom. I visited the classroom that was the general education classroom to see how they were set up and to see how receptive the general education teachers were to inclusion.(AV) And then I sat down with my staff of special education teachers that worked as an inclusion teacher and talked to them about some of the things I had observed (TC) and some of the ways I felt they could best use their skills and talents to work with those teachers and yet be as unobtrusive as possible and yet be effective.(SD) It would be necessary to arrive on time, to be available to work with the general education students as well as the special students and to let them know about the different ways to give the general education teachers support. Are they going to be receptive or how much help they did or did not want? (AV) Sometimes what seems to be the greatest problem is getting the general education teacher to not feel intruded upon, (SD) but to welcome in the inclusion teacher and to understand that it could be a co-teaching in a class and to see how they could help in the class as a whole and help to include those students, those special students in with the general education.(SD) So there will be a comfortable situation for everyone.(SD) And I try to make myself available to any general education teacher who wanted to speak with me privately about any concerns they have.(SD) That was what I tried to do as a chairperson.”

Additional question: Your personal vision; was it to get most of the students out into the inclusive area?

P3 responded, “Those that I felt would be mature enough to handle it because many students who are learning disabled have other small problem also.(SA) It would depend on how well they would be able to work in a classroom with a larger population.”

RSQ4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

P3 responded that “being able to attend the ARD meeting helps. Being able to communicate with the general education teachers and the special education teachers and other people who know of the students and the students needs; being able to discuss as a group how we felt we could to service those students and whether they could best be serviced in an inclusion type situation or maybe one that was more restrictive.(TC) The sharing discussion of course helped the decision-making.(TC) Because it wouldn’t be possible for one person to know everything about a student. We have to know what the assessment score is and

things that people know who have worked with that student before, what do the parents have to say how do the parents feel about this. The overall total discussion of course contributed to the final decision-making.”(SP)

Additional Q: Do you find that you are satisfied with the decision –making process to get the students in inclusion?”

P3 responded, “No not always satisfied with the conclusion of the decision making process at the school but I understand it is the consensus of the group. (SP) That would be more important than...” (She stopped talking).

RSQ5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

P3 responded, “I think it is a great impact.(TC) If you can meet with the chairpersons of the English department then you can go in and not only look at the chairpersons but with several of the general education teachers that will be serving that student and if you could tell them a little about the special education program and how modifications will help,(SD) (TC) things that they can do and the real general purpose of having an inclusion teacher in with the students as well as the students; if you could kind of get them to see how relative it is; get them to understand why the teacher is there.(TC) She’s not an assistant but more of a co-teacher, and if you can answer their questions, if they have any questions, you could make them feel free to ask whatever;(SD) give them some information about the individual student, the special education students in their class, what those students needs are.(SD) I think it helps the situation quite a bit. So they can feel free to ask whatever they want to from you the chairperson in special education. If you could care to answer, their questions, you know, in a clear, concise, honest way. I think it certainly does help more than one day sending in a teacher who says I’m here to help you with a few of the students you have in your class. Sometimes they don’t even know those are special education students. You have them come in a talk about how many they have in a class and how you can help them.(TC) That teacher is going to service those students unobtrusively, and you’re going to help explain what modifications are for.(SD) I have found that helps a lot because many general education teachers don’t understand the importance of modifications and they want to avoid them and so you kind of have to explain it to them and how they can best utilize modifications without disrupting their class.(AV) Any kind of open discussion is actually comfort to the general education teachers.”(AV) (TC) “It very important to meet with your inclusion teacher before they begin their inclusion experience and to make sure they’re in the position they’re going to be and to work very hard to set up a schedule that really meets the needs. (SD) It is a very large school with a very

large population. You find sometimes that an inclusion teacher only has 15 minutes in a class and then have to go on to another teacher during that period. I found that to be a problem; to think you can help any student in 15 minutes then you have to leave and go to another class. (AV) I would have liked to have seen a better way to schedule it; to schedule those teachers to a classroom, where they'd spend at least a half an hour in the general education classroom helping those students (SD) rather than their quick little run-in, kind of sit, observe, and leave. I always thought they were more intrusive (...inaudible) coming in and looking at them then running to another class. (AV) There's a better way to set it up and that's when you have to talk with the counselors, administration, and the department heads of general education classes to get everyone to be on the same page about how we can best help these students. (AV) And that isn't always possible. It isn't always possible to get everyone on the same page." (AV)

RSQ6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

P3R responded, "If you have an administration that is open to having you do a really relative in-service for all of the teachers at the school, I think it will help quite a bit. (TC) Because I have found through my experience that many general education teacher really do not understand the importance of using modifications to not only teach the students but also to determine their grades and recognize the overall achievement in general education class. (SA) (AV) So it very important that the general education teachers spend time with the special education teachers themselves so everyone understands what the purpose if for modifications and which modifications are the most success for students.(SD) You know in a large public school, some modifications may sound good but they really are unrealistic for that particular school environment so you have to explain to them why certain modifications are given.(AV) And, they need to document that they have used them to have copies for each student. That every student isn't going to have the same modifications but the ones their meet there needs. So we give an in-service that explains all this."(SD) Everybody needs that in-service and that training, and your office as a chairperson, special education chairperson, your office really has to be open all the time so that when a teacher whose having any concerns can come in and talk to you about what's been going on in their class if they don't understand."(SD)

Additional Q: Did you find that the teachers you work with were satisfied with the type of in-service or leadership training that they got on modification or inclusion in general?

P3R responded, “No I didn’t. Overall I didn’t feel they were, were listening to us. (AV) Well some of the older teachers seem to have the attitude, [‘I’ve already heard all this before. You know just give us the modifications, we’ll move on.’] Some of those less experience teachers probably listened better because it was something new to them. And what I found is they weren’t always receptive to us because many people perceived it as just something else to add to their workday.” (AV)

Additional Q: So you say they were not always receptive?

P3R responded, “I didn’t feel they overall were always 100% staff receptive to us, (AV) because probably many of the in-services were a part of the overall school program where the teachers were being given information on a lot of other things. The focus was not on the special education program. (AV) I think if there had been separate response levels, just about dealing with special education students that there would have been greater acceptance of the program. They would have focused in on it more. (AV) But when you are talking about overall school operations and then you get a 5 minute presentation on something quick. I don’t think they listen.”

RSQ7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

P3 responded, “It really depended on the particular administrator whether or not he or she, what importance they placed on special education program as an educational program on the whole.(AV) It depended on whether the administrator felt special education was a place to put problem students out the way than deal with rest of the group in the school; however they saw it as an important part of the campus.(AV) And those that see it as a more important part of the campus are able to be more supportive of your program and will sit and listen when you talk to them about problems or needs that you have,(AV) to the student body as a whole. So it just depended on the particular administrator. (SD) What’s their outlook on special education? Are they just looking to place students so they can (...inaudible) self-contain? Do they really want to set up a program that going to meet the needs and provide the services that meet the needs of student? And I’ve had both types of administrators.”

RSQ8 What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P3 responded, “Now that’s kind of hard to answer because the LRE, the general education teachers who might be opening up their classroom for a least restrictive type interaction with general education students, how receptive are they to have special kids in their classroom?(AV) Are they willing to teach them at their level and at their pace? (AV) How well trained is your special education personnel? (AV) Because of the size of general education class they have to move a certain pace.(SA) They try to keep up their curriculum goals for general education and you have to have a good inclusion teacher to help those special students at least keep up with the minimum requirements and to (inaudible) their modified lesson.(SA) Were they able to really provide help and materials and resources to the general education teacher to help them?(TC) You know whether they were interested in those children in the regular education class; they’re not going to just come in and just sit, they’re going to move around.(SA) They’re going to interact with all the students in the class.(AV) It depends on the personnel.”(SA)

Additional Q: Are there any particular socialization issues you’d like to address?

P3 responded, “I find that most special education students who are included in general education classes have a little sixth sense to know to be as kind of quiet and hidden as possible so that the other students don’t know.(SI) You know, they’re glad to be in that general education class. So, Many times, unfortunately they’ll sit and pretend to be able to read a text or pretend to be able to do the lesson or they’ll even pretend to be bored, (SI)[that’s why I’m not doing it, not because I cannot read the material but because it’s just boring] (...inaudible). So, they’ll sit quietly and not do anything, or do a minimum or try to find someone to copy from. (SI) So it is important to have that inclusion teacher in to help get them started and break the lesson down for them. So I think they socialize pretty well.(SI) If they’re in with people that they know, general education students who are friends of theirs then they sit by them and they are kind of socialize in their own little way(SI)... They’re not usually the one causing a lot of problems in the general (SI) education class. I think they’re happy to be back in, especially if they’ve been out in little groups, special education grouped classes.(AV) I think they are happy to get back in the general education classes enough to where they go in and try to be unobtrusive and not be (inaudible) and not be taken out again.”(AV).

#### **Interview with Participant 4**

RSQ1: What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

P4 stated, “We have tried all kinds of strategies to meet the needs of the students as well as of the teachers in the class to find out how we could best help the

teachers. (SD) I meet with the teachers as often as I could to find out what kind of help they needed to work the special education students in their class. (TC) It was quick sometimes but it helped some of them. I have had teachers and administrators willing to work with our program and some that don't. You never know how it will go from one year to the next."

RSQ2: How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P4 responded, "When the ARD committee meets we try to discuss the best place for the students to learn. The first place to consider is the general education class. (SP) Placement is important because first we try to keep the student in the general education class if it is possible. (SP) Depending on the reports from the teachers at the ARD meeting, (SP) we consider what will be best for the kid and the teacher sometimes. With the right modifications and accommodations, we can keep the kid in the general education class."(SP)

RSQ3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P4 responded, "I think it is important to have the special education student in the general education class because they get to spend more time with students not like them. (AV) (SA) They have role models to follow and learn from. (SI) (SA) They are exposed to more of the general education curriculum and they are better prepared for the state test. (SA) I would like to see the general education teachers get more information on inclusion to help them understand and be more accepting to our students."(AV)

RSQ4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

P4 stated, "The ARD committee is responsible for the placement decision. It is supposed to be a group decision." (SP) P4 asserted, "All the members have their input but not all the members of the ARD are present for the entire meeting and then the decision for placement depends on the members left. Sometimes the meetings are very long and the administrators may leave before the meeting ends. When this happens, they may not get all the information about the student but will let us know they will support our decision. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't."

RSQ5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?



P4 stated, “I think collaboration is important, it is important for the teachers to work together and to plan together.... (inaudible) and help the students become successful. (TC) (SA) The teachers can share their ideas, get new ways to teach a lesson or even try a new way to teach a lesson they have problem with. (TC) We have to do everything we can to keep the student in the general education classroom. (AV) (SP) Working with the teacher, collaborating with the teacher can be a big help for everyone.”(TC)

RSQ6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

P4 stated, “Staff development is good. (SD) It is important for teachers. I find that teachers like to hear about what they teach and how to teach their subject area. Sometimes I think they feel the special education information is not important to them because they have to focus on the state test most of the time and the special education students may not take the test. To help teachers stay informed and up to date on special education issues and other instructional areas, staff development is very important. (SD) We have in-services on the campus, teacher workday, and cluster meetings to keep the teachers informed. (SD) We don’t have a lot of information shared about special education at all the in-services but it helps when we get to hear what special education is doing. The chairpersons get to attend workshop off campus and bring back information to share with all the other teachers, special education and general education.”(SD)

RSQ7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

P4 stated, “The administrators seem to be getting better at accepting students with disabilities in the general education setting. (AV) They really have no choice. My administrator takes the time to listen to the concerns and plans for our students. Suggestions are even made to help me work with the general education staff. (TC) (SD) I believe the administrator cares but there is so much going on to run a school that they just want what is best for the students, all the students. In the end, they don’t want their test scores affected in a negative way.”(AV)

RSQ8: What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P4 replied, “The academic achievement of the special education kids depends a lot on the special education and general education teachers working together. (TC) (AV) (SA) When we help the general education most of the time the outcome is in the favor of the student. (AV) The teachers want to do a good job

in the classroom but sometimes they don't understand what to do to help the special education students or then don't have the time help the student with assignment. (AV) That's when the modifications come in. The students can do better when the teachers use modification strategies to help them. (SA) When the kid feels he can do the work then usually the behavior is better. (SI) They socialize better in the class and not cause problems."

### **Interview with Participant 5**

RSQ1: What can you tell me about your leadership experience to promote inclusion for students with disabilities on the campus?

P5 responded, "This has been a busy year for our department. We had a lot of new teachers and we had several in-services to help them understand what they need to do as far as inclusion was concerned. (SD) New teachers always seem to be the biggest problem. I try to get to them and invite them to come in a talk if they have any questions about working with the special education students. (TC) I try to get the special education teachers involved in helping the new teachers too."(TC)

RSQ2: How would you describe the significance of placement decisions for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P5 stated, "Placement is important and we have to make sure when the students are placed, they are placed in the right class and the teacher is willing to work with them. (SP) It is so important to get the students into the class where they can do their best."(SP)

RSQ3: What has your leadership vision contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P5 responded, "My vision is to get the general education teacher to understand that we are here to help them work with the special education students. (AV) If they have a question about the students, they can come to the special education teacher or me for help. I would like to see more of the students in general education classed and not be pulled out so often just because they have been identified as a student with a disability. (AV) Especially those that I felt could handle. It would depend on how well they would be able to work in a classroom with a larger population."(SA)

RSQ4: How has the decision-making process for placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) impacted your views of inclusion?

P5 responded, “The decision to keep a student in general education is decided by the ARD committee members. (SP) The ARD meetings are held to identify the area of weakness the students may have and the committee will discuss those areas to decide if the students needs additional ... (inaudible).”

RSQ 5: How does collaboration between the chairperson of special education and the general education staff impact the placement decision for students with disabilities impact?

P5 stated, “In order to keep the students in and get more students in the least restrictive placement we have to collaboration together. Working with the general education teachers is important, especially if there are a lot of new teachers on campus. (AV) (TC) Collaboration is the one thing that helps the new teachers most. (TC) They don’t feel so lost when they know another teacher is there to talk to them about the instruction and sometimes behavior problem that they have to handle. Sometimes the administrator will let me know when a teacher is having problem in the classroom and I will go to the teacher and to find out what I can do. When we sit down to talk it is helpful most of the time...especially with the new teachers.”(TC)

RSQ6: How does leadership training or staff development for inclusion of students with disabilities help you encourage the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE?

P5 responded, “Everybody needs an in-service and staff development training. (SD) You want your office and special education staff to be open to the needs of the teacher who's having any concerns about special education students. They can talk to you about what's been going on in their class or what help they may need with the curriculum. (TC) You have to be prepared to answer question when asked about the special education program or the student in the program. (AV) (TC) You have to keep the teachers informed about the needs of the students according to the students IEP.” (TC)(SD)

RSQ7: What are your feelings on administrative support of your leadership for inclusion of students with disabilities on the camps?

P5 responded, “The principal is usually not involved. The assistant principal is the administrator of our program. The assistant principal is usually very supportive and tries to attend all ARD meeting to stay up on what we do for the kids in our department. (TC) If I have a real problem with a student or a teacher, the administrator is usually very supportive.”(TC)

RSQ8:What is your perception on the academic achievement and socialization issues of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment?

P5 stated, “I think we have some more work to do to get the students where they need to be with academics. (SA) (AV) The state tests and accountability puts a lot of pressure on the teachers to do a good job. If the students are exposed to the curriculum and the IEP is used to help them with their academics, I think they do better than anyone expects. (SA)(AV) We just have to give more of them a chance to do the work with the general education teacher. (AV) The students behavior usually changes when they go into the regular class. (SI) Most of the students want to stay in the regular class to be with their friends. They will behave better most of the time to stay in the regular class. (SI) So we should do more to help them with the academics and behavior to remain in the regular class.”(AV)

## Curriculum Vitae

### Education

- Doctor of Education Candidate, Administrator for Teaching and Learning, Walden University, October, 2011.
- Master of Education, C & I, University of Houston Central.
- Bachelor of Science in Education, University of Houston Central.

### Presentation and Workshops

- Information Management System (PEIMS) and Compliance for Special Education Services, , March 2001-May 2008
- Modifications and Accommodations, Title V, March 2005 & March 2006
- Inclusion for All: Understanding the Least Restrictive Environment, Council for Exceptional Children's Conference, June 2004
- Present Level of Performance –Education Service Center, Fall 2000

### Work Experience

#### January 2011 – Present

- Adjunct Instructor, English Language Institute

#### September, 2004 – March, 2007

- Lecturer, Title V and Adjunct Instructor, ESL

#### February 2001–August 2008

- Coordinator, Special Education PEIMS and Compliance

#### November 1998 – February 2001

- Coordinator, Special Education

#### August 1994 - November 1998

- Coordinator Title 1 / Teacher

#### August 1990 - July 1994

- Teacher, Special Education Resource K-5

#### August 1978-1990

- Teacher, General Education Grades 2-8

### Recognitions and Honors

- Teacher of the Year, Special Education, District Regional Finalist, 1998.
- Teacher of the Year, Elementary Runner-up, 1992.
- Outstanding Young Educator, Elementary Runner-up, 1985.