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Elementary Teachers' Understanding, Knowledge, and Perceptions of Inclusion Best Practices

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jason Liggins

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MEd, Lincoln Memorial University, 2004

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Recent legislative actions requiring schools in the local school system to increase the percentage of students served in the inclusion classroom has led to teachers having difficulty in implementing inclusion best practices. Using Vygotsky's social theory, the purpose of this case study was to examine teachers' understanding, knowledge, and perceptions of inclusive teaching strategies. The research questions were used to explore the teachers' understanding of inclusion, perceived effectiveness of strategies, and the resources that teachers feel are necessary to implement inclusion strategies. A purposeful sample of 10 teachers currently teaching in an inclusion setting were interviewed face-to-face using semistructured questions. The interview transcripts were coded for common themes. Some of the themes included a lack of training and a need for a better understanding of coteaching roles. Findings indicate that the teachers believe inclusion to be worthwhile, but challenging. The findings also indicate a need for more professional development and training on inclusion strategies. Using the findings, a 3-day professional course was designed to address the teachers' needs. This study will provide administrators with a greater understanding of the professional learning needs of the teachers. It has the potential to bring about positive social change in many ways, including better-prepared teachers, leading to more effective teaching practices and greater self-efficacy. Also, this project has the potential to reap many benefits for the county's students with disabilities population, by providing them with more suitable educational opportunities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my loving mother. Everything that I have achieved in life is due to the love and nurturing you provided. You were my biggest fan. You always encouraged me to dream big dreams. Thanks for inspiring me to be a better person. There truly is no love like a mother's love.

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This journey would not have been possible without the love and support of so many friends and family members. Thank you for encouraging me to keep going during challenging times. Throughout this process, I have called on you all for many things, and each and every time you answered. Thank you for your support.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The education of students with disabilities (SWD) in the general education classroom has been a topic of discussion in education for several decades. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted into law in 1975. IDEA did not use the word inclusion. However, sections of the law required individualized education program (IEP) teams to consider the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each student. Under the least restrictive provision, IEP teams are required to consider the general education classroom with nondisabled peers as the first placement option. Teams must explain why, with supplementary aids, the student will not be successful in the general education classroom.

The reauthorization of IDEA by Congress in 1997 further increased the drive for educating more students in the general education classroom. The reauthorization fortified the "preference for children with disabilities to be educated and receive services with their non-disabled age-mates in typical early childhood settings" (Smith & Rapport, 1999, p.4). Another significant legislative act was the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). NCLB holds schools accountable for the test scores of all students including students with disabilities. Schools are required to show that students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) as measured by the state's achievement test. In an effort to meet AYP goals many schools have examined the methods used to instruct students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities have had the opportunity to be more successful when included in the classroom with nondisabled peers (McMaster, 2012). However, many

teachers experience difficulty implementing inclusion practices because many general education teachers are underprepared to instruct students with disabilities (Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012). Often university education programs consist of only one class on teaching students with disabilities (McCray & McHatton, 2011). This lack of training adversely affects teachers' willingness and ability to effective implement inclusion best practices.

The purpose of this study was to investigate general education teachers' level of understanding and knowledge of inclusion and inclusion practices in a county school district in North Georgia. Throughout the study, I investigated what training and resources general education teachers feel are most important to successfully implement inclusion. The findings could be used to provide local school administrators with a blueprint for planning future professional learning opportunities.

Definition of the Problem

The district of focus is located in Northwest Georgia. Within the county, there are two high schools, four middle schools, and 10 elementary schools. The rural county serves a total of 9,035 students in grade K-12 (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Approximately 15% of the student population receives special education services (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). The majority of students receiving special education services are served in an inclusion setting. The success of inclusion programs is frequently contingent on the willingness and readiness of general education teachers (Obiakor, Harris, Muta, Rotatori, & Algozzine 2012).

Many schools at the local level have recently increased the percentage of students served in the inclusion classroom. However, some teachers have expressed difficulty in implementing inclusion practices. During a breakout session of a recent (March 16, 2015) computer software training conference, many teachers expressed having difficulty in teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Some teachers discussed the significant amount of time it took to modify or adapt lessons. Some teachers expressed uncertainty in how to properly modify lessons.

In addition, during a local conference it was discussed that many of the elementary schools have a rotating system to determine which general education teacher will be the inclusion teacher. This practice of rotating the inclusion classroom is largely due to a lack of willingness of teachers to volunteer to serve as the inclusion classroom teacher According to a local administrator many teachers do not feel comfortable teaching in the inclusion classroom. As a result, few teachers volunteer to teach in the inclusion setting resulting in teachers being assigned to those positions.

While many schools have increased the percentage of students served in inclusion settings, this transition has not been supported with follow-up or the development of professional learning activities. There is no available data on teacher readiness, levels of preparedness, or teacher-efficacy. Each of these factors is important if teachers are to adequately implement inclusion practices. A better understanding of the teachers' readiness to implement inclusion best practices will allow the district to develop proper professional development. Using this project study, I addressed the lack of data and provided insight for future professional development.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

As a part of applying for the Race to the Top grant in 2011, the method for

determining AYP in Georgia was revised. A category included in the process that was not

previously included is the percentage of students with disabilities served greater that 80

% of the day in the general education classroom. The Federal Office of Special Education

Programs (OSEP, 2010) suggested that 90% of students with disabilities be served in

inclusion settings for greater than 80% of the day. According to the Georgia Department

of Education (GADOE, 2014), schools are required to serve at least 65% of students with

disabilities in the inclusion setting for a minimum of 80% of the day.

The transition to the 65% benchmark has been in effect for 2 years, and no

follow-up by the county on implementation has occurred. Additionally, professional

development dealing with inclusion for general education teachers has not been offered in

the district. A local special education representative explained that many special

education teachers have received professional development in working with general

education teachers, but there has not been any training geared towards the preparation of

general education teachers. Reviewing the district list of professional development course

offerings further verifies the lack of professional development.

Also, levels of inclusion throughout the school district vary greatly. Three of the

10 elementary schools failed to meet the 65% benchmark (Georgia Department of

Education, 2014). Two schools met the benchmark with percentages close to the

minimum falling between 65-69% (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Three

schools were above the 65% percent threshold with the highest being 80% (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Two other schools did not have enough students with disabilities to be included in this category. There is no available data explaining the reasoning behind the varying inclusion levels. Each school, with the guidance of the central office, is responsible for establishing special education services protocol.

Students with disabilities taught in inclusion settings in the county are taught in a coteaching classroom. The general education teacher serves as the teacher of record. However, the responsibilities are shared with a certified special education teacher. Special education teachers are assigned to schools based on the total special education population. According to a local administrator, every attempt is made to assign special teachers to only one grade level. This is not always possible, and in some cases, grade levels must share a special education teacher. In these cases, I have observed that the classrooms are sometimes assigned a special education paraprofessional to assist in serving the special education students.

In order to fully implement inclusion best practices, teachers must be properly trained. Smith and Tyler (2011) argued that simply establishing inclusive classrooms does not guarantee success. In order for inclusion classrooms to operate successfully, teachers need to be equipped with research-based inclusive strategies (Smith & Tyler, 2011). As a general education teacher with an undergraduate degree in special education, I have been used as a resource for many colleagues. During these discussions, teachers have expressed frustrations of not having the necessary resources and training to properly instruct students with disabilities. A local administrator noted that many teachers have

expressed the desire to work with students with disabilities, but lack the necessary training (personal communication, 2015). Ahmend and Deppler (2012) suggested that success in implementing effective inclusive strategies is contingent on teachers' understanding of inclusive education. Male (2011) reported that the implementation of professional development improved knowledge and acceptance of special education inclusion. Providing teachers with the necessary training and resources empowers the teacher to work in inclusion settings. Properly trained teachers are often more willing to implement best inclusion practices.

Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature

Inclusion has been debated for many decades; with the passing of multiple acts of legislation, it had been assumed by some educational professionals that the issue of inclusion had been resolved (Male, 2011). However, due to recent regulations and the need for school districts needing to comply with federal and state mandates, many schools are re-evaluating their practices (Gazzard, 2011). Students are better served in inclusion settings (McMaster, 2014). Nevertheless, inclusion is often not practiced or implemented at the levels recommended by federal and state mandates. This is because many teachers have not been properly trained to instruct students with disabilities. McCray and McHatton (2012) reported that "less than one-third of teachers" have received preservice training in teaching students with disabilities. Often teachers are hesitant to work with students with disabilities because of little formal education or training (Fuch, 2010). Proper training and professional development often leads to greater self-efficacy in teachers (Urton, Wilbert, & Hennemann, 2014). Teachers with greater

self -efficacy are more prepared to meet the challenges presented by teaching in an inclusion setting.

If inclusion is to be successful teachers must believe in the process. McCray and McHatton (2012) reported that a large majority of preservice teachers had less anxiety about working with students with disabilities after receiving training. The teachers reported being less afraid and more likely to include students with disabilities in the general education class (McCray & MaHatton). Gokdere argued that professional development not only helped to make teachers more qualified to teach students with disabilities, but also it gave them greater confidence in doing so. Gokdere (2012) further suggested that a correlation exists between teachers' levels of confidence and their willingness to use inclusive practices. As teachers feel more comfortable in themselves they are more accepting and willing to implement new strategies.

Definitions

Accommodations: Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate or complete the same assignment or activity as other students (Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, 2001).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): The minimum amount of progress that schools and school systems must demonstrate as measured by achievement tests. Each state establishes criteria for AYP using guidance from the United States Department of Education (Mathis, 2006).

Coteaching: An educational setting in which the special education teacher works collaboratively with the general education teacher to provide needed supports to students with disabilities (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & Mcculley, 2012).

General education classroom: A setting in which typical developing students are taught using the instructional standards established by the state's department of education (Webster, n.d.)

Inclusion: An educational setting in which students with disabilities are taught along with nondisabled peers. In addition, students with disabilities are included in and given the same educational opportunities (McMaster, 2014).

Inclusion best practices: Instructional practices used in the general education classroom that has been shown to be effective in instructing students with disabilities. Best practices are grounded in and supported by current research (Roster, Reglin, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014).

Individualized education plan (IEP): A written legally binding plan developed by team consisting of local administrators, special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, and other education professionals (Watson, n.d.)

Least restricted environment (LRE): An educational setting in which a student with a disability is able to be educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum appropriate extent (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013).

Mainstreaming: The process or practice of placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom for a portion of the school day. The goal behind

mainstreaming to is to provide appropriate socialization and access to the similar educational opportunities as non-disabled peers (Obiakor et al., 2012).

Modifications: An adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure (Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, 2001).

Resource (pullout) model: An instructional model often used with students with disabilities in which "students are pulled out of the general education classroom for a portion of the school day to receive specialized instruction in a separate room with fewer students. "Students still spend part of their day in the general education classroom" (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013, p.5).

Special education classroom: An educational setting in which students with disabilities are instructed, receiving specialized instruction separate from non-disabled peers (Obikator et al., 2012).

Teacher efficacy: Teachers' beliefs and confidence in their capabilities to perform specified teaching tasks and carry out duties that enhances student learning and achievement (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014).

Significance

The results of this study provide an understanding of the various levels of knowledge about inclusion that elementary general education teachers possess. The insights from this study can aid administrators in planning and developing professional learning for teachers. In addition, the results of this study allow school leaders to gain a better understanding of what resources classroom teachers need in order to successfully

establish inclusion classrooms. This study has the potential to lead to more consistency in inclusion practices throughout the county.

Additionally, this study has the opportunity to bring about positive social change. It is important that students with disabilities be provided with the best possible education. When provided with the necessary skills and training, teachers are less likely to be resistant of establishing inclusive classrooms (Swain, et al., 2012). Students with disabilities are best served by teachers who are accepting and knowledgeable.

Guiding/Research Question

A significant amount of research is clear on the value of educating students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. These students display greater achievement when taught with non-disabled peers (McMaster, 2014). Nevertheless, there continues to be a documented hesitation to implement inclusion best practices among teachers throughout the world. Each country, state, and school system varies in preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities. The gap in practice of implementing inclusion could have a negative impact on students with disabilities.

A significant amount of prior research in this field focused on the advantages and the positive aspects of inclusion. Also previous studies have documented the correlation between teacher preparation and readiness to being willing to fully implement best practices (Obiakor et al., 2012). This study provides greater insight into problems with implementing inclusion at the local level. Because there is limited data at the local level about teachers' levels of knowledge and perceptions about inclusion, it is important to

investigate. Moreover, proper training is a significant variable in implementing inclusion best practices (Urton & Hennemann 2014).

This qualitative research study addresses the levels of teachers' knowledge and perceptions of inclusion. Also, I investigated what training and resources the teachers feel they need to in order to properly implement inclusive practices.

Research Q1: What are general education teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies?

Research Q2: How do general education teachers perceive the effectiveness of inclusion?

Research Q3: What specific inclusion practices do general education teachers perceive to be effective?

Research Q4: What resources do general education teachers believe are needed to successfully implement inclusive strategies?

Review of the Literature

In the literature review for this study, I present research on the importance of the preparation of teachers to work in inclusive settings. The review includes a historical perspective of special education and inclusion. I examine how teachers' preparation, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards inclusion are connected to the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Using ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Proquest I complete a search of literature related to the study. Key terms used in the searching for literature included the following: *inclusion, inclusion barriers, mainstreaming, special education, teacher preparation, and teachers' perceptions of inclusion*. The main focus of

the literature review is on the impact that teacher preparation or the lack of preparation has on teachers' ability to implement inclusive strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Vygotsky's social constructivist view. Vygotsky (1978) argued that education leads to the development of the person. The education of a child is a shared joint process in a responsive social context (Gindis, 1999). According to Vygotsky, students learn through social interactions with each other. Vygotsky's arguments led to the foundational emphasis of least restrictive and inclusive classroom settings (Gindis,1999). It is important for students with disabilities to have regular and consistent interaction with nondisabled peers (Gindis,1999).

The focus of education should be on developing the strengths of students by equipping them with the necessary tools to properly learn (Gindis, 1999). According to Mallory and New (1994), Vygotsky supported inclusive strategies by suggesting the need for teachers to adapt instruction to the unique characteristics that each student brings to the learning community. According to a key element of Vygotsky's theoretical view, students with differences should be presented with alternative means for accessing content (Smagorinsky, 2012). Smagorinksy (2012) suggested that Vygotsky's writings provide a framework for designing inclusion education programs. Vygotsky's theory explains that only an inclusive learning environment can fully develop the higher and psychological function of a child with a disability (Gindis,1999). Students with disabilities are better prepared in an inclusion setting. When students receive instruction

adapted to meet their needs they are able to be successful in general education classrooms.

Historical Perspective

The path to achieving quality education for students with disabilities has been a long and difficult path. In the early 20th century, there were few educational choices for parents of students with disabilities. Frequently states had laws and statutes that permitted the exclusion of these students from public schools (Yell, Rodgers, & Lodge-Rogers, 1998). The few programs that were provided for students with disabilities focused on teaching students a trade skill such as carpentry, sewing, and other types of manual labor. These students were denied access to the basic curriculum. This included students with average to slightly below intelligence. In fact, in 1893 Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Watson v. The City of Cambridge*, that a student could be excluded from school based solely on the inability to learn. As a result of this and other rulings millions of students were denied access to an appropriate education. Students with disabilities were thought to be unworthy of receiving education.

Towards the late 1940s schools introduced programs for students with intellectual disabilities. However, even then these students were often segregated from their nondisabled peers. Many of these students were housed in separate schools and classroom (Yell et al., 1998). Generic classrooms were established for the education of students with disabilities. Often the special education classroom was made up of students with varying disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). In addition, many special education classrooms were less focused on teaching the students the curriculum and more on

teaching these students proper moral and survival skills (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The quality of these education programs varied from state to state, although research indicates that most were of low quality (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Students with disabilities were often exempt from the compulsory laws that mandated that parents enroll their children in school. This lack of enforcement and poor quality education often resulted in students with disabilities remaining at home.

These separate schools and classrooms for students with disabilities remained unchallenged throughout the early part of the 20th century. Challenges to this practice began to mount after the Supreme Court of the United States issued a ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education case* in 1954. The case has been proclaimed as a landmark case in achieving equity in education for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). The unanimous ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* provided a number of legal avenues for advocates of students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

The court decision cited the "constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law found in the Fourteenth Amendment "(Yell et al., 1998, p.221). This guarantee became the central argument used in subsequent cases by advocates of students with disabilities. The court unanimously agreed that due to the importance of education that racial segregations would have negative consequences, and that segregated schools denied equal education opportunities (Yell et al., 1998). This same argument was later applied in at least 10 other decisions related to the segregation of students with disabilities. In those cases the courts found that the concept of equal opportunity also applied to students with disabilities.

One of the most influential special education cases stemming from the Brown decision was the *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children (referred to as PARC) v. Pennsylvania (1972*). In 1971, PARC filed suit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for not providing children with mental retardation with a public education (Chinn, 2004). The Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) served as the foundation of the plaintiffs' argument. The plaintiffs suggested that by operating a public education system the state had an obligation to provide a public supported education for all students. They argued that in not doing so that Pennsylvania was in violation of the 14th Amendment (Yell et al., 1998). This case was significant in that it indicated that students with disabilities should be educated in programs similar to those of students without disabilities. This was monumental to the movement of including students with disabilities in public education. Chinn (2004) argued that this case cemented the right for special education students to receive an appropriate education. With this ruling parents had a ruling supporting the arguments that all students were entitled to an appropriate education.

Another landmark case that helped establish the rights of a student with disabilities to an appropriate education was the *Mills v.The Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972)*. In this case, the plaintiffs argued that their children were being denied an appropriate education due to monetary constraints. Additionally, the plaintiffs argued that students had a right to an appropriate education regardless of cost. The court sided with the plaintiffs and ruled that all students had a right to a publicly supported education. The courts indicated that cost could not be used as a determinant in

providing a free and appropriate education. Another factor making this case a landmark win for students with disabilities was the establishment of procedural safeguards by the courts for students with disabilities and their parents (Chinn, 2004). These decisions along with the additional 46 other cases filed in state and federal courts served as the foundation of the movement for equitable education for all students (Chinn, 2004).

Evolution of Special Education and Inclusion Services

After several landmark cases, many state governments began to establish laws ensuring a free and appropriate education for all students. However, there was variation of the specifics of the laws from state to state. Many special education advocacy groups began to lobby for legislation from the federal government. Out of these lobbying efforts, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) or Public Law 94-142 was passed in 1975. This law provided regulations and requirements that states must follow in educating students with disabilities. Through this legislation parents and students had a law guaranteeing equal access to a free and public education. Many advocacy groups hailed this law as the vitalization of special education (Coffey & Obringer, 2011). EAHCA not only changed the model of the teaching of students with learning disabilities but also had an impact on the education of all students with disabilities (Coffey & Obringer, 2011). Parents and students were now able to explore new options afforded to them by due process (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

> The EAHCA mandated that qualified students with disabilities had the right to (a) nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures; (b) be educated in the least restrictive environment; (c) procedural due process, including parent

involvement; (d) a free education; and (e) an appropriate education" (Yell et al.,

1998, p.225).

There are several key portions of this law that had an impact on the way that students with disabilities are educated in schools. The law requires that students be provided with an IEP. The IEP requires that a team (including representatives from the local educational agency, general education teachers, special education teachers, other education-related professionals, and parents) establish a plan that provides the most appropriate education for the student. This process removes the decision from a single agency. Also, it provides parents with due process rights. Due process rights affords parents the opportunity to disagree with the recommendations of the school officials. This has been proven to be monumental as parents are now able to advocate for their children. The inclusion of due process rights takes away the argument of cost and availability. This law made clear that the school must make every effort to provide the student with the most appropriate education. In accordance, with due process regulations, the school must consider all options for students.

In 1990, the EAHCA (Public Law 94-142), IDEA. IDEA is accredited with strengthening the educational rights for students with disabilities. Many educational professionals argue that the updates to the law in 1990 and 1997 further advanced the purpose of inclusion. Alquraini (2013) stated that IDEA promoted an increase in the number of students receiving their education with nondisabled peers. While mainstreaming began in 1975, the practice became more common in the 1990s

(Alquraini, 2013). More school systems began including students with disabilities in general education classroom for small portions of the day.

Even with the practice of mainstreaming many special education students still spent a large portion of the day in separate classrooms. Students with disabilities were often included in the general education for nonacademic periods of time, but received their primary instruction in a separate classroom (Alquraini, 2013). Many parents and special education advocacy groups began to question if students were truly being served in the LRE. This debate prompted school districts and government agencies to reevaluate their practices.

With this new debate began the rise of inclusion. Inclusion, though never mentioned in IDEA or other special education laws would emerge as a topic in the education world (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013). Parents began lobbying to have their students educated in the general education class. The debate often centered on the term LRE. Different educational agencies defined this term in different ways. With the amending of the IDEA in 1997, congress sought to better define the term. It was clarified that remaining in the general education classroom should always be the ideal option.

The practice of inclusion was further promoted with the passage of NCLB in 2002 and the Reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (McCray & McHatton, 2011). NCLB held schools accountable for the scores of all students including those students with disabilities. This stipulation is considered by many to be a transformational factor for students with disabilities. Before, many states did not hold schools accountable for the scores of students with disabilities. Some states even allowed students with disabilities to

be exempt from participating in the state's achievement test. The enactment of NCLB required schools to end this practice. Many schools had to examine ways of enacting these new accountability requirements (McCray & McHatton, 2011). The education of students with disabilities became a primary concern for many school officials.

In facing this new accountability, many schools moved towards including more students in the general education classroom. In 2004 congress reauthorized IDEA, re-emphasizing that students with disabilities should be included in general education classes to the greatest extent possible (Alquraini, 2013). The law did not require inclusion. Instead, IDEA (2004) required schools to begin the consideration of the LRE by considering general education as the first option. In addition, NCLB and IDEA promoted more academic rigor, greater exposure to the general education curriculum, and increased accountability (Roden, Borgemenke, & Holt, 2013). Both laws emphasized that public schools must have the same high standards for all students (Roden et al., 2013). As a result of these mandates, many schools increased inclusion services.

Inclusion and Student Achievement

Students with disabilities have greater achievement when included in the general curriculum. Studies have attributed students with disabilities having greater access to the curriculum as a factor to increased performance on standardized testing (Black & Simon, 2014). As the number of students served in inclusive settings has increased so have the achievement scores (Thomas, 2013). Inclusion allows students with disabilities to reach their highest potential.

Several districts have been able to improve the achievement of students with disabilities. Telfer and Howley (2014) detailed the steps that two rural districts took to close the achievement gaps of special education students. The two districts had an intense focused on increasing the number of students served in the inclusion setting (Telfer & Howlet, 2014). Everyone in the districts worked towards a common goal of increasing exposure to the general curriculum (Telfer & Howlet, 2014). As a result, students with disabilities showed improvement in academic skills (Telfer & Howlet, 2014). Other students have shown similar improvements. Huberman, Navo, and Parrish (2012) conducted a similar study of eight school districts in which the special education population demonstrated unusual levels of high academic performance. Most of the districts indicated that access to the general education curriculum and inclusive practices were the most significant factors in improving student performance (Huberman et al., 2012). Each district identified inclusion as the main educational model for instructing students with disabilities (Huberman et al., 2012). In each district, the students with disabilities showed greater achievement when compared to similar school districts (Huberman et al., 2012). These studies support the argument that inclusion can be beneficial to the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Inclusion classrooms allow students with disabilities the opportunity to achieve academic success.

Studies indicate that students in inclusion settings have greater exposure to grade level content (LaSalle et al. 2013). Researchers have cited greater exposure to grade level content as being a key predictor of overall student achievement (Huberman et al., 2012). Roden et al., (2013) examined the practices of schools in Texas. In order to

comply with NCLB mandates, many of the schools increased the number of students with disabilities served in inclusion settings (Roden et al., 2013). Roden et al. found that many schools displayed a new level of success. The language arts and math scores of the students with disabilities demonstrated a significant increase on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS; Roden et al., 2013). Similar results were found in a study that examined the impact that inclusion had on student with intellectual disabilities (Dessmontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). Students taught in the inclusion setting showed more growth in literacy skills than the control group of students taught in special schools (Desmontet et al., 2012). This supports the social constructivist theory that students learn better in settings with nondisabled peers.

The inclusion classroom has been found to be effective in instructing students with disabilities. LaSalle et al. (2013) contended that students in inclusion settings often show greater achievement when compared to students taught in small groups or resource (pullout) settings because the students are more engaged and there is an increased amount of time spent on instructional tasks. Studies have also indicated that special educators are often not given the same access to curricular tools as educators in the general setting (LaSalle et al., 2013). Inclusion is a better way to improve special education students' performance (Huberman et al., 2012). Those students taught in the general education classroom more than 80% of the school day continuously demonstrate academic growth (Roden et al., 2013). Students in inclusions settings typically outperform their peers taught in small group settings. The general education classroom allows students with disabilities to accelerate at faster rates.

Teacher Perception of Inclusion

Despite the clear benefits of inclusion, many general education teachers are resistant of inclusion (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). Many teachers expressed fear and anxiety in regards to working with students with disabilities (Gokdere, 2012). The success of inclusion settings often hinges on the attitudes of the teachers involved in implementing the practices (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014). Glazzard (2011) asserted that inclusion faces significant challenges if teachers are not committed to the principals of inclusion. Teachers with a negative perception of inclusion are less likely to implement inclusion best practices. There is a connection between teachers' perception of inclusion and being successful teaching in an inclusion setting.

Many teachers remain uncertain of the benefits of inclusion (Ko & Boswell, 2013). According to Ko and Boswell (2013), teachers report bad experiences and failed attempts at implementing inclusion strategies. These negative attitudes often created barriers to using effective teaching practices (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). There is a direct correlation between teachers' attitude and their execution of inclusion strategies (Urton et al., 2014). Many teachers view inclusion as an unfair challenge. Teachers with these attitudes are less likely to modify their instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. As a result, teachers with negative attitudes of inclusion are often unsuccessful in reaching students with disabilities.

Glazzard (2011) found many general education teachers indicated a lack of resources and a need for additional support. These teachers were resistant towards inclusion practices (Glazzard, 2011). Monsen et al., (2014) reported that teachers with

positive attitudes were much more likely to be successful in inclusion settings. Given the
direct link between teachers' attitudes and their willingness to carry out inclusion
strategies it is important that schools work to promote positive attitudes. McMaster
(2014) argued that the key components to successfully implementing inclusion are the
willingness to struggle, a positive attitude, and self-confidence. Schools that create a
culture of acceptance and inclusion are more likely to be successful at creating inclusion
classrooms.

Inclusion and Teacher Preparation

The first step in creating a culture that is accepting of inclusion is to examine the
professional needs of teachers. Teachers are more likely to accept the idea of inclusion if
they feel they are properly prepared. Research indicates that the more training and
experience a teacher has the greater their self-efficacy is towards teaching students with
disabilities (Hamman et al. 2013). In multiple studies teachers have indicated the need for
more training (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Teachers reported having received little
training before being placed in an inclusion classroom. An examination of the
curriculums of universities supports this assertion. Many teachers are leaving college
insufficiently prepared for the challenges presented by teaching in an inclusive setting
(Smith & Tyler, 2011). Many colleges require general education candidates to take less
than three courses directly relating to teaching students with disabilities. Some colleges
only required one course. This lack of training often leads to teachers feeling
underprepared to work with students with disabilities (Smith & Tyler, 2011).
Insufficiently trained teachers face many challenges in teaching students with disabilities.

Ashby (2012) argued that teachers need more preparation to successfully implement inclusive practices. Ideally universities will make the shift to incorporating special education throughout their teaching programs (Ashby, 2012). Pre-service candidates have a better feeling after receiving more training (Golmic & Hansen 2012). After completing special education courses and practicums many candidates experienced a change in attitude towards teaching students with disabilities (Swain et al., 2012). Before receiving explicit training and hands-on experience, many pre-service teachers expressed mixed feelings about their preparedness (Swain et al. 2012). A follow up after training indicated a significant shift in attitudes towards inclusion (Swain et al. 2012). McCray and McHatton (2011) also documented a notable change in the perception of teachers after taking a special education course. Training and professional learning has the potential to reshape the way teachers view the teaching students with disabilities.

While it has been documented that better teacher preparation is vital to improving teachers' ability to teach inclusion, colleges continue to grapple with this issue (Hamman, Lechtenberger, Griffin-Shirley, & Zhou, 2013). Teacher preparation programs have not kept pace with the growing demands (Hamman et al., 2013). Therefore it is up to the school to provide teachers with professional development activities that enhance their abilities to carry out inclusion practices (Hamman et al., 2013). Professional learning is key to building an inclusive culture in schools (McMaster, 2013). It is important that school leaders provide many opportunities for teachers to enhance their teaching skills (McMaster, 2013). In reviewing schools that have successfully established inclusive settings, a key factor in their success was a focus on learning and collaborations

(McMaster, 2012). Successful inclusion is largely dependent on the readiness and willingness of the general education teacher.

Counter Arguments

A vast amount of research supports the use of the inclusion model to educate the majority of students with disabilities. However, there is research that questions if inclusion is always the correct model. According to McLeskey and Waldron (2011) findings indicate that both inclusive and resource settings can be effective models for instructing students with mild disabilities. Students with disabilities need high-quality instruction tailored to their individual needs to make adequate academic progress (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). The inclusion classroom is often lacking specialized instruction and teachers with those specialized skills (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

Tkachyk (2013) suggested that students can be better served in smaller specialized settings. Full inclusion can only be successful if there are supports in place to ensure students receive the specialized programming necessary for maximum growth (Tkachyk, 2013). So while inclusion has been identified being effective for many students, it has not been proven to offer the type of intensive instruction needed by a substantial amount of students with disabilities (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Tkachyk, 2013). Nevertheless, a significant amount of research has shown that when effective inclusion practices are established, students with disabilities have shown high academic growth (McMaster, 2013). It is important that teachers consider the individual needs of students when determining the LRE for students.

Critical Review

The debate of inclusion emerged out of the civil rights movement (Thomas, 2013). In the case of *Brown V. Board of Education*, Chief Justice Warren wrote "We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place." It is with this quote that many special education advocacy groups later hinged their argument for greater access. Several judicial rulings in a variety of cases helped shaped educational policy throughout the country (Thomas, 2013).

In an attempt to create continuity throughout the country, Congress soon passed a series of laws that would reshape the world of inclusion. IDEA cemented the right to Free Appropriate Public Education for students with disabilities. The law established specific guidelines that schools must enact to accommodate the disability of students. IDEA mandated that students be taught in the general education classroom the maximum extent possible. This mandate meant that schools could no longer exclude students without going through due process and providing sufficient justification. Inclusion was further developed through the passage of No Child Left Behind, which required schools to report disaggregated achievement data (Schulte & Stevens, 2015). Facing increased accountability, more schools turned to the practice of inclusion. Today the majority of special education students are taught in inclusive settings.

Decades after the passage of these laws the literature reveals there are still significant deficits in the practice of inclusion. It has been demonstrated that the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusion heavily influence their ability to establish inclusive classrooms. When teachers lack self-efficacy in teaching students with

disabilities student achievement is often affected. In order to change this and successfully establish a culture of inclusion schools must be willing to provide teachers with specialized training (Obiakor et al., 2012). It is important that teachers have an understanding of the students' individual needs. Teachers continue to need training covering inclusion best practices (Dixon et al., 2014). It is important that the general education teachers learn to address the unique learning needs of students with disabilities (Obiakor et al., 2012). Teachers with the proper training develop greater self-efficacy (Hamman et al., 2013). Teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to tackle the challenges of teaching students with disabilities (Hamman et al., 2013).

Implications

The focus of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of teacher knowledge of inclusion best practices. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding what perceptions and attitudes that teachers hold about inclusion. I attempted to determine what the teachers perceive as barriers and what resources and training are needed to successfully implement inclusion best practices.

The information obtained from this study could be used to establish professional learning and training for teachers in the county of focus. This study could serve as a blueprint for designing professional learning opportunities.. The findings of this study could have a major impact on teaching practices and student achievement. Currently, there is a lack of data that must be addressed. Proper training is very effective in increasing successful implementation of instructional best practices (Dixon et al., 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of the general education teachers' knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of inclusion and inclusion best practices. General education teachers are vital to successfully establishing inclusive classrooms (Smith & Tyler, 2011). However, research indicates that many general education teachers enter underprepared to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (McCray & McHatton, 2011). It is imperative that school districts examine the factors that impede the implementation of inclusion best practices. Gaining a better understanding of the teachers' level of knowledge and perceptions can lead to the development of useful and meaningful professional development.

Section 1 defined the problem from both local and national level. Section 1 supported the problem with a thorough review of the literature. The review of literature provided an in-depth review of prior research concerning the historical perspective of inclusion, teacher preparedness for teaching in inclusion classrooms and perceptions of inclusion that hinder implementation of inclusion best practices. The review of literature also included an overview of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory and how it relates to the practice of inclusion.

Section 2 explained the methodology used in this research project. Section 2 discussed in detail the qualitative approach and design of the project. The section established how participants were selected and how the data was collected and stored. The section explored and addressed possible ethical concerns. Section 3 presented the

project study. Section 4 included reflections and addressed strengths and weaknesses of

the project.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the teachers' knowledge and understanding of inclusive practices. Properly implementing inclusion best practices is beneficial to the academic of achievement of students with disabilities. According to the scholarly literature it there is a connection between teachers' knowledge, experiences, and training and their willingness to implement inclusion best practices.

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative studies explore the in-depth perceptions or innermost thoughts of the participants (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore qualitative studies yield descriptive data. Rather than focusing on numbers, data takes the form of words and pictures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). One of the goals of qualitative studies is to present the experiences of a group or an individual's experience in a specific setting (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). This was in line with the purpose of this study. In this study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' knowledge of inclusive practices. In addition, the study was designed to gain an understanding of the teachers' perceived barriers to implementing inclusive strategies.

Research Design

Using a qualitative, case study approach allowed the participants to share their feelings and thoughts about inclusion and inclusive strategies. According to Merriam (2009), case studies are exploratory and are used to probe for a deep understanding of the central phenomenon. The case study approach allowed me to get an up-close view of how the central problem is shaped within the setting (Creswell, 2012). A case study approach

was most appropriate for this study because it allowed me to discover meaning and to gain insight into an in-depth understanding of an individual or group (Lodico et al., 2010). Using a case study allowed me to gain detailed data from the participants (Merriam, 2009).

After examining the purpose of the study, a qualitative research design was deemed a more appropriate match than a quantitative research design. Quantitative approaches offer a statistical or numerical summary of the results, rather than an in-depth explanation of the problem (Lodico et al., 2010). Quantitative researchers analyze trends and the relationships between two variables, providing little information as to why the participants feel a certain way (Creswell, 2012). Using qualitative approaches allow the researcher to gain significant insight as to why there is a problem implementing inclusion practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

While a case study design was chosen for this project there are other qualitative designs that were considered. The research designs grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology were determined to not be appropriate or this study. According to Merriam (2009) grounded theory has a focus on building theory. In addition, grounded theory is useful for addressing questions about how things change over time or the process (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I did not intend to develop a new theory. Instead I focused on teachers' perceptions and previous knowledge.

Likewise, an ethnographic study was not suitable for this study (Creswell, 2012). Ethnographic studies focus one particular cultural group and how those interactions are influenced by the larger society (Lodico et al., 2010). In this study, I examined the

individual experiences and perceptions of teachers within the county. Provided that the participants have different work environments and access to different resources, they lacked the common shared beliefs and values that are essential to conducting an ethnographic study.

The use of a phenomenology study was considered but also rejected. A phenomenology study is used in describing the phenomenon being studied. Phenomenology is focused on describing individual experiences (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), the task of a researcher conducting a phenomenology study is to depict the basic structure of the experience. The phenomenologist is grounded in wanting to understand the human experience (Lodico et al., 2010). The phenomenologist is not concerned with efforts to categorize, simplify, or reduce the phenomena (Merriam, 2009). This purpose of this study was to seek an explanation, rather than an interpretation. I attempted to understand the reasoning or underlying causes behind the teachers' thoughts and perceptions. Using a phenomenological research approach would not meet this need.

Participants

Criteria

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants in this study. Creswell (2012) stated that by using purposeful sampling, participants are selected based on who can best help understand the phenomenon. I recruited general education elementary teachers who were involved in teaching in inclusion settings. Using a purposeful sampling method ensured that the participants all had background knowledge of the

central phenomenon and were capable of contributing essential data to the study (Creswel1, 2012). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), purposeful sampling allows for the researcher to choose subjects who help to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory. Purposeful sampling allowed an in-depth study of information-rich cases (Lodico et al., 2010).

In this study, I used a purposeful homogenous sampling. Homogenous sampling is the selection of participants who are a part of the same group (Creswell, 2012). Homogenous sampling ensured that all participants had similar attributes (Lodico et al., 2010). The study included 10 general education teachers who were working in an inclusion setting at the elementary level. Using the faculty and staff e-mail addresses that are listed on each school's website, I extended invitations to every general education teacher in the county. A smaller group of teachers were selected from those who met the criteria and who were willing to participate.

Justification for the Number of Participants

Selecting participants is an important step in the research process. Meriam (2009), suggested that one of the goals of a qualitative study is to seek an intimate account of the participant's experiences. In order to explore the personal perspectives of the participants the sample size should remain small and manageable (Creswell, 2012). In selecting the participants my primary goal was to gain an equitable representation of the county while avoiding redundant information. The study included teachers from across the grade levels. The study included participants from a majority of the schools. The selection of

the 10 teachers was an appropriate size as it allowed the research process to remain personal and intimate while also providing a sufficient amount of data for the study.

Procedures for Gaining Access

The process of gaining access to participants began by seeking cooperation from the county's office of the superintendent. A formal written request was made to the superintendent. The request included a detailed description of the study, explained potential benefits and risks, and addressed ethical concerns. Access was granted to all staff members within the county. The next step of gaining access was seeking approval of the study from the institutional review board (IRB) at Walden University. Permission to conduct the study was granted. Walden University's approval number for this study is 01-28-16-0074463. After approval was granted, teachers from each nine of the county's school were invited via email to participate in the study. A total of 13 teachers responded and offered participation. From the pool of teachers willing to participate, 10 teachers meeting the established criteria were chosen for the project study. Eight of the county's elementary schools were represented in the study. After multiple invitations, I did not receive any responses from teachers at one school. Participants were selected on a first come first serve basis. Before participating in the study each participant was asked for individual consent. The purpose and the components of the study were explained in detail.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Relationship

Participants in my work setting were not included in this study. This meant that I did not have a prior working relationship with most of the participants. I had met some of

the participants at prior countywide professional learning opportunities. However, even those relationships were limited and still need to be fully established. As potential participants responded to the invitation a more detailed description of the project was sent to all of those who responded. Participants were encouraged to ask questions to determine if participation in this project was beneficial to them. After participants agreed to participate I followed up with an introduction of myself and answered more detailed questions. It was during this time that interviews were scheduled. It was stressed that the interviews were relaxed and driven by the participants. Participants were informed of the next steps throughout the process. I was able to establish well-defined relationships with each participant.

Ethical Concerns

Prior to beginning the project I sought and received approval from the Walden IRB. Respect for the participants' time and professional roles were maintained at all times. It was explained that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that each participant had the right to withdraw participation at any time during the study. Once the participants were chosen informed consent letters were emailed to each participant. Each participant was asked to return the consent with an electronic signature. Some participants did not respond and were asked to sign paper copies at the time of the interview.

The confidentiality of each participant was maintained throughout the project. All identifying information was removed from the final report. Pseudonyms have been used to replace the name of the county, schools, administrators, and participants. The final

report was reviewed for any information that might lead to the identity of the participant (Creswell, 2012). Any information found that might reveal the identity of the participant was excluded from the final report. The interviews were conducted in settings chosen by the participants. Conducting the interview in the natural setting of the participant reduces the potential risks and allows the participants maximum comfort (Creswell, 2012). Member checking was used to verify that each participant was being properly represented. Each participant was provided with a copy of an analysis of his or her interview. All notes made during the interview were locked in a personal filing cabinet at my home when not in use. All computerized data have been stored in password-protected files. In 5 years after the completion of the project, all data will be permanently destroyed.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semistructured interviews. Each interview was conducted in person one -on-one. The interviews were scheduled to accommodate the individual needs of each participant. All interviews were conducted during nonschool hours and did not interrupt the daily schedule of the participants. Before conducting the interview, an interview protocol was designed to assist with note taking during the interviews. The note taking section of the protocol allowed me to make note of key phrases that I thought might aide in analyzing the data. The protocol included demographic information including the names of the interviewer and participant, date, time, and a brief description of the study. During the interview field notes were recorded to help facilitate my memory and reduce any biases (Merriam, 2009). The field notes

were used to help me remember important moments and details from the interview. All interviews were audiotaped. Immediately following each interview, the interviews were transcribed in both physical and electronic (Microsoft Word) formats. Both formats were stored securely when not in use.

Conducting interviews was most suitable for this project because it allowed the participants to provide an intimate account of their feelings (Merriam, 2009). Using interviews allowed for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of not only how the participants perceive the problem, but also why they perceived things the way they did (Creswell, 2012).

Data Tracking

All data were handled in a manner that protected participants from harm and potential risks. Field notes, interview transcriptions, and all other correspondence with participants were controlled with strict access. An access log was maintained to help track all individuals with access to the information. All recording and electronic files were kept in my possession. Individuals assisting me were asked and required to sign a letter of confidentiality.

Role of the Researcher

Currently I am serving as a general education elementary teacher in the county of study. I have worked in the county for 14 years. I have experience as both a general education and special education teacher. I have worked with my colleagues on inclusion and other training. I do not serve in a leadership position and I do not have authority over other teachers. Conducting a countywide study limited personal biases, as it helped to

ensure that I had limited connections to the participants. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, the study did not include participants from my school. As a result, my work relationship did not affect data collection or analysis.

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

The information collected was analyzed by hand. Analyzing the data by hand included multiple readings of the transcripts, a color-coded method for coding the data, and charting data according to emerging themes. Creswell (2012) suggested that analyzing data by hand can be cumbersome, but offers the researcher many benefits. Analyzing the data by hand allowed me to develop a close connection with data (Merriam, 2009). By using manual methods to analyze the data the researcher becomes entrenched in the data.

The data were analyzed using transcription and coding methods. Each interview was transcribed and stored in both hard copy and electronic formats. Immediately following the interviews, I wrote in a journal reflecting on each of the interviews. During the reflection time, I reviewed field notes and listened to the interviews. The interviews were transcribed. After the transcriptions were complete, I read over the transcripts several times. Creswell (2012) suggested that multiple readings of the transcriptions aid the researcher in developing a greater understanding of the data. As I read through the transcriptions, I jotted notes in the columns noting information that stood out or was relevant. All of the phrases that were repeated were highlighted using circles, underlining, and other methods to note significance. Similar findings were transferred into a table or chart under a title noting their resemblance.

The next phase of analyzing was the coding of the data. All data were separated into broad categories and themes. Using a color-coding system the data were examined to connect similar codes and themes. Data with similar connections were coded with similar colors. Color-coded information was analyzed to determine major themes. I examined specific quotes, field notes, and other relevant information to develop themes.

After the data were analyzed and interpreted, participants were sent an individual analysis of their interview. This allowed the participants to review the identified themes and interpretations. According to Creswell (2012), member checking gives the participants the opportunity to determine whether the interpretations are a fair representation of their interviews. Each participant was sent a hard copy of his or her interview analysis. Participants were encouraged to e-mail me with any clarifications or misrepresentations. Participants were given 72 hours to request any changes. None of the participants requested changes.

Also I sought a peer review by a colleague, within the county, who has an educational doctorate degree and is an adjunct faculty member at a local university. The peer reviewer examined the data and reviewed my findings. The peer reviewer also examined the summaries and final interpretations of the data. Additional arrangements were made for an external audit to be conducted by a local professional familiar with the doctoral research process. The external auditor offered advice and suggestions throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Both the peer reviewer and external auditor signed a letter of confidentiality. Using member checking, peer review, and an external

audit helped to reduce personal biases and increase the validity and reliability of the project study (Creswell, 2012).

Discrepant Cases

In most research studies there are cases that do not coincide with other cases. Specifically, these cases offer contradictions to the patterns developing from the data analysis (Creswell, 2012). These cases are known as discrepant cases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The findings did not indicate any discrepant cases.

Limitations

This study was limited to the participants in this study. Due to a small and limited population the study might not be generalizable to larger populations (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, qualitative research is susceptible to personal biases. This study would be hard to replicate as the research was connected to the personal beliefs of each of the participants.

<p align="center">**Findings**</p>

The research findings were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are general education teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies?

2. How do general education teachers perceive the effectiveness of inclusion?

3. What specific inclusion practices do general education teachers perceive to be effective?

4. What resources do general education teachers believe are needed to successfully implement inclusive strategies?

There were 10 participants in the study. A semistructured interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews occurred at settings chosen by the participants. The interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes. All of the participants were engaged and actively participated in the interviews. Each participant expressed the importance of this activity. As I conducted the interview I offered transitions to allow the interview to flow through each segment or portion of the interview. Participants were encouraged to take break as needed. The interview was divided into four segments with each segment focusing on one of the research questions. The first segment of the interview focused on research Question 1, Segment 2 was aligned with research Question 2, Segment 3 was aligned with research Question 3, and Segment 4 was aligned to Question 4. After an intense analysis of the data several themes emerged.

Demographic Data

Demographic Data was collected from each participant to provide an understanding of each participant's background. At least one teacher from grades K-5 is represented in the study. Eight of the county's ten elementary schools were represented in the study. Four of the teachers were kindergarten-second grade teachers. The other participants taught in third-fifth grade classrooms. Total teaching experience ranged between one and twenty-seven years. Eight of the participants had between three and five years of inclusion experience. Two of the participants had one or fewer years of experience in inclusion settings. There were nine female participants and one male. The

teachers had a range of 16-25 students in class. Each teacher had at least 5 students with disabilities in their classrooms. Each of the teachers co-teaches with a special education teacher. The amount of time that the special education teacher spent in the classroom varied at each school.

Segment 1

The questions from Segment 1 of the interview addressed Research Question 1 relating to the teachers' knowledge and understanding of inclusive teaching strategies. The interview questions in this segment were designed to gain an understanding of the teachers' experience levels and overall skills in working with students with disabilities. The data findings were analyzed using the responses to the following questions:

1. How prepared do you feel in an inclusion setting?

Follow up: How comfortable are you implementing inclusion strategies?

2. Before teaching, what experience did you have with students with disabilities?

3. Describe professional development opportunities you have had related to inclusion.

4. How do you feel the level of training factors into a teacher's ability to successfully implement inclusion strategies?

Theme: Training deficits. Some research has indicated that the ability to successfully implement inclusion best practices is related to the amount of training and experience a teacher has. Every participant indicated that before becoming certified teachers they had little experience with students with disabilities. Every participant indicated only having the one introductory- level course covering teaching students with

disabilities. One participant stated, "Many of my college classes hinted at methods for working with diverse students, but none of them were explicitly designed at teaching students with disabilities." Another participant indicated that their minimum amount of training in working with students with disabilities caused them to struggle with inclusion her first few years of teaching. The participant recalled that eight students with disabilities were assigned to the class in here first year of teaching. The participant recalls struggling to accommodate the unique needs of the students.

The participants indicated that in addition to not being properly prepared by coursework, they had received little professional development related to inclusion. Four of the participants indicated that they had not received any training at all. Five participants had attended a one-day conference hosted by the Northwest Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). All of the participants had received training at the local level on working with students on the Autism Spectrum, but not related to inclusion classrooms.

Theme: Importance of training. In segment 1, Question 4 was designed to explore how the participants felt the level of training impacted a teacher's ability to be successful in an inclusion setting. Every participant indicated that proper training was crucial to properly implement inclusion best practices. Generally, all the participants had a positive perception of inclusion and the benefits. However, many of the participants indicated frustration with the feelings of being underprepared to help students with disabilities. One participant suggested it would be invaluable to have readily available resources. The participant stated, "I know all students are different, but some type of

resource providing general guidance would be very helpful. Similarly, a second participant mentioned during the first few years of working with inclusion students they had a feeling of helplessness because of the lack of training. The participant stated they felt dependent on the special education teacher. One participant indicated spending many hours researching techniques and teaching strategies. All of the participants believe that training makes a difference in being successful and not being successful. Also, one participant stated, "You would not want a surgeon who had not received a significant amount of training, and while not exactly equivalent it is equally important that general education teachers receive inclusion training."

A different participant offered the following explanation of the difference in their first two years of teaching inclusion classes and the last three years since attending a national inclusion workshop during the summer:

I remember being completely lost for the first few years of teaching inclusion. I had students with varying disabilities, including students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Other than a few observations, I had minimum experience of working with students with disabilities. It was my fourth year of teaching, but my first at this school, so I was given the inclusion room. It was a daily struggle. After my second year in the inclusion classroom, my co-teacher and I had an opportunity to attend a national conference. I recall sitting in the conference thinking of all the things I was doing wrong or was not doing at all. I could not wait to get back and improve my instructional practices. Attending that conference changed my outlook on inclusion.

It was evident from the data that the participants placed significant value on receiving training. Each participant believes that more training would help teachers be more successful. One participant cautioned that teachers don't need just more training but quality training.

Segment 2

The second segment of the interview addressed the research question "How do general education teachers perceive the effectiveness of inclusion?" This portion of the interview sought to examine what teachers like and dislike about inclusion. This was included because it provides essential data to what might be potential barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion. The data from segment 2 of the interview was derived from the following questions:

5. Describe what you perceive as the effectiveness of inclusive education.

6. How do you feel the inclusion classroom benefits students with disabilities?

7. What are some challenges of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom?

Theme: Student growth and achievement. In Segment 2 of the interview, Question 5 and 6 addressed what the teachers perceive as benefits of inclusion. It is important the teachers are able to recognize the many benefits of inclusion. Every participant indicated that student growth was the biggest advantage of inclusion. One participant stated, "Watching my students' excitement as they learn new skills, is the one thing that keeps me going." Another participant echoed those sentiments answering

"seeing students with disabilities grow leaps and bounds makes dealing with the many challenges easier."

A different participant stated that he was a full supporter of inclusion. He believes that students with disabilities achieve much more when taught in the general education classrooms. A second participant argued that it was often hard to accommodate students with disabilities, but seeing them achieve like their non-disabled peers made it a worthwhile investment. All participants answered with similar responses. One participant answered that student achievement was the most satisfying part of working students with disabilities.

Subtheme: Social development. Based on the data the teachers feel that students not only benefit academically but also socially from the classroom. The kindergarten and first grade teachers participating in the study especially stressed this point. One participant stated kindergarten is a key year in developing appropriate behavior for school. The participant stated that it was essential that these students learned key social skills. A different participant stated that by being in a general education classroom students are better able to model the actions of their non-disabled peers.

One other participant felt that being pulled out added an unnecessary stigma to students with disabilities. The participant went on to state that the students become labeled "low". Another participant noted that in the older grades the other students know that the students being pulled out are on a lower level. However, several of the teachers felt when the students are included with non-disabled peers it provides a sense of social acceptance. One participant suggested if the lessons are differentiated to each student's

level it minimizes the negative attention students with disabilities might otherwise receive.

A second participant stated that including students with disabilities in the inclusion room helped them develop more social awareness. The participant elaborated with the following answer:

Including students with disabilities in the classroom holds students to higher expectations. For example, a few years ago, I had a student with Autism who frequently screamed out to get the teacher's attention. I was able to point out all the other students raising their hand to get their hand. The special education teacher and I were able to write up a social story to help with his understanding. Before long his outbursts happened less and less. Often times, in smaller pull-out settings the student might have been allowed to continue those outbursts. In the general education setting he was able to see that's not how the "real-world" functions. Using the other students as examples, we were able to teach him an essential life skill.

A similar experience was shared by this participant:

I had a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in reading. In first and second grade this student had been served in a resource special education setting. In third grade, he began a transition to inclusion. At the beginning of the year, he would often state that he was not smart that is why he had to go to special classes. As the year progressed, he began to experience academic success. He was particularly strong in math and science. He soon began to realize that he was

outperforming some of the "higher" students in those areas. This gave him a significant boost in confidence. He began volunteering to answer questions, something that he absolutely refused to do at the beginning of the year. His self-esteem along with his academic achievement grew tremendously that year. He is now in fifth grade being served entirely in an inclusion setting.

Other participants shared similar success stories. It was evident from the data that the participants felt that the general education classroom provided that students with a better social environment. Multiple participants cited increased self-esteem, a more accurate portrayal of the real world, improved social interactions, and a greater sense of social awareness.

Subtheme: Benefits to non-disabled peers. The data suggests that the participants see a benefit to non-disabled peers as well. One participant stated that inclusion helps all students in many ways. The participant went on to explain that often there are students in the general education classroom that are slow learners, but don't qualify for special education services. The participant further explained that having a co-teacher allowed more students to receive individual attention.

Other participants also thought that the inclusion settings made students more accepting of diverse students. One participant stated, "Many students develop a greater sense of compassion. Often they want to provide assistance to the struggling students." A different participant maintained that it helped non-disabled gather a greater sense of the real world. The participant asserted that students get a better understanding that the world is a diverse place with people of varying capabilities.

Theme: Time consuming/hard work. In Segment 2, Question 7 was asked to gain a deeper understanding of what challenges the teachers face. The data gained from this question is essential to addressing the needs of the teachers. Teachers were asked to talk about some challenges with including students with disabilities in the regular classroom. All participants stated that it was extremely hard work. One participant talked about the amount of time it took to address the unique needs of every student. Another participant stated she spent hours and hours modifying lessons. The participant positioned that any educator considering working in an inclusion setting should understand that while rewarding it was hard work. Likewise, a participant stated that no matter how well they planned, a new need would arise. The participant expressed that it was overwhelming trying to make sure that they were meeting the need of all the non-disabled student and students with disabilities. Other participants shared similar thoughts about the amount of time planning and modifying the lessons took.

Subtheme: Varying disabilities/lack of resources. Every participant mentioned not completely having a total understanding of the various disabilities. One participant stated, "Every disability has a unique set of characteristics and needs that are associated with it." This was echoed by another participant who stated, "There is no one-size fits all type of accommodation for students." A participant stated, "There is a big difference in teaching a student with a learning disability versus teaching a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or an EBD student." The participant added that they frequently referred back to old textbooks or looked online, but it would be nice to have resources readily available. This sentiment was shared among other participants

indicating a lack of resources. Other participants mentioned there is not an official resource for teachers to turn to when needed.

Theme: Student frustration/wrong placement. Several participants indicated that sometimes inclusion setting is simply not the least restrictive environment for all students. One participant shared the following experience:

I had a student who was labeled Mildly Intellectually Disabled (MID). The student had an IQ of about 70. She was on a first grade level in fifth grade. It didn't matter what accommodations were made she couldn't grasp the concepts. The student could not complete any assignments independently. Often she would be in tears and clearly frustrated with the difficulty of the work. She clearly was not in a placement conducive to maximizing her learning potential.

Other participants shared similar stories about the workload being too demanding for the students' abilities level. One participant stated that sometimes the students simply require more attention than is available in a classroom full of students. This was also communicated by another participant who stated there were times when they simply could not stop and provide all the extra assistance that was needed by some students. The participant reported that too many times the students were unable to keep up with the pace of the general education classroom. Another participant stated that often the curriculum had to be broken down or modified so much that the student really was receiving the same information as the other students. A third participant stated, "Inclusion is a great thing, but it is simply not the right placement for every child.

Theme: Coplanning/shared responsibilities. Six of the seven participants indicated co-teaching and co-planning as being challenges of teaching in inclusion settings. One participant stated that their coteacher was responsible for working with multiple grade levels and simply did not have time to coplan. As a result, the participant did a large portion of the planning, and her coteacher made suggestions after the fact. Other teachers also proclaimed that because of all the other duties held by the special education teacher, the bulk of planning and implementing strategies fell on the general education teacher. A different participant stated that it would be more effective it the two teachers were able to plan and map out learning strategies together. The participant believes that it would make teaching in an inclusion setting lesson stressful if both parties shared the responsibilities.

Segment 3

The questions included in Segment 3 were related to specific inclusion best practices that the participants were aware of and were using in their classrooms. The questions also attempted to glean information of what strategies that the participants might need more help implementing. Data for this portion of the interview was derived from the following questions:

8. What specific inclusion strategies have you found to be most effective?

9. What strategies do you find ineffective?

10. What does a highly effective inclusion class look like to you?

Theme: Differentiation. Differentiation involves the teacher tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. Each of the participants cited differentiation

as being one of the most effective strategies for working in an inclusion setting. One participant noted that differentiation is an absolute must for students in the inclusion setting. The participant added that it should be used for all students, but is essential for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. A second participant stated the lessons must be individualized and adapted to meet the needs of the students. One participant stated that during planning they designed the lessons and then determined what modifications are needed to make the students successful.

Other participants agreed that differentiation was a very effective strategy. However, many expressed how difficult it was to make individual accommodations for every student. One participant stated that she worked hard at it, but she would like more training, and to see how other teachers were going about it. The idea of wanting to see differentiation in action was repeated by other participants as well. It was clear from the data that the teachers felt differentiation a key factor in an inclusion setting.

Theme: Flexible small groups. Every participant agreed that working with small groups was an essential strategy in an inclusion setting. One participant stated that they couldn't imagine operating her class without the use of small groups. Another participant added that small grouping allowed her to work with every student and gather important data. A different participant described their groups as need-based and frequently change as the students' needs change. The participant cautioned that small group settings needed to be flexible and student-centered. An additional, participant stated small grouping works because it allows the teacher to tailor instruction more effectively. The participant commented that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work within any classroom, but

especially an inclusion setting. According to the data, every participant believed in the use of small group instruction.

Theme: Modified lessons. Modifying lessons include adapting lesson materials to allow the student to be more successful. The findings indicate that participants believe students with disabilities greatly benefit from modified lessons. One participant stated that modifying the assignments reduces student frustration, but allows the student to receive the same information. Another participant's answer resembled this response. The participant stated that while it was extra work and required extra detail to planning that it was worth her time. The following response given by one of the participants summarizes the thoughts of most of the participants:

> Modifying assignments is something that I struggled with in the beginning. I thought it wasn't fair. In my mind, if they were going to be in the general education classroom, they should complete the same assignments. In my mind it just made sense. I had this student with ADHD. She was a very bright student. However, she never completed assignments. The special education teacher recommended that we shorten the assignments and/or allow her to have extra time. Soon she began completing more and more assignments. I quickly realized that even with the shortened assignments she was grasping the key concepts.

Theme: Accommodations based on disability. Many of the participants struggled with answering what strategies they found to be ineffective. All of the participants mentioned that the struggled with knowing what modifications work with certain type of students. One participant stated that it would be helpful to have a pre-

constructed checklist to refer to. A second participant attributed their struggle to a lack of training. A third participant said it was hard to realize if they were over accommodating or not accommodating enough.

One participant gave the following response:

> Without having specific training, it's hard to know what typically works with different disabilities. All of the disabilities are so different. There needs to be some type of reference manual that is readily available to general education teachers. I know that the special education teachers have many resources. I attended a training session about working with high-functioning autistic students. One of the best things about the training was a packet that contained different strategies for different situations. This would be beneficial to have for other disabilities.

Theme: Coteaching. Coteaching emerged as a theme from Question 10, which asked participants what they thought a highly effective inclusion classroom looked like. Every participant described a setting in which the general education and special education teachers were not distinguishable. One participant said that both teachers would be working with small groups of students. A different participant positioned that both teachers would be responsible for delivering key content to the class. Other participants felt that in a highly effective classroom the teachers would share responsibilities. Another participant stated the students would look at the teachers as equals. The participant added that the students would feel comfortable working with either teacher. Each participant believed that coteaching was a key component of a highly effective classroom.

Segment 4

The questions in Segment 4 were designed to identify what additional resources the participants felt they needed to be more successful in inclusion settings. The data findings emerged from the following questions:

11. What supports do you feel would help you be better prepared to implement inclusion best practices?

12. What topics regarding inclusion would be most beneficial to include in professional development courses?

Theme: Professional development/more training: Each of the participants identified the need for more training. Most of the participants felt they had learned a lot through trial and error. However, all participants agreed that it would be more beneficial to new and veteran inclusion teachers to receive more training. One participant indicated that teachers might be more willing if they were better trained. Another participant who has spent four years working in an inclusion setting stated, "I know that as I received more training, I became much more comfortable in working with students with disabilities." The participant went on to say that as she felt more comfortable, her beliefs about inclusion completely changed. A different participant suggested that with most teachers not having a special education background, professional development is essential.

Subtheme: *Ongoing professional development*. Each of the participants felt that the most effective professional development would be ongoing. It was suggested that often professional development is a one-time thing. One of the participants went asserted

that the topics are not always relevant and almost never make it back to the classroom. A second participant added that professional development should include follow-up. Three other participants shared similar positions asserting professional development should be catered to the needs of the teachers and should be ongoing. The participants indicated professional development should be hands-on and relevant. The participant added professional development shouldn't just be an introductory course, but offer teacher real world instructional strategies.

Theme: Differentiated instructional strategies. Question 10 asked participants what topics would be most beneficial to include in professional development course. The data overwhelming indicated that the participants wanted more training in differentiating lessons for the students. One participant stated that differentiation was one of those topics that should be continuously reviewed and expanded upon. The participant further suggested that new strategies and methods of differentiation are being developed. It is important that teachers are offered professional development using current research. Other participants also suggested the importance of differentiated instructional strategies. One participant summed it up by saying, "Differentiated instruction is one of the most important components of an inclusion classroom. Therefore, it is impossible to have an effective training session without addressing it."

Theme: Co-teaching roles/collaboration. Coteaching again emerged as a theme from Question 10. One participant indicated that the roles of each teacher remain unclear. Many participants expressed this belief. One participant felt their coteacher was more like a paraprofessional than a certified teacher. Other participants shared similar sentiments.

In particular, another participant stated the coteacher just shows up. The participant added that there was rarely common planning. This thought was shared among two additional participants. A third participant indicated having a great relationship with the coteacher, but not feeling comfortable giving the teacher more control. One other participant stated, "I would like clarification of exactly how coteaching works." It would be great if general education teacher and special educations teachers both received the same training." The participant stated it would be beneficial to see coteaching models or videos of co-teaching in action.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework of this study is Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. Vygotsky's theory suggests that the purpose of the school is the education of the person. According to the social constructivist theory individual differences should be recognized by teachers and used in developing appropriate education. The findings of this study are directly related to the constructivist theory. Common themes emerging from the data include a focus on individual needs, importance of social interactions, and acceptance of inclusion practices.

The data from the semistructured interviews indicates that the general education teachers are often faced with many challenges due to insufficient training. The participants in this study believe in the concept of inclusion, but continue to face difficulty in implementing inclusion best practices. The interviews and the findings answer the following research questions:

1. What are general education teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies?

2. How do general education teachers perceive the effectiveness of inclusion?

3. What specific inclusion practices do general education teachers perceive to be effective?

4. What resources do general education teachers believe are needed to successfully implement inclusive strategies?

Question 1, examined the level of the participants' knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies. The data indicated most of the teachers entered the teaching profession with a very limited background. All of the participants indicated that they had only had an introductory level course. Some of the participants indicated that even the single introductory course was very early in their college program, and didn't provide much help in their current teaching settings.

The participants indicated that since becoming teachers, there had been limited professional development. Some of the participants had participated in training sessions. The majority of the participants stated they had not received any training specifically related to inclusion. All of the participants concurred that proper training was essential to developing strategies for a highly effective inclusion classroom. Each of the participants shared steps and methods they had taken to research and better equip themselves. All of the participants expressed the willingness and desire to receive more training.

Question 2 was used to determine how effective the participants believed inclusion to be. All of the participants believed inclusion to be extremely effective for

meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Many of the participants volunteered to be the inclusion teacher at their schools. Each of the participants reported that most students with disabilities are able to experience significant academic growth in inclusion settings. The participants believed that inclusion settings set standards and held students to higher expectations than separate classrooms. In addition, to growing academically the participants felt that inclusion setting was beneficial for social development as well.

While being generally in favor of inclusion the participants cautioned that inclusion had many challenges. Each participant felt that it required a significant amount of personal time. Some participants cited lack training and a lack of resources as being challenges. Others found meeting the unique needs of every student as a challenge.

Question 3, explored which inclusion best practices teachers were comfortable with using and found to be effective. The participants named many different strategies used in their classrooms. Hands-on assignments, small groups, modified or shorten assignments, and peer-tutoring were all mentioned as effective inclusion best practices. Every participant mentioned the effectiveness of differentiating every lesson to meet diverse learning needs. According to the findings, differentiation is an essential strategy to effectively implement inclusion.

Question 4 examined what resources the participants felt would help them be more successful in inclusion settings. The data indicates that participants feel more professional development is absolutely essential to helping teachers be more successful in inclusion settings. Throughout the interview the lack of resources and professional development repeatedly emerged. Many of the participants felt that many of the

challenges of inclusion stemmed from not being adequately trained. It was shared belief among the participants that is inclusion is already challenging and not being properly trained made it even more challenging.

The participants proposed that the professional development should be ongoing and relevant to the specific needs of the teachers. The participants indicated a wide range of topics that should be covered. These topics included differentiation, co-teaching roles, and specific strategies and accommodations. The participants believe that differentiation is a strategy that continues to expand and develop. The participants felt common planning, more collaboration, and a better understanding of co-teaching roles would aid in establishing a more effective inclusion classroom.

Project as an Outcome

The product of this project study is a three-part (day) professional development workshop. The professional development workshop will explore the foundations and conceptual frameworks of inclusion. The workshop will offer specific strategies that can help teachers better implement inclusion best practices. The professional development is designed to be relevant and focused on the needs of participants. The workshop will provide engaging activities that require participants to apply concepts to real-world situations. The goal is to provide teachers with strategies that can be utilized in their classrooms. Participation in this workshop could lead to a better understanding of inclusion and greater self-efficacy.

Transition to Section 3

Section 2 provided the methodology used in this research project. Included in this section was a discussion of the qualitative approach and design of the study, gaining access to the participants, the process for selecting participants, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis of the data. Section 2 also presented a detailed rich narrative of the findings of the project study. Section 3 presents the project that was developed in accordance with the findings.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Ten general education elementary teachers in a rural county participated in an interview. During these interviews, the teachers shared information regarding their knowledge level and perceptions of inclusion best practices. The interview questions were connected to the purpose of the research study. The questions focused on four main broad categories: teachers' understanding, perceptions of inclusion, perceptions of inclusion best practices, and additional resources needed. Using the findings from the research study, a professional development program was designed to better prepare the teachers to implement inclusion best practices. The key components of the research study were derived using the data provided by the teachers.

The project for this study is entitled Inclusion Academy: Best Practices Workshop. This workshop was developed to respond to and meet the identified needs of the teachers within the county of study. The workshop was designed to provide teachers with methods for teaching students with disabilities in regular education settings. The project is designed to provide teachers with on-going professional learning that supports the implementation of instructional practices. The Inclusion Academy allows teachers to participate in collegial discussions and work and learn together with other professionals.

Description and Goals

The project was created with the purpose of further developing general education teachers' knowledge and ability to implement inclusion best practices. The setup of this project is grounded in the adult learning theory, andragogy. According to Knowles

(2012), adults are motivated to learn by experiences. Knowles (2012) further explained that adult learning should be organized around real-life situations. According to the andragogy learning theories, adult learning is self-regulated (Khiat, 2015). The role of the instructor is to facilitate learning rather than control the learning process (Khiat, 2015). Giannoukos, Besas, Galiropoulos, Hioctour, (2015), stated, "The goal of the educator is not only to transfer knowledge but also to urge the learner to search for knowledge himself" (p.46). This framework is suitable for the Inclusion Academy as it encourages the learner to facilitate the learning process and engage in lifelong learning (Giannoukos et al., 2015).

The project is divided into a 3-day workshop. Each day of the workshop will cover multiple topics based on identified needs from the data analysis in Section 2. The workshop will be guided by the use of instructional videos, reviewing relevant websites, small group peer collaboration, and hands-on activities. The special education director, curriculum director, academic coaches, teacher leaders, and other special education department officials will serve as the official facilitators of the project.

While the project is mainly geared towards the development of general education teachers, there will be opportunities for special education teachers and administrators to participate in the training sessions. Many of the teachers identified the need to collaborate with their special education colleagues. One session of the workshop will focus on collaboration and coteaching. However, special education teachers will also serve as resources throughout the workshop. Special education teachers will be allowed to share their knowledge of best practices involving students with disabilities. Also, school-level

administrators will be encouraged to attend different portions of the workshop. Many of the teachers indicated administrative support being vital in the implementation of inclusion best practices.

Each day of the Inclusion Academy will consist of learning modules. The workshop will begin with an overview of inclusion. Day 1 will include an examination of the historical foundations of inclusion. Participants will explore various topics including the general education teacher's role in developing IEP, understanding the IEP, and examination of the different types of disabilities. Day 2 will focus on differentiation and other specific inclusion best practices. The various practices will be demonstrated and modeled by the presenters. Each segment will include hands-on activities. Presenters and mentors will help teachers create sample lesson plans based on the learned techniques. Day 3 will be a continuation of best practices. The third day will include the special education teachers. The topics of Day 3 will focus on coteaching models, roles, and other related topics.

The primary goal of this project is to provide teachers with a foundational understanding of inclusion. Moreover, a goal of this project is to equip teachers with resources to be successful teaching in inclusion settings. The project was established with a desire to expound upon the participants' current knowledge allowing them to develop a greater sense of self-efficacy.

<div style="text-align:center;">**Rationale**</div>

Federal and state mandates regulate the service of students with disabilities. In an effort to ensure that all students are receiving a suitable education many different

programs have been established. Inclusion classrooms are being increasingly used to provide students with disabilities in the LRE. While the use of inclusion has increased, the findings of the study indicate a lack of proper training for many general education teachers. All of the participants in the study indicate a need for more professional development.

To address the local problem, 10 local elementary general education teachers were interviewed to gain greater insight into what resources are needed to make inclusion teachers more successful. The interviews were focused on gathering the participants' level of understanding, perceptions of inclusion practices, and needed resources. After an analysis of the interviews, I determined that the participants documented a need for more professional development. When properly trained, teachers are less likely to be resistant of the inclusion classroom (Roden et al., 2013). As the teachers feel more comfortable teaching in inclusion settings they are equipped to address the learning needs of all students.

Each participant suggested having little experience in working with students with disabilities before becoming teachers. The participants also indicated little recent professional development. Each of the participants felt that proper training was essential to the success of new inclusion teachers. One participant stated, "Even though I have learned so much, there is still so much more that I don't know." Another participant claimed that every inclusion teacher would greatly benefit from participating in more professional development. The Inclusion Academy addresses the needs of the teachers within this county. The findings indicate that the teachers are willing to learn. The

workshop focuses on special education foundational practices, differentiated instruction, and coteaching. These are all essential practices that help shape the educational settings of students with disabilities

Review of the Literature

The data from the research study indicated that all the participants placed a high value on professional development. Many of the participants felt a lack of appropriate training was directly connected to the difficulty that many teachers faced with implementing inclusion strategies. As a result of the findings, professional development was chosen as the project genre. It was evident from the findings that the participants in the study are in need of professional development to be more successful in implementing inclusion best practice. A 3-day professional workshop might be the medium that allows teachers to be more successful in teaching students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. In review of literature, I focus on the key components and best practices of the professional development genre. In addition, I present best practices for designing and implementing the subject matter of the workshop. The professional development workshop focuses on foundational best practices, differentiation, and coteaching roles, as each participant identified these areas.

Professional Development

Professional development of teachers is an essential element in improving the education of students with disabilities (Tzivinikou, 2015). According to Crawford and Thompson (2011), professional development is directly related to the growth of teachers. Professional development leads to the discovery of new and invigorating ideas (Bradley,

Munger, & Hord, 2015). Participation in professional development improves the quality of the teacher and therefore leads to greater student achievement (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske (2015). Professional development leads to the growth of both the teacher and student.

The focus of education continues to be on improving student learning and increasing achievement outcomes. There is a direct link between professional learning and student achievement outcomes (Barret et al., 2015). In this study, I found that many teachers in low-performing schools were also inadequately prepared. I tracked student growth as teachers completed professional development, resulting in improved student achievement scores. Killion (2015) found similar results. Teachers who participated in mathematics professional development saw their student achievement scores significantly increase. Professional learning is a key component of providing students with disabilities a suitable education.

One goal of professional learning is to improve student achievement. Gleason and Gerzon (2014) found a direct connection between student achievement and quality professional learning. A study of four high-poverty schools out-performing other schools demonstrated that affect that professional learning can have on student achievement. It is crucial that school systems provide teachers with professional development opportunities. "Content-focused professional learning is a powerful vehicle for promoting student learning" (Killion, 2015, p. 59). Professional learning provides teachers with the needed to tools to provide quality education. Student learning and achievement hinges on qualified teachers using research based practices.

Professional development not only leads to significant gains in student achievement but also leads to significant growth for teachers as well. After participating in professional development, many teachers demonstrate a greater degree of competency (Baldiris, Zervas, Fabregat, & Sampson, 2016). According to Baldiris, et al. (2016), results from post-assessments indicated that teachers demonstrated significant gains in designing inclusive learning experiences for students with disabilities. Professional development leads to greater knowledge and improved attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Royster, Reglin, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014). Royster et al., (2014) asserted that teachers are more likely to implement new practices when properly trained. The attitude of the teacher is one of the most important factors in the success of inclusion, and teachers demonstrate a more willing attitude after participating in professional development (Royster et al., 2014).

Teaching in an inclusion setting presents teachers with many challenges. Teaching in an inclusion setting requires training. Shady, Luther, and Richman (2013) positioned that teachers cannot be simply told to teach in inclusion settings without support and guidance. Quality professional development often leads to increased knowledge and self-confidence (Shady et al., 2013). In general, teachers want to provide all students, including students with disabilities, with a high-quality education. However, high-quality education cannot be achieved without equipping teachers with the necessary tools (Shady et al., 2013). Students benefit when teachers are trained and prepared to teaching in inclusion settings. Proper training it essential to the successful implementation of best inclusion practices.

Effective professional development must be designed to address the individual needs of teachers. In designing professional development, the designers must begin with the outcomes in mind (Bradley et al., 2015). The professional learning must provide teachers with a road map (Bradley et al., 2015). The professional learning should identify desired goals and strategies to reach the fundamental goals.

After desired outcomes have been developed, it is important to focus on characteristics of professional learning. Blank (2013) examined 16 different studies to determine key characteristics of professional development that had the greatest impact on student achievement. Highly effective professional development should be ongoing, includes active participation, be collaborative and relevant to the needs of the participants, be linked to students' results (Blank, 2013). Professional learning with these characteristics have the best chance of impacting the teaching practices of the participants

Only providing teachers with a one-time professional learning course is not sufficient (Blank, 2013). One-shot professional development courses provide some valuable benefits, but are often ineffective in leading to any significant changes (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). According to Blank (2013), past effective professional learning opportunities have included follow-up, assistance, and coaching. Patton et al. (2015) stated, "Long-term professional development is accompanied by a chance to practice the change with on-site follow-up, subsequently bringing experiences back to the group for discussion" (p.32). On-going professional development is essential if changes are going to be sustained.

In addition to providing teachers with on-going professional development, it is

important that professional learning is relevant to the needs of the participants. Teachers are more successful at implementing strategies if they find it to be applicable to their job (Royster, Reglin, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014). Teachers need to be trained in strategies that can immediately be applied to their teaching practice (Royster et al., 2014). When given job-embedded or related professional development educational practitioners reported improvement in achieving and applying the learning outcomes (Owen, 2014). Professional development should expand on what the participants are already doing (Owen, 2014). Job embedded professional development is the most effective type of professional learning. Training that builds on the participants' knowledge is more likely to be implemented in the classroom.

Professional development should provide opportunities for participants to engage and collaborate with peers. Stewart (2014) stated that learning in professional development should be active, requiring teachers to learn from each other. Professional learning activities should not just be presented, but applied to real-world situations. Rather than just showing up and going through the motions, participations should have input in planning, thereby having an active choice in what they learn. It is in these types of professional learning settings that maximum learning occurs.

The ultimate goal of all professional development should be the fostering and creation of professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are collaborative groups of professionals focusing on specific job–related and development topics (Tobia & Hord, 2012). PLCs allow for a large variety of ideas and varying viewpoints to be shared. In PLCs, teachers share knowledge and receive constant feedback. PLCs create built-in

resources for teachers' access when needed (Adams and Vesico, 2015). According to

Riveros and Viczko (2012), PLCs allow teachers to understand that professional learning

can be found in the context of professional practices.

Coteaching Strategies

The data indicated a significant need for professional learning on implementing

coteaching strategies. Every participant indicated uncertainty as to the role of the

coteacher. Researchers have revealed that this is not a new phenomenon. Many teachers

lack the necessary collaborative skills to improve student learning (Strieker, Gillis, &

Zong, 2013). Coteaching is an inclusion model that involves the collaboration of general

education and the special education teacher to provide instruction to students with

disabilities (Solis et al., 2012). Coteaching is one the most widely used practices in

implementing inclusion classrooms. It has been found to be a highly effective practice

when implemented successfully (Strieker et al., 2013). In many cases coteaching has

been found to be more difficult than expected (Strieker et al., 2013). Coteaching requires

a significant amount of effort, collaboration, and compromise.

Despite the many reported challenges, coteaching environments have

continuously been efficient in reducing the ability or achievement gap of students with

disabilities (Nierengarten, 2013). According to Nierengarten (2013) the challenges of co-

teaching can be alleviated by more training and with assistance from local administrators.

Frequently teachers are placed in inclusion settings with little training. Coteaching

requires training in communication, collaborations, and responsibilities (Nierengarten,

2013). Coteaching has to be a joint venture (Solis et al., 2012). It is essential that both the

general education and special education teacher have a clear understanding of each other's role.

The special education teacher was often viewed as the subordinate (Pugach & Winn, 2011). These teachers play more of a supportive role instead of providing specialized instruction. Studies attribute this phenomenon to a lack of understanding of the shared teaching model or other collaborative studies (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Another factor leading to the lessening of the special education teacher's role was the lack of common planning. A significant number of coteachers indicated the lack of common planning with their colleague (Nierengarten, 2013; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Solis et al., 2012). Teachers are more likely to have a better collaborative relationship when provided with ample common planning (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Common planning time must be scheduled for both teachers to share personal knowledge of the students and their unique needs (Royster et al., 2014). With collaboration being an essential component of successful coteaching settings, common planning is vital.

Coteaching classrooms require significant support from the administration. Walsh (2012) found coteaching classrooms flourished when given high priority from school leadership. Administrators are responsible for identifying crucial factors and making sure those are in place. In this study Howard County in Maryland experienced significant success by focusing on the core elements of the co-teaching classrooms (Walsh, 2012). Administrators provided professional learning and support that facilitated successful co-teaching practices. Other studies indicate that coteaching is a key best practice in serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Shady et al., 2013).

According to Walsh (2012), co-teaching classrooms should be viewed as a source of continuous school improvement. Coteaching is an effective strategy for inclusion classrooms. In order for this strategy to work both teachers must work collaboratively to provide students with quality education.

Differentiation

There are many inclusion best practices. Of those best practices, differentiation may be the most significant practice. If teachers are going to be effective, they must take into account all of the unique needs of a diverse student population (Tomlinson, 2005). According to Tomlinson differentiated instruction requires the teacher to teach in response to the students they serve, rather than teaching out of habit (Wu, 2013). Students with disabilities have been able to demonstrate significant progress when taught in truly differentiated classrooms (Morgan, 2014). Differentiated instruction is a strategy that works for all students. It plays a significant role in ensuring students with disabilities are able to be included in the general education classroom (Acosta-Tello & Sheperd, 2014). Differentiated instruction needs to be a component of an inclusion classroom.

Differentiation has been shown to be an important practice. Despite the documented importance there continues to be a gap between the research and practice (Ernest, Heckaman, Thompson, Hull, & Carter, 2011). Ernest et al., (2011), used a case study to track a teacher as he implemented differentiated practices. The results indicated that with proper support and coaching the teacher was able to actualize the many positive benefits of differentiated instruction (Ernest et al., 2011). Much like inclusion many teachers enter underprepared to use differentiated teaching strategies. Pre-service teachers

typically have one class on academically diverse learners (Logan, 2011). Logan (2011) noted, "Pre-service teachers were almost never encouraged to use differentiation by education professors or university supervisors (p.10)." Differentiation is a complex concept (Mills et al., 2014). Without training and support from instructional leaders differentiated practices remain undeveloped in classrooms.

However, when provided with support and professional learning teachers are able to implement differentiated instructional practices. Training in differentiation resulted in teachers having a greater sense of self-efficacy (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin (2014). Dixon et al., (2014) contends that teachers are often only introduced to differentiation in teacher preparation programs. Therefore it is important that teachers receive more professional learning in order to meet the diverse needs of all students. This professional development should offer more than an introduction. It should provide teachers with real-world applications (Dixon et al., 2014). Kappler and Weckstein (2012) proposed that teachers are the centerpieces in implementing differentiated instruction. Their study documents the professional growth of teachers using differentiation (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). The use of differentiation was used as a change initiative and was tied to the teachers' evaluation (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). Providing proper support and training makes differentiation attainable.

Teachers in this study stated that they had a general understanding of differentiated instruction. All of the participants felt that it was essential to provide students with disabilities a quality education. Differentiation requires the teacher to have a shift in thinking (Tomlinson, 2005). Though it may seem like a difficult task,

differentiation becomes easier with each undertaking (De Jesus, 2012). "Teachers can successfully differentiate instruction by simply incorporating into their lessons the use of cooperative learning, project base learning, and multiple intelligences" (De Jesus, 2012, p.10). Once a teacher gains a deeper understanding of the foundational practices of inclusion the process becomes less overwhelming (Mills et al., 2014). Carol Tomlinson, recommends that teachers start out slowly (Wu, 2013). Differentiation should not be viewed as the latest fad. Instead, teachers should look at differentiation as a foundational shift in instructional strategies.

When teachers accept differentiation, students are the main beneficiaries. Numerous studies indicate positive growth in student achievement. In many cases differentiated instructional approaches have been found to be more efficient in increasing student achievement than traditional approaches (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014). Little et al., (2014) found that the treatment group of middle school students outperformed their peers in the control group. These students were taught using differentiated strategies rather than traditional whole group approaches to reading. Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri (2011) also found that students with learning disabilities taught using differentiated instruction strategies outperformed other students in co-teaching classes taught using traditional methods. Students perform better when taught using differentiated methods (Little et al., 2014; Brigham et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2014).

Summary

Teachers in this study indicated a clear need for more training in inclusion best practices. It is evident from the literature that professional development is an effective

tool to enhance teachers' instructional practices (Crawford & Thompson, 2011). Teaching students with disabilities requires a significant amount of effort and collaboration. Many teachers enter the professional without being properly changed. Therefore, it is important that schools properly train teachers to work with these students. Teachers who receive the necessary professional development are often more effective at reaching student with disabilities (Tzivinikou, 2015).

Two topics that repeatedly emerged from this study was the lack of understanding of co-teaching roles and the need more for more training with differentiated instruction. Both co-teaching and differentiated instruction are vital practices in providing students with disabilities with the best possible education. For co-teaching to meet its goals, it requires a concerted effort by both the general education and special education teacher (Solis et al., 2012). If teachers are to truly operate a cohesive co-teaching classroom, they must be provided with the necessary support, training, and resources (Pugach & Winn, 2011).

Today more than ever teachers are serving more diverse classrooms (De Jesus, 2012). Each student presents the teacher with unique challenges. Differentiation plays an important role in meeting the unique needs of all students (Morgan, 2014). There are many different methods for achieving differentiation (Morgan, 2014). "Although differentiated instruction is designed to benefit all students, it requires extremely hard work by knowledgeable and well-prepared teachers" (Morgan, 2014, p. 37). Differentiating instruction entails a significant amount of organization, planning and training (Petrilli, 2011). Petrilli wrote, "with a well-trained and dedicated staff and lots of

support differentiated instruction can be brought to life" (p.55). It is critical that teachers receive the necessary training.

In conducting this literature review, a number of sources were consulted. These sources include textbooks, scholarly websites, and Walden's library databases. Using the databases in Walden's library, multiple databases were searched including ERIC, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest Central. The key terms used in the search included staff development, professional learning, professional learning communities, professional development, inclusion, inclusion best practices, co-teaching, collaboration, differentiated instruction, and differentiation. Each of the key terms produced a multitude of sources. Using many of the sources saturation of the relevant literature was achieved

Implementation

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The workshop is expected to be a joint venture between the Exceptional Education Department and the Curriculum and Planning Department. The special education director and the curriculum director or their designee will serve as the workshop facilitators. Each day of the workshop will require a facilitator. In addition to the overall facilitator, small group facilitators will be needed for each of the breakout sessions. For the program to be successful, five to six facilitators will be needed for each day of the workshop. The county already has individuals dedicated to the facilitation of professional learning. Facilitators for the professional development could include central office representatives, academic coaches, and other teachers within the county.

The workshop will consist of multiple web searches as well as viewing different professional websites. Participants will need to bring their county issued laptop computer. Teachers will need to bring county lesson plan templates. The workshop will supply post-it notes, highlighters, pens, handouts, and other miscellaneous items.

Each module of the workshop will be presented using Powerpoint presentations and (or) learning videos. After each activity, participants will be required to participate in a small group session to discuss the presented topic. The small groups will then lead to collegial discussions with all of the workshop's participants.

The workshop will be implemented during regularly scheduled time designated for professional development. Currently, there are four pre-planning in-service days. Three other professional learning days have been designated throughout the year. An additional three days have been designated after the school year has ended. Each school has professional learning activities after school at least once a week. It is suggested that the Inclusion Academy occur during the pre-planning service days. Follow-up meetings and site-based professional learning communities will occur throughout the year.

Potential Barriers

The barriers to implementing the Inclusion Academy are limited. The county already has an established professional development infrastructure. Two locations throughout the county are set up to conduct and facilitate professional learning classes. The greatest barrier will be scheduling the program. Currently, the county has many new initiatives in place that require a significant amount of training. In addition the state is in the process of revising the performance standards, which will require professional

development and training time. However, the workshop is designed so that it can be completed at any time during the school year. The flexibility of the program should allow for navigation of scheduling barriers.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The Inclusion Academy is a yearlong endeavor. Implementation should begin with administrators using data to identify possible participants. Co-teachers will attend the training as a unit. For the inaugural academy teachers will be allowed to volunteer to participate. All co-teaching units will eventually participate within a three-year time frame.

It is proposed that the 3-day workshop be conducted during the first three days of the preplanning week. During the workshop, the participants will be organized into Professional Learning Communities. Beginning with the first week of school, teachers will begin implementation of the learned strategies. Teachers will record weekly journal entries on successes and areas that need improvement. The special education directors and other group leaders will provide support and conduct ongoing follow-up meetings with the participants.

School administrators and peer teachers will be tasked with conducting regular observations of teachers. Using a predesigned observation protocol the observer will document and record strategies used in the classroom. Data collected during the observations will help evaluate the effectiveness of the program. At the end of the year, the cohort will meet again to discuss things learned from the year. Participants will complete summative evaluations of the program. School officials should examine the

summative surveys and other collected data to modify the program as needed. A revised program should be repeated the next school year.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The findings from the study indicate a need for professional development covering key components of inclusion. As the developer of this project, my role is to present the findings of the study and the proposed project to appropriate school leaders. An executive summary report of the project study should be developed and presented to school leaders.

Participants in the project will consist of both general education teachers and special education teachers. The success of the workshop is largely contingent on the development of a collaborative relationship between the general education teachers and special education teachers. All participants will be expected to participate in the workshop and implement the learned strategies within their classrooms. In addition to utilizing the learned strategies, participants will be expected to complete bi-weekly reflections about their growth and struggles using the learning strategies.

Teachers will also be charged with participating in routine meetings with their established professional learning communities. General education and special education will be responsible for communicating on a regular basis. Additionally, it is expected that general education and special education teachers will spend time collaborating during common planning times.

Administrators are responsible for ensuring that general education and teachers have common planning. Administrators will be tasked with helping to establish

professional learning communities within their schools. It is also important that administrators provide teachers with the necessary resources and tools to implement the strategies learned during the workshop. Administrators will also be responsible for conducting regular observations and documenting the progress of the program.

<div align="center">**Project Evaluation**</div>

The effectiveness of this project will be evaluated using both formative and summative evaluation methods. Using both formative and summative evaluation methods will allow for both immediate and overall feedback. Formative evaluation is important as it provides feedback during the learning process (Glazer, 2014). This process will allow the facilitators to adapt and immediate changes. Feedback is an important part of achieving maximum efficiency (Glazer, 2014). Summative evaluations, on the other hand, provide an overall picture. Summative assessments are used to determine to what extent the learning outcomes have been achieved (Kealey, 2010). Formative and summative evaluations are equally important in determining the effectiveness of this program.

Formative Evaluation

At the end of each session, participants will be asked to respond to questions evaluating each session of the workshop. Participants will be asked to make suggestions for improvement and provide facilitators with feedback on the overall organization of the workshop. Teachers will also complete journal entries. Journaling and reflecting on teaching practices are already currently a component of the state's teacher evaluation system. Teachers will maintain the journal entries in the same format as other

documented professional activities. These journal entries will provide key information and allow for discussions that can lead to improvement of the professional development workshop. When programs are being implemented for the first time this type of formative feedback is extremely important (Lodico et al., 2010). Formative evaluation allows the developers "work the kinks" of the program out.

Summative Evaluation

In addition to the formative assessment each teacher will complete a summative assessment of the workshop. At the end of the year, each participant will be asked to complete a survey evaluating the workshop. The data collected from the observations should be combined into a single report to determine the overall effectiveness of the program. Summative evaluations provide an overall summary of the participants' experience (Lodico et al., 2010). This type of evaluation provides the developers with concrete data as to whether the goals or desired outcomes were achieved (Spaulding, 2014).

<center>**Implications Including Social Change**</center>

The project has the potential to bring about social change. Throughout the course of this study, it has been demonstrated that teachers have better perceptions and attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities when properly trained (Golmic & Hansen 2012; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Swain et al., 2012). Having a positive attitude towards teaching with students with disabilities often leads to greater success (Telfer & Howley, 2014). Inclusion has been proven to be a very effective environment for teaching students

with disabilities. Better equipping teachers with the necessary skills will provide a positive social change for both the students and teachers.

Local Community

The teachers in this study mostly had favorable opinions of inclusion. However, all of the participants indicated that teaching in inclusion settings was difficult and sometimes stressful. Each participant indicated feeling underprepared to implement inclusion best practices. This program can positively impact the instructional practices of local teachers. Better preparation is likely to increase the teachers' satisfaction with their jobs.

This project provides the opportunity to increase student achievement. Professional development has been linked to an improvement in instructional methodology. This in returns often leads to greater student achievement. Students with disabilities deserve to be taught in the least restrictive environment by teachers who are adequately prepared.

Far-Reaching

This project has the opportunity to be a change agent in many schools. This study can be a source for actualizing the goal of reaching every student. This project is designed to meet the needs of local elementary teachers. However, many of the topics are beneficial to middle and high schools inclusion teachers, as well. The topics covered in this project have the ability to prepare teachers at all levels to meet the needs of a diverse learning population. "Parents, whose children have experienced a differentiated

instruction classroom, are parents who are proud of their children's accomplishments and supportive of the school" (De Jesus, 2012, p.10). This project has the potential to change the climate of the school.

Conclusion

It is essential that teachers receive the necessary training to meet the needs of all students. Collaborative professional development leads to greater inclusion of students with disabilities (Brusca-Vega, Alexander, & Kamin, 2014). The Inclusion Academy Workshop will provide teachers with the opportunity to enhance instructional skills. This enhancement of the instructional skills has the potential to lead to greater student achievement.

Section 3 of this project study provides an in-depth description of the project that was formulated using the findings from the research study. Section 3 discussed the rationale, goals, needed resources, and potential barriers. Section 3 also describes the evaluative methods that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the project. Section 4 offers a reflection on the completion of the project study.

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Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Section 4 presents the project's strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. In this section, I reflect on my personal growth throughout the completion of this project. I provide a detailed account of my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and developer. Section 4 also includes the implications, applications, and recommendations for the future.

Project Strengths

This research study was designed to identify areas of need as defined by general education teachers working in inclusion settings. The data revealed that while most of the teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion, they were having difficulty in implementing inclusion best practices. As a result of the information obtained from the research study, a professional development workshop was designed to meet the identified needs of the teachers. When teachers are properly, trained they are more willing to face the challenges of teaching students with disabilities within the general education classroom (McCray & McHatton, 2011).

This study presents professional development using real-world application. Professional development embedded in real-world application is more effective than lecture-oriented workshops (Shady et al., 2013). This idea was further supported by the findings from the participants in the study. Each of the participants suggested that professional learning should be hands-on. The professional development should be job-related grounded in the practical application of the strategies.

The project is designed to allow teachers opportunities to work together in collaborative groups sharing and determining possible solutions. Every module involves the participants being active participants contributing professional knowledge and increasing dialogue. According to Hord (2009), professional development is more likely to be implemented when the participants feel that it is meaningful and relevant to their job. This project provides participants with content that is related to their job performance.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

This project focuses on addressing the gaps in elementary general education knowledge and understanding of inclusion best practices. The primary focus used in developing the workshop was college preparation and past professional learning opportunities. The professional learning workshop did not address different factors that may be school specific. Instead the project focuses on broad concepts that are more universal to the teaching practice of inclusion. A more specific site-based project might better address issues that are unique to the individual schools.

The project also does not address the additional support needed from the school level administrative staff. In order for many inclusion practices to be successful teachers must be supported by the administration with scheduling, planning opportunities, and other supports. This project has portions that include the administrators but on a limited basis. A project similar to the Inclusion Academy might better address the administrators' role in implementing inclusion best practices.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

After reviewing the findings of the study, it was evident that many teachers felt underprepared to teach in inclusion classrooms. The participants in the study indicated that they lacked the necessary expertise needed for working with students with disabilities. As a result, a professional development course was designed to meet the individual needs of the participants. However, there are other approaches to address the needs of the participants. An alternate approach might look at developing partnerships with local community colleges and universities. This approach would allow the school system to not only address a need of the teachers within the county but also evaluate the available local resources. Developing this relationship allows the county to benefit from the expertise the local colleges have to offer.

However, this would also allow the university to evaluate their programming and the courses that are offered. This approach defines the problem a deficit of community resources rather than a lack of teacher training. Many of the teachers indicated having few classes in exceptional student education. Developing a partnership allows the schools to have a better understanding of what training preservice teachers are receiving. As a result, the schools will have a better understanding of what training that needs to be offered. Developing this partnership will allow the county to have an ongoing community professional learning community resource.

Scholarship

Throughout this process I have grown more resilient. I learned that the key to overcoming difficult tasks is to work hard and remain diligent. Through the course of

conducting this research, I have grown both personally and professionally. This process required me to focus on and improve my overall organizational and time management skills. Completing this project study has allowed me to view ideas from other perspectives. I have learned that every person offers a valuable and unique perspective on any given situation. During the course of this project, I have been able to engage in collegial dialogue with colleagues. This open dialogue has created a sharing of ideas and resources that were previously unknown. I walked away from every interview with a new perspective and having gained a greater understanding of the key concepts at the center of this project study. Remaining focused and maintaining a positive attitude were essential factors throughout this process.

Project Development and Evaluation

I am currently an elementary general education teacher. For several years, I have been designated as the inclusion classroom teacher. After becoming the inclusion teacher I quickly realized what a monumental undertaking this was. As the number of students served in inclusion has continued to rise, I realized that many teachers were having a difficult time serving students with disabilities in general education settings. I also realized that in many cases this caused teachers to have a negative perception of inclusion. Therefore, I designed a project study that would examine the underlying causes of the difficulty and discover possible solutions.

Before beginning the process, I reviewed many texts to ensure that I had an understanding of the research process. During this process, I learned that it was important to be consistent and to follow the exact protocol during every interview. I also learned the

importance of controlling bias by the researcher. Because this topic was of great interest

to me, it was essential during the data analysis stage that I t analyze the transcripts and

refrain from making assumptions. I learned the importance of supporting each coding

with text from the transcripts. Another important step was having the participants review

an analysis of their interview to ensure it accurately conveyed their thoughts. Having a

peer review my work also helped to produce a more accurate and valid study. Finally, I

learned the importance of critiquing and evaluating all processes and information. It is

through the evaluation process that growth occurs.

Leadership and Change

Over the course of conducting this project, I realized that leadership is more than

taking charge and dictating. Leaders must be able to foster and develop the leadership

capacity of others (Lambert, 2003). Leadership deals with listening and guiding others

through the process of self-actualization. Change is not an easy process. In order to lead

change a person must be able to effectively communicate a shared vision (Kotter, 1996).

Leading change requires the leader to be able to create a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996).

In completing this project, I have learned that as a leader my role is not to create change,

but to facilitate the growth of others. I have learned that if change is to happen and be

sustained there must be teamwork and collaboration from all stakeholders.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Through this process, I have not only grown professionally but also as a scholar. I

have learned that being a scholar involves taking learned information and applying it new

situations. I have learned that it is important to closely read and analyze important

information. I now understand that being a scholar requires a commitment to seeking more information. The learning process is continual and is vital in growing as a person. Being a scholar requires being able to acknowledge and accept varying beliefs and ideas. Lastly, it is vital that a scholar is willing to contribute and share new thoughts and ideas in a larger context.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Emerging into a practitioner has been a continued process throughout my career. Being a practitioner is different from simply doing the job. Being a practitioner requires seeking and implementing new strategies. Throughout the course of completing this project study, I have grown as a practitioner. Completing this study has allowed me to establish new partnerships with my colleagues. Moreover, this process has provided me with the necessary tools to explore scholarly research based practices. This process has confirmed my personal learning to be an on-going and continual process. My teaching practice is now grounded and supported with current research and data.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Developing this project has been a major undertaking. In developing the project, I wanted to design a project that was relevant and user-friendly. I reviewed the data multiple times to ensure that I was aligning the project to the needs indicated by the participants. In the beginning stages, I wanted to look at things from my point-of-view. Conducting this study has helped me realize the importance of approaching all things using multiple point-of-views. As a result, I reviewed every aspect of this project

numerous times to eliminate personal bias and to closely align to the identified needs from the study.

Before completing this project study, I looked at things from a big picture or holistic perspective. During the process of developing this project, I have renewed appreciation of paying attention to every detail. Designing a project requires a focus on details. As a project developer, the importance of the details is my most significant takeaway from this project. It is now an integral part of my daily practice.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

As I reflect on this project, it has been an overall rewarding experience. Many times through the process I found it to be challenging. It is through these challenges that I was able to grow as a person. I have grown as a scholar and on a personal level. I have a greater understanding of perseverance. I learned through the completing of this program that hard work overcomes difficulty. I know to look for the lesson in every hardship. During the process, my confidence in my personal abilities has grown.

Completing this process has enhanced my scholastic skills. Every assignment completed further developed my research skills. In every class I had the opportunity to collaborate, engage in vigorous discussion, and learn from peers in my classes. During the development of this project, I frequently referred to textbooks and notes from other classes. Developing the project allowed me to put in practice all of the skills I attained throughout my doctoral program. This study has paved the way for future scholastic projects.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study has the ability to bring about social change in many aspects. This project is designed to meet the needs identified by a variety of teachers throughout the local county. Teachers are better prepared if they have a better overall perception of working with students with disabilities (McCray & McHatton, 2011). This has the potential positive effect on students and teachers. Better preparing teachers helps to reduce the stressors or difficulties of teaching in inclusion settings. When teachers are less resistant of inclusion, students perform better (Fuchs, 2010). Moreover, equipping teachers with research-based best practices provides an opportunity to enhance the learning of students with disabilities. Inclusion provides students with the best opportunity to achieve maximum learning (Ashby, 2012). This project has the potential to better equip teachers with the ability to serve students with disabilities.

Applications/Directions for Future Use

This project was designed as a comprehensive professional development resource. The project is designed to be an ongoing professional development tool. It can be presented and revisited throughout the year. The ultimate goal of the project is to provide participants with sufficient resources to take back and share within their school's PLCs. The project is grounded in instructional strategies and differentiation. The project has the potential to lead to positive impact on student achievement.

Participants at the conclusion of the workshop will evaluate the project for effectiveness. The data obtained from the formative assessment should be used to make

improvements to the professional development. The information from the observations could be used to design future studies and other professional development sessions.

This project was designed for elementary general education teachers. However, many of the topics are appropriate for middle and high school teachers. An understanding of differentiation and co-teaching strategies is an essential skill set for all teachers at any level. With minimum changes, this project can be adapted and used to provide professional development to a large variety of teachers.

Conclusion

The number of students served in inclusion settings continues to grow. This growth in many cases has not been matched with efforts to increase teacher preparedness to teach students with disabilities in the general education setting. This project was designed to address this training deficit felt. The participants in the study identified the need for more professional development addressing coteaching, research-based best practices, and differentiation. This project was designed based on those concerns. The project study attempts to address the individual needs of teachers having problems implementing inclusion strategies. The overall goal is to prepare teachers to be successful thus leading to better educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

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Appendix A

Inclusion Academy: Best Practices
Three-Day Professional Development Course

Overview:

  This project was designed using current scholarly research. A research study was conducted in a rural North Georgia school system. Results of the study indicated a need for more professional learning dealing with in inclusion best practices. This professional development will focus on three main areas: inclusion foundations, differentiation, and co-teaching models.

  The professional development course will provide the teachers with current research-based strategies to use in inclusion settings. The course is designed to be an introduction to an on gong professional development model. The content for the professional development is divided into 9 learning modules. Participants will complete 3 modules each day. Each module will include videos, hands-on activities, small group discussion, and large group discussion. The professional development will be conducted and facilitated by the county's special education department and the professional learning coordinator.

This project is designed to meet the specific needs of the participants in this study, but can be easily adapted to address the needs of other teachers in need of support with inclusion best practices.

Desired Outcomes
1. Teachers will be equipped with resources and strategies to implement inclusion best practices.
2. Teachers will become more comfortable with implementing inclusion with best practices and instructing students within general education classroom settings.
3. Students with disabilities will receive high quality appropriate education services.
4. Teachers and administrators will develop Professional Learning Communities within their local school settings.

Professional Development Outline:

Day 1 Understanding inclusion	Day 2 Application of Differentiation	Day 3 Coteaching and Establishing PLCs
• **Inclusion Overview** • **Advantages of Inclusion** • **Understanding the IEP**	• **Differentiation** • **Inclusion best practices** • **Accommodations and modifications for various learners**	• **Coteaching Models** • **Establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

Inclusion Academy Day 1: Understanding Inclusion

(A zip file containing all handouts, Powerpoints, and other resources will be emailed to teachers prior to the professional development course. Every teacher is provided with a county issued laptop or I-pad. The teachers will need their electronic devices each day of the course).

8:00-9:15 Introduction/ Welcome/ Ice-Breaker Activities

The Special Education Director and Professional Learning Coordinator (or their designees) will serve as the official facilitators of this professional development course. The facilitators will begin the course by providing a description of the course. It is suggested they provide a historical timeframe of inclusion within the county. Lastly, the facilitators will identify the learning targets or desired outcomes of the professional development course.

The next portion of the staff development is an activity to introduce the teachers to each other. This is a countywide professional development course. One of the goals of the professional development is to establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) throughout the county. These icebreaker activities will allow the teachers to gain a better understanding of their colleagues.

Activity 1: Interesting Introductions

Participants sit in a circle. Participants will introduce themselves by thinking of an alliterative name for example, "Joyous Jason" or "Rowdy Rob". As each individual introduces themselves they repeat all the introductions that have preceded them.

Activity 2: What If? (This activity was retrieved from an online source. The citation is listed below).

 "Have participants introduce themselves to one another. Next, pose a tricky scenario to participants and have them work together to create solutions for dealing with it. Try these three possible scenarios.

· _Some of your students make it clear that they are not interested in what you are teaching. What is your goal? What do you do?

· _You have a class with a very short attention span. They become restless and bored. What is your goal? What do you do?

· _You have a class of students who are not achieving as well as they could be. What is your goal? What do you do?"

Reference: The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-to-Use Strategies, Tools and Activities for Meeting the Challenges of Each School Day, 3rd Edition. (n.d.). Retrieved March 23, 2016, from http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118450280.html

Break 9:15-9:25
Module 1: 9:30-11:30 Inclusion Defined and Historical Foundations of Inclusion

Activity 3
After the break, each teacher will be placed in small groups. Teachers will be placed in order by the proximity of the locations of their schools. The goal is to create collaboration throughout the county.

The teachers will participate in a Web Quest (See Day 1 Resources) to discover the foundations of special education. The handout is 10 questions. Teachers will need to click on the provided link and search the website for the answers. Teachers may choose to work together. After the teachers have answered the questions, the group's facilitator will lead a discussion. The designated recorder/reporter will record and report the answer to the larger group

Facilitator questions:

1. What new information did you learn from this activity?

2. What information surprised you?

3. How can you use this information?

4. What questions do you have?

* Teachers will be given a short break

Activity 4:

After the short break teachers will watch the following videos:
History of Education: https://vimeo.com/24040778

Idea: Inclusion, IEPs and Special Needs Laws - What Teachers Should Know: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jFRHRVv7Mo

After viewing the videos the facilitators will conduct a large group discussion.

Lunch: 11:30-12:30

Module 2: 12:30-2:00 Advantages of Inclusion

Activity 5
Research indicates that it is important for teachers to recognize the importance and advantages of inclusion. In small groups the teachers will brainstorm a list of advantages of inclusion. One person from each of the groups will report out the responses. All of the group responses will be combined into one document.

Activity 6

The teachers will be given copies of the following articles. Members of the groups will partner. Each partner group will read through one of the articles and find different advantages of inclusion as discussed in the articles. The groups will also discuss disadvantages found in the articles and determine possible solutions. Teachers will complete handout for this activity. As a wrap up the facilitator will conduct an open discussion in a large group session.

Brucker, P. O. (1994). The advantages of inclusion for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *27*(9), 581-82.

Knight, B. A. (1999). Towards inclusion of students with special educational needs in the regular classroom. *Support for Learning*, *14*(1), 3.

Obiakor, F. E., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Rotatori, A., & Algozzine, B. (2012). Making inclusion work in general education classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children,* 35(3), 477-490

Module 3 Understanding the IEP 2:15-3:15
This module will be conducted in small groups. Lead special education teachers from the county's schools will facilitate the small group sessions**.**

Activity 7
 Teachers will watch the video: IEP Education for General Education Teachers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjNd01WvmMg

Teachers will be instructed to take notes during the video. After the video the facilitator will lead group in a discussion. After discussing the video, teachers will be provided with an example copy of a student IEP. The special education teacher will project the sample IEP and lead teachers through each section of the IEP. Sample IEPs can be accessed through the county's website.
 (Note: IEP sample will need to be revised as the county makes changes).

3:15-3:30 Wrap-up/ Formative Evaluation

Inclusion Academy Day 2: Application of Differentiation

This session will focus on the basics of Differentiation and how it relates to teaching students with disabilities. Other differentiation training sessions will occur throughout the year with the help of the county's Academic Coaches. Participants will be guided through modules that explain the foundation, strategies that work with students with disabilities, and teachers will practice modifying. Officials from the special education office and academic coaches will guide general education teachers through these applications.

Desired Outcomes/Learning Targets:
1. Participants will gain a better understanding of differentiated instruction.
2. Participants will apply differentiated strategies to instructional practices.

8:00-8:15 Attendance/ Refreshments/Miscellaneous

8:15-8:30: Meet in small groups to review and discuss topics covered yesterday

8:30-8:40 Break

8:40-9:50: Module 4: Introduction to Differentiated Instruction

8:40-8:50 In a large group settings participants will share what they think and know about differentiated instruction. The facilitator will chart responses.

8:50-9:30 After a discussion the participants will watch a video by Carol Tomlinson discussing the foundations of differentiated instruction.

The video Introduction to Differentiation: What Differentiation is and is Not approximately 33 minutes long.
The video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6d_gFawCmk
or http://www.videocourses4teachers.com.

Before watching the video the participants will be asked to complete a KWL chart (See Day 2 Resources)

9:30-9:50 Following the video participants will discuss key ideas learned from the videos. This discussion will occur in small groups. Participants will complete the last section of the KWL chart.

9:50-10:00 Break

10:00-12:00- Module 5 Differentiation Strategies

10:00-10:30: The facilitator (Special Education Director, Professional Learning Coordinator, or Designee) will present the Differentiation Strategies Powerpoint (See Day 2 Resources). Participants are free to ask questions and add to the discussion as the presenter presents. Participants will have the note-taking version of the handout to complete as the presentation occurs. Immediately following the presentation participants will complete the 3-2-1 graphic organizer.

10:30-10:45 Small group discussion: Participants will discuss the different strategies presented. Participants are encouraged to talk about how they have previously used the strategies.

10:45-12:00 Application: Participants will use a previously taught lesson to discuss how and which strategies apply to that lesson. Using the given lesson plan template teachers will pick two topics to be taught in the upcoming school year and design lesson plans including possible key differentiation strategies.

12:00-1:00 Lunch Break

1:00-1:15 Checkup/ Review

1:30-2:00 Finish up Lesson Plans

2:00-3:00 Module 6: Connecting Differentiation with Accommodations & Modifications

All participants will be given an Accommodations & Modifications checklist (See Day 2 Resources). Participants will be given sample student profiles. Using the sample student profiles participants will need to determine what accommodations and modifications are most appropriate for the student. This will be a small group discussion facilitated by special education department officials and academic coaches. Participants will need to justify and provide reasoning for each accommodation or modification.

3:00-3:30 Wrap up / Daily Reflection/ Formative Evaluation

Inclusion Academy Day 3: Co-teaching and Establishing Professional Learning Communities

This session will focus on an important component of inclusion classrooms. The findings from the study reveal that many of the teachers struggle with co-teaching relationships. This session will focus on co-teaching roles and co-teaching models. In addition, this session will focus on establishing local professional learning communities at each school. Teachers will be responsible for conducting regular meetings and maintaining an online journal. Special education teachers and administrators will participate in this session of the professional learning course.

Learning Targets:
1. Participants will gain an understanding of co-teaching roles.
2. Participants will learn a variety of co-teaching models to utilize in their classroom settings.
3. Participants will gain an understanding of the value of collaboration in the form of PLCs.

8:00-8:10 Attendance/ Refreshments/Miscellaneous

8:10-8:20: Meet in small groups to review and discuss topics covered yesterday.

8:20-8:40: Large Group Discussion:
The facilitator will lead a conversation about the co-teaching and gather what understandings that the participants already have

8:40-8:50 Break

8:50-9:50: Module 8: What is co-teaching? Co-teaching roles
Participants will be guided through an overview presentation of co-teaching. Co-teaching will be defined. The presentation will also cover the roles of both, co-teachers. Throughout the presentation participants will be encouraged to ask questions and discuss the material being presented. The participants will also collaborate with their co-teaching partner throughout the presentation.

9:50-10:00 Break

10:00-12:00 Coteaching Models
Participants will be guided through a presentation over the six main co-teaching models. After the presentation the teachers will watch a short video modeling the different strategies.

Coteaching Examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6llQCG8QhBE

After watching the videos each participant will work with their co-teaching partners to develop brief lessons using each strategy.
12:00-12:30 Lunch

12:30-1:30 Continuation of Module 8
Participants will complete mini-lessons. For each of the co-teaching models select participants will share their lessons in a large group setting.

1:30-1:35 Break

1:35-2:30 Module 9: Professional Learning Communities
Participants will watch a video explaining Professional Learning Communities and the value they add to professional learning. Participants will be assigned to groups based on the proximity of the schools. Participants will meet with their cohort members and discuss PLC. Students will read the article *What is a professional learning community?* by Richard Dufour (The article can be accessed through the county's digital library).

Video: About Learning Communities:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7YX40bWrCs

Article
DuFour, R. (2004). What is a" professional learning community"? *Educational leadership*, *61*(8), 6-11.

2:30-3:00 Module 10: Putting it all together: What happens next?
The facilitators will explain the on-going component of the project. Administrators and academic coaches will support teachers. The coaches and administrators will be responsible for conducting follow-up observations and providing feedback. Participants will submit bi-weekly reflection journal entries via a password protected on line program (Google Docs). In addition, each PLC will meet monthly. Meetings will be documented by maintaining meeting minutes. The facilitator will explain the summative evaluation a survey will be completed by each participant during the post-planning week before summer vacation.

3:30-3:30 Formative Evaluation/Closing Remarks

Inclusion Academy

Day 1 Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Desired Outcomes

1. Teachers will be equipped with resources and strategies to implement inclusion best practices.

2. Teachers will become more comfortable with implementing inclusion with best practices and instructing students within general education classroom settings.

3. Students with disabilities will receive high quality appropriate education services.

4. Teachers and administrators will develop Professional Learning Communities within their local school settings.

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSION DAY 1 AGENDA

- "Get to Know" your cohort- Ice Breaking Activities
- Module 1: Historical Perspective of Inclusion
- Module 2: Advantages of Inclusion
- Module 3: Understanding the IEP
- Formative Evaluation

DIFFERENTIATION DAY 2 AGENDA

- ❖ Review concepts from Day 1
- ❖ Module 4: Introduction to Differentiated Instruction
- ❖ Module 5 Differentiation Strategies
- ❖ Module 6: Connecting Differentiation with Accommodations & Modifications

AGENDA: INCLUSION ACADEMY DAY 3: CO-TEACHING AND ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

- ➤ Module 8: What is co-teaching? Co-teaching roles and responsibilities
- ➤ Module 9: Professional Learning Communities
- ➤ Module 10: Putting it all together: What happens next?

. **Handout Module 1 Activity 1**

Inclusion Web Quest (Electronic Format)

Directions: Click on the link to search for the answer to the questions.

1. What is inclusion? **http://specialed.about.com/od/integration/a/Inclusion-What-Is-Inclusion.htm**

2. What was the effect of Brown v. Board of Education?
http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/art/history.spec.ed.law.htm

3. What two 1970's cases indicated that placement in a regular school is preferable to placement in a special school class is preferable to placement in any other type of program of education and training?
http://disabilityjustice.org/right-to-education/

4.   What 1975 law passed by Congress stated that in order to receive federal funds, states must develop and implement policies that assure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children with disabilities? http://www.scn.org/~bk269/94-142.html

5. What is that same law now called? http://www.scn.org/~bk269/94-142.html

6. What were the two primary purposes of IDEA 2004? http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/art/history.spec.ed.law.htm

7. List at least 5 key components of IDEA 2004? http://teach.com/the-history-of-special-education

8. How did No Child Left Behind (NCLB) impact special education?
https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/how-no-child-left-behind-affects-your-child

9. Which factors legally must be considered in determining appropriate placement for a student with a disability? Which if any factors may not be considered?
http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/lre.faqs.inclusion.htm

10. What percentage of students with disabilities does OSEP recommend spend at least 80% of the day in general education settings?
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/policy.html

Video Note-Taking Four Square

Video Title:_____

Summarize the key points.	Questions. What questions do you have after viewing the video?
Most Important Take Away. What is the most important message from this video?	Other Notes

Module 2 Handout Activity 2

Brainstorm at your table a list of advantages and disadvantages of inclusion.

Advantages	Disadvantages

Module 1 Activity 3   Use the following T-chart to record notes during the viewing of "IEP Education for General Education Teachers"

Academy Day 2 Resources
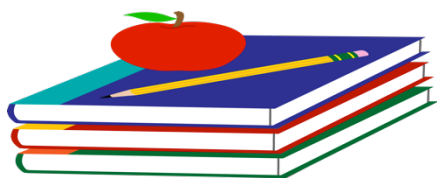
Module 4 Handout

Topic:

What I already **K**now	What I **W**ant to Know	What I **Learned**

Video Note-Taking Four Square

Video Title: _____

Summarize the key points.	Questions. What questions do you have after viewing the video?
Most Important Take Away. What is the most important message from this video?	Other Notes

Differentiated Instruction

Strategies that Work

Differentiated Instruction Defined

"Differentiated instruction is a teaching philosophy based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction to student differences.

Rather than marching students through the curriculum lockstep, teachers should modify their instruction to meet students' varying readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests.

Therefore, the teacher proactively plans a variety of ways to 'get at' and express learning."

Carol Ann Tomlinson
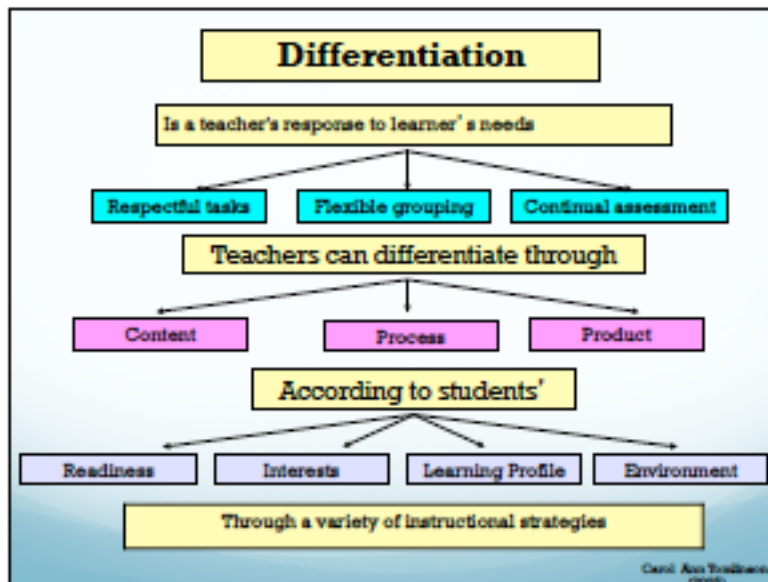
Flexible grouping

"Flexible grouping is a range of grouping students together for delivering instruction. This can be as a whole class, a small group, or with a partner. Flexible grouping creates temporary groups that can last an hour, a week, or even a month. It's not permanent, but it is a temporary way for students to work together in a variety of ways and configurations depending upon activity and learning outcomes"

~Janet Cox

Respectful Tasks

Purposeful, meaningful, engaging tasks which are determined by assessing prior knowledge, readiness and interests.

Carol Ann Tomlinson
Nonnegotiables of Differentiated Instruction: Respectful Tasks

http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol4/425-video.aspx

Tiered Instruction

- "**Tiered instruction** is a method that varies the level of assignments, so all students have a chance to find success and make progress. Teachers tier learning, so students are working at different levels of the same task, some more difficult and challenging than others. All students work on, explore, investigate, and learn the same basic material but on differing levels, or tiers."

Reference:

http://study.com/academy/lesson/tiered-instruction-definition-method.html

The Basics of Tiered Lessons

- Challenge Level: Different groups tackle different assignments based on readiness level

- Product: Different groups learn same essential skills but produce different products based on learning styles

- Process: Based on levels students use different processes to learn similar material and achieve similar outcomes

- Outcome: Student use same materials but produce varying products.

- Complexity: Using the same assignment, students produce products appropriate to learning levels.

Choice of Activities/Varying Learning Styles

Examples Common Differentiated Strategies

Choice Boards: Students choose assignments from a board containing various assignments.

Think, Pair, Share: A Questioning technique where the students are given a prompt or question. The students are asked to think by themselves, pair with another student, and finally share their ideas with the group.

+ **Literature Circles:** A student led discussion format which allows students to read on topics of interest, or select books of choice, and share readings and ideas with others who read the same materials

Cubing: The cube has 6 faces with a different activity on each face. Use the 6 levels of Bloom's taxonomy on the cubes. (knowledge, comprehension, evaluation, analysis, synthesis, and pllication)

Examples Common Differentiated Strategies

Jigsaw: A cooperative learning strategy in which the class is divided into small groups consisting. These small groups serve as the students' home base. Each member works an "expert" group to learn about their part of the content. After students become experts on their part students return to their home groups to share their learned information.

Other strategies can be found on the Curriculum and Planning page on the county's website.

3-2-1 Differentiated Strategies

3 **Thoughts I have.**

1.

2.

3.

2 **Things I learned**

1.

2.

1 **question I have**

1.

Accommodations/ Modifications Handout

What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?

Accommodations: Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate or complete the same assignment or activity as other students (Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, 2001).

Modifications: An adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure (Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, 2001).

Accommodations to the classroom environment

- ✓ Seat the student near the teacher or positive role model
- ✓ Seat where the student learns best.
- ✓ Use a study carrel.
- ✓ Reduce distractions by moving students away from the center of the room, windows, and doorways.
- ✓ Allow the student frequent breaks or other rest times.
- ✓ Establish and use learning centers.
- ✓ Arrange classroom to facilitate small group, large group, and peer learning opportunities.
- ✓ Ensure proper desk height and seating comfort.
- ✓ Post a visual schedule on student's desk

Accommodations for Organization

- ✓ Provide student with a folder or binder organized by subject
- ✓ Provide student with planner or agenda
- ✓ Provide students timeline for completion of long assignments.
- ✓ Routinely check for understanding

Accommodations to Assignments and Instructional Content

- ✓ Shortened Assignments
- ✓ Alternate projects or assignments
- ✓ High-interesting reading material at lower reading levels
- ✓ Peer-Tutoring
- ✓ Use Braille for students who cannot read print.
- ✓ Use high interest, low vocabulary reading materials.
- ✓ Hands-on assignments
- ✓ Allow tape-recorded materials.
- ✓ Provide student with a calculator.
- ✓ Preview assignments
- ✓ Provide additional instructions.
- ✓ Study sheets.
- ✓ Provide students with lecture notes.
- ✓ Provide manipulatives
- ✓ Use visual aids

Accommodations to Instructional Methods and Presentation

- ✓ Use graphic organizers
- ✓ Use study guides
- ✓ Use multiple modes of presentation (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.)
- ✓ Allow student to use audio recorder
- ✓ Repeat directions
- ✓ Provide students with a model of the finished product
- ✓ Break assignments into chunks
- ✓ Model appropriate study skills
- ✓ Provide extensive feedback and monitoring
- ✓ Increase wait time for responses
- ✓ Use an agenda for assignments
- ✓ Use materials that are age and developmentally appropriate

- ✓ Paraphrase or summarize the key ideas of the lesson
- ✓ Use nonverbal communication to reinforce appropriate behavior.

Testing Accommodations
- ✓ Allow Extra time
- ✓ Flexible schedule
- ✓ Give tests and quizzes orally
- ✓ Frequent Breaks
- ✓ Read testing items to students
- ✓ Provide a sample or practice test
- ✓ Provide study guides
- ✓ Small group

Math Accommodations
- ✓ Allow the student to use a calculator
- ✓ Flexible Grouping
- ✓ Require student to complete fewer problems
- ✓ Provide students with fact tables
- ✓ Use graphic organizers
- ✓ Use real-world math applications
- ✓ Provide manipulatives
- ✓ Use visual aids for multi-step problems
- ✓ Use pictures or graphics

Reading and Writing Accommodations
- ✓ Lower reading levels
- ✓ Shortened Assignments
- ✓ Reading Highlighters
- ✓ Assistive Technology
- ✓ Peer Readers
- ✓ Provide Summaries of Chapters
- ✓ Provide audio recordings of reading materials

Module 6 Handout

Sample Student Scenarios

1. Lisa is a fourth grade student with a learning disability in basic reading. She has a high listening comprehension and frequently contributes to in class discussions. She performs well in all areas with a particular strength in math computation. What accommodations and modifications can be made to help Lisa succeed in all areas including: science, social studies, and math word problems?

2. Sal has a good rote memory. He is able to perform simple math problems and is able to recall basic math facts. Sal struggles to complete more complex problems with multi-steps. What accommodations or modifications might help Sal be more successful?

3. Michael is a fifth grade student, diagnosed with Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder (ADHD). He has average to above average intelligence. Michael frequently loses materials and often receives poor test scores on tests, due to not studying and other off-tasks behaviors. What accommodations or modifications might help Michael be more successful?

4. Marco a third grade student with a learning disability in reading and mathematics. Marco struggles with comprehending texts, because of his significant low decoding skills and poor knowledge of sight word vocabulary. What accommodations or modifications might benefit Marco?

Inclusion Academy Daily Professional Development Evaluation

Date: _____ **Workshop Title:** _____

Please rate the following:
1. Today's session was relevant to my learning needs.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

2. The activities in this session helped me to better understand the topic.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

3. The session was well planned and interactive.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

4. I plan to use what I learned during the session
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

Please Answer the following questions.

5. What was the most important thing you learned today?

_____

_____

6. What part of today's session needs to be improved or further clarification is needed?

_____

_____

_____

7. How can we adapt the content to build on this session for follow-up learning?

_____

_____

8. Please share any other comments or thoughts. Use the back for more space.

_____

_____

Inclusion Academy

Day 3 Resources

Benefits of Co-Teaching

- More teacher-student interaction
- Increased opportunities to place students in flexible groups
- Students benefit from a variety of teaching styles
- Greater collegial skills
- Increased access to the general education curriculum for Students With Disabilities (SWD)

Strategies for Co-Teaching Success

- Establish honest and open communication
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Make time for co-planning
- Remain focused on helping the students to succeed

Co-Teaching Roles

Co-Teaching is a shared responsibility.

Both teachers should share in the following

- Planning
- Assessing & evaluating
- Providing instruction

Teachers should make a checklist detailing co-teaching responsibilities

Co-Teaching Requires Teamwork

"Alone we are smart. Together we are BRILLIANT.

~ Steven Anderson

Co-Teaching Models

Inclusion Academy: Best Practices

Six Co-Teaching Models

- One teach, One observe
- Station Teaching
- Parallel Teaching
- Alternative Teaching
- Teaming
- One Teach, One Assist

One teach, One observe

- During One Teach , One Observe one teacher leads the instruction.
- The other teacher collects data. This data could include data on specific students or data on the co-teachers behavior

** Turn to your co-teacher briefly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy.

Station Teaching

- The students are divided into groups.
- The teachers work with different groups.
- The groups rotate between the two teachers.
- Station Teaching allows for small group and more intense instruction.

** Talk to you neighbor about how this might look in your classroom.

Parallel Teaching

- Students are divided into two groups. Both teaches teach the same content.

- The groups do not rotate.

Table Talk: What are some disadvantages and advantages of this approach to co-teaching?

Alternative Teaching

- A small number of students are selected for intense instruction by one educator.

- Possible uses include: Remediation, enrichment, assessment and reassessment.

Teaming

- Both teachers work together to deliver the content of the lessons.

- Both Teachers are fully engaged.

One Teach, One Assist

- One teacher conducts the lesson, while the other teachers provides assistance to individual students.

Observation Protocol

Observer: _____Teacher:_____

Date/Time: _____ Subject:_____

Provide a brief description of the lesson:

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What is the role of the students? What is the role of the teachers?

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│                                                                 │
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Evidence of Differentiation: (Please list any evidence of differentiated strategies)

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│                                                                 │
│                                                                 │
│                                                                 │
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```

Circle all observed co-teaching method(s) . Briefly describe.
One teach, One observe   Station Teaching   Parallel Teaching

One teach observe   Alternative Teaching   Teaming

| |
| |

Questions:

| |
| |

Glow/Growth report:

| **Glow (Describe what went well)** |
| **Growth (Describe areas of concern)** |

End of Course Summative Evaluation

1. The desired outcomes of this professional development course have been met.

O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

2.   Participating in the Inclusion Academy has been very beneficial.

O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

3. The material and content of this course was relevant to my individual needs.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

4. After participating in the Inclusion Academy, I have a better understanding of Inclusion.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

5. After participating in the Inclusion Academy, I have a better understanding of Co-Teaching.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

6. After participating in the Inclusion Academy, I have a better understanding of differentiation.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

7. After participating in the Inclusion Academy, I am more comfortable with teaching students with disabilities.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

8. This professional development course better prepared me to teach inclusion settings.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

9. Since completing the course I have implemented many of the strategies learned in the course.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

10. Establishing a Professional Learning Community (PLC) with peers has enhanced my growth as a professional.
O Strongly Agree   **O** Agree   **O** Disagree   **O** Strongly Disagree

Part B.

11. Describe the strengths of this course.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Describe the weaknesses of this course.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B:

Interview Protocol Form:

Project: Elementary Teachers' Understanding, Knowledge, and Perceptions of Inclusion
Best Practices

Date: _____   Interviewer: _____

Time: _____   Interviewee: _____

Location: _____

Introduction: To ensure complete accuracy of my note taking, I would like to audio
record our conversation. Only the researcher will be privy to the recordings. All
recordings will be transcribed and stored securely. After 5 years the recordings and all
transcriptions will be destroyed. I would like to inform you that all information will
remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw consent at
any time. Precautions have been taken to eliminate any potential risks. Thank you for
your participation. Your input is valuable to this research project.

Background Information:

Grade Taught: _____   Teaching Experience: _____

Number of Years Teaching in an Inclusion setting: _____

Interview Questions **Teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies** 1. How prepared do you feel in an inclusion setting? 2. Before teaching, what experience did you have with students with disabilities? 3. Describe professional development opportunities you have had related to inclusion.	Notes:

4. How do you feel the level of training factors into a teacher's ability to successfully implement inclusion strategies?	
Perceived effectiveness of inclusion 5. Describe what you perceive as the effectiveness of inclusive education. 6. How do you feel the inclusion classroom benefits students with disabilities? 7. What are some challenges of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom? **Effectiveness or ineffectiveness specific inclusion practices** 8. What specific inclusion practices have you found to be most effective? 9. What strategies do you feel are ineffective? 10. What does a highly effective inclusion class look like to you? **Resources teachers believe are needed to successfully implement inclusive strategies.** 11. What supports do you feel would help you be better prepared to implement inclusion best practices? 12. What topics regarding inclusion would be most beneficial to include in professional development courses?	

Appendix C

Letter of Confidentiality

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Title of Research Project: A Case Study: Examining Rural Elementary Teachers' Understanding and Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching Strategies.

Researcher: Jason Liggins

I agree to assist the researcher in this project. I understand that through providing my assistance, I will access sensitive and confidential information. By signing this agreement, I acknowledge my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I agree to keep all the research information shared with me confidential.
- I agree not to share or discuss the information in any format with anyone other than the researcher.
- I understand that all participant information must be held to strict confidentiality standards. This information may not be shared or discussed with anyone not granted permission by the researcher.
- I agree to return all information to the researcher. Once the assigned tasks have been completed, I agree to remove or destroy all shared information immediately.
- I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
- I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.

_____   _____   _____
Signature   Date   Printed name

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date   Printed name