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Teacher Perceptions of Self-Determination, Students with Disabilities, and Peer Advocates

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Andrea Charmaine McDonald

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Teacher Perceptions of Self-Determination, Students with Disabilities, and Peer

Advocates

by

Andrea Charmaine McDonald

MA, Touro University, 2008

BS, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2018

Abstract

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills, necessary for students to successfully transition to secondary education and beyond, are often missing in students with disabilities. These skills are an important part of the process of addressing transition in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities. Guided by Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, this study examined general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and attempted to determine how these skills changed after students with disabilities worked with a peer advocate. General education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy were identified, as well as differences in perceptions regarding students who worked with a peer advocate and those who did not. A purposeful sample of 5 general education teachers was selected to participate in this study. Teachers participated in 1 interview, completed an anonymous survey, and participated in 1 classroom observation. Descriptive analysis was used to present the information in a narrative. Participants felt that self-determination and self-advocacy skills were important for students with disabilities. Teachers with the experience of having peer advocates in their classroom noticed an increase of self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities. This study may provide positive social change by giving insight to educators on ways to utilize peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in their academic and social success, resulting in successful student participation in the IEP process and transitioning from middle school to high school.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my family. To my husband, Jack, thank you for being supportive and motivating. To my daughters, Natalie and Madison, thank you for being patient.

Table of Contents

iv

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

Self-advocacy and self-determination skills include communicating interests and desires, setting goals, and making decisions (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Providing peer assistance in the form of tutors or advocates in the middle school years can lead to increased self-determination and self-advocacy for students with disabilities (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) helped put the idea of promoting self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities at the forefront of special education issues by placing more importance on the transition from middle school to high school (Department of Education, 2004). Providing peer assistance in the form of tutors or advocates in the middle school years can lead to increased self-determination and self-advocacy for students with disabilities (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). This increased student involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process results in increased self-determination and self-advocacy skills (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004).

For students with disabilities, peer assistance results in increased student involvement in the classroom, as well as in the process of planning an Individualized Education Program or IEP. (Carter, Clark, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2005; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). IDEA requires the development of an IEP for each student receiving special education services and that the program must be reviewed annually (Department of Education, 2004). The purpose of the IEP is to provide an individualized

and appropriate education for the student with a disability (Vaughn et al., 2007). When

the student with a disability is ready to transition from middle school to high school, the

student's participation in the transition planning is crucial (Department of Education,

n.d.; Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002; Lee, Wehmeyer,

Palmer, Williams-Diehm, Davies, & Stock, 2011). This includes the student being a

member of the IEP team (Department of Education, 2004). To be a fully informed

member of the IEP team, the student with a disability must possess self-advocacy and

self-determination skills (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Stang, 2008; Grigal et al., 2003; Wood

et al, 2004). According to Vaughn et al. (2007), self-advocacy "occurs when individuals

effectively communicate and negotiate for their interests, desires, needs, and rights" (p.

508). Self-determination includes self-advocacy skills as well as independence, goal

setting, self-awareness, and the ability to make independent decisions (Vaughn et al.,

2007). These self-determination and self-advocacy skills help the student with

disabilities become successful in IEP transition planning and participation, as well as in

the general education setting (Carter et al., 2008; Gil, 2007; Johnson et al., 2002; Scanlon

et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2004; Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, Shogren, Davies, & Stock,

2011). Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, and Little (2013) examined the

relationship between self-determination and post-school outcomes for students with

disabilities. Their findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between having

self-determination skills at the time of exiting high school and gaining access to

employment and community (Shogren et al., 2013). They also found a correlation

between exposure to self-determination interventions in secondary school and stability in

student outcomes over time (Shogren et al., 2013). The meta-analysis conducted by Lee, Wehmeyer, and Shogren (2015) also found a relationship between learned self-determination skills and positive outcomes related to academic and transition goals. Miller-Warren (2016) found that although transition planning is crucial for postsecondary success, the results of 24 parent surveys concluded that collaboration between parents, teachers, and other transition-related IEP team members was nonexistent. In addition to self-determination skills, self-advocacy skills are also necessary for a successful transition through secondary education and beyond (Gil, 2007; Nota, Soresi, Ferrari, & Wehmeyer, 2011; Martorell, Gutierrez-Recacha, Pereda, & Ayuso-Mateos, 2008; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016; Wehmeyer et al., 2011; Wilson, Bailk, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012).

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills are often missing in students with disabilities (Test et al., 2004). Yet, strong evidence suggests that these skills are important for these students (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004; Martin, Huber Marshall, & Sale, 2004; Nota et al., 2010; Test et al., 2004; Van Dycke, Martin, & Lovitt, 2006; Wehmeyer et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2012). In order to successfully transition from middle school to high school, students with disabilities must be active participants in their IEP process, and communicate personal needs and goals as part of the transition process (Vaughn et al., 2007). To do this, they must gain self-determination and self-advocacy skills (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003; Martin, Van Dycke, Christensen, Green, Gardner, & Lovett, 2006; Martin et al., 2006; Shogren et al., 2007). Rowe, Mazzotti, and Sinclair (2015) concluded that secondary teachers

successfully taught self-determination skills in the general curriculum, and the lessons had lasting effects on students with and without disabilities both while in school and beyond.

Research shows that peer tutors or advocates aid in the acquisition of self-determination and self-advocacy skills by providing opportunities for modeling and practice (Seo, 2014; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer, & Wood, 2005). The use of peer tutors or advocates in the middle school years and beyond leads to increased self-determination and self-advocacy in students with disabilities (Miller, 2005). The use of peer tutors or advocates results in increased student involvement in the IEP process for those students with disabilities (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Martin et al., 2004; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). However, it is not clear if some peer tutoring methods are more effective than other methods (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). Furthermore, the most beneficial way to implement peer advocates is unclear (Miller, 2005; Temple & Lynnes, 2008).

The prevailing research on self-advocacy has the same common purpose: to show that self-advocacy is an important part of the IEP process. In order for students to successfully transition from middle school to high school, they must possess adequate self-advocacy and self-determination skills (Bremer et al., 2003; Carter et al., 2008; Gil, 2007; Johnson et al., 2002; Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008; Scanlon et al., 2008; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005; Wood et al., 2004). In their literature review of evidence-based practices in secondary transition, Test et al. (2009) found a moderate level of evidence of practices related to student-

focused planning: involving students in IEP meetings, utilizing self-advocacy strategies, and self-directed IEPs. There is a direct relationship between the concepts of self-determination, self-advocacy, and the concept of empowerment (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). Empowerment is a difficult concept for a teacher to teach and reinforce. It is the result of learning self-determination skills, including self-advocacy, as well as the reinforcement of those lessons (Field et al., 1998). If the student with a disability is empowered to take control of the student's education, the student is more likely to self-advocate and ask for help, complete the work, and take education seriously (Lee et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Wood, et al., 2004).

When a peer tutor or advocate assists a student with a disability, both students benefit academically and socially (Calabrese et al., 2008; Campbell Miller, Cooke, Test, & White, 2003; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Walker, Rummel, & Koedinger, 2011). Peer tutoring provides the student with a disability the opportunity to be included in the least restrictive environment possible (Miller, 2005). Being in this environment provides more opportunity for positive social interaction and improved peer relationships for students with disabilities (Miller, 2005). Within the peer tutor-tutee partnership, the student with a disability is able to focus on specific areas, either academic or social, and work on improving those skills that are lacking (Odluyurt, Tekin-Iftar, & Ersoy, 2014; Miller, 2005). As a result, the student learns and practices self-advocacy skills through modeling and practice (Martin et al., 2004; Miller, 2005; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer, Wood et al., 2005). This, in turn, affects the student's involvement in

the IEP process and transition planning (Lee et al., 2008; Test et al., 2004). If the student has opportunity for success in the classroom, then the opportunities for success beyond secondary education become attainable (Martin et al., 2004; Sebag, 2010; Test et al, 2004). If the student is empowered to take control of his or her own educational planning, then that student has more of a stake in the chances of success (Sebag, 2010). Section 2 provides a literature review describing self-determination theory and perceptions of self-determination and self-advocacy with students with disabilities from the perspectives of general and special education teachers, parents, and students with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

There were a large number of students with disabilities at a middle school in the United States Desert Southwest who lacked the self-determination and self-advocacy skills necessary to seek out help in the general education environment (Personal communication with special education teacher, November 3, 2010). Formal and informal test results and classroom assessments showed that a large number of students with disabilities lacked self-determination and self-advocacy skills to seek out help in the general education environment (Personal communication with former principal, June 28, 2010). Currently, special education teachers met with the students outside of the general education classroom to provide modeling and direct instruction on advocacy skills. Providing this type of individual instruction by teachers within the general education setting stopped the flow of instruction and interrupted the learning environment (Personal communication with special education teacher, November 3, 2010). However, these self-

advocacy and self-determination skills, which include (a) taking charge of one's life, (b) speaking up, (c) having a voice in one's life instead of having another speak on one's behalf, and (d) having a purpose could not be taught in isolation. In order to ensure that self-advocacy and self-determination skills are taught, educators must teach these skills through a variety of ways throughout the school campus setting (Angell, Stoner, & Fulk, 2010; Wood et al., 2004).

The former principal of this middle school stated that there were several factors leading to this problem. First, he felt that the students with disabilities at the school were struggling, even with the support of both the smaller special education classrooms and the co-taught general education classrooms, because they were not at the level of their peers without disabilities both academically and socially. The state utilized criterion reference tests to measure student achievement in relation to academic standards, and based on these results, the junior high school did not make adequate yearly progress for the eighth consecutive year. According to the State School Performance Framework, although the school made more gains than any other middle school in the state for the 2012-2013 school year, one subgroup, students with IEPs, lacked overall significant gains. Secondly, the former principal stated that students in the smaller special education classes lacked exposure to a sufficient amount of grade-level content material or to the social discourse with typical peers as students in the general education classrooms. Finally, the former principal felt that students with disabilities who were in the co-taught classrooms were struggling to be independent learners and lacked the ability to advocate for themselves (Personal communication with former principal, June 28, 2010).

The current principal also concluded that students with disabilities often transitioned into the secondary education environment and struggled because they did not have the skills to advocate for themselves (Personal communication with current principal, August 11, 2015). She stated that this is often because they were not taught these skills in elementary school, where the special education teacher often advocated for the student instead of teaching the student self-advocacy skills (Personal communication with current principal, August 11, 2015). Data from the 2015-2016 school year showed that only 16.1% of sixth grade students with disabilities were proficient in reading, compared to 54% of sixth grade students without disabilities. Only 7.9% of seventh grade students with disabilities were proficient in reading, compared to 59.8% of seventh graders without disabilities. Of the population of students in the eighth grade, 12.8% of students with disabilities scored as proficient in reading, compared to 58.9% of students without disabilities. In math, only 8.9% of sixth grade students with disabilities scored as proficient, compared to 32.4% of sixth grade students without disabilities. Only 1.6% of seventh grade students with disabilities scored proficient in math, compared to 31.2% of students without disabilities. Of the eighth grade population, 7.9% of students with disabilities were proficient, and 15.3% of students without disabilities were proficient (State Department of Education, 2015). Because students with disabilities are typically behind their nondisabled peers, both academically and socially, many of the general education and special education teachers have negative perceptions towards these students (Copeland et al., 2004; Kemp & Carter, 2006; Personal communication with former principal, June 28, 2010; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005).

Special education teachers were meeting with the students to provide modeling and direct instruction on advocacy skills (Personal communication with Thomas Morgan, former principal, June 28, 2010; personal communication with Mary Greer, current principal, August 11, 2015). This problem affected the success of the students with disabilities because they did not have the skills to advocate for themselves, and this in turn affected their grades and their participation in IEP transition planning. With increased pressure for schools to show growth and adequate yearly progress on statewide testing, many teachers had a negative perception of students with disabilities, feeling that these students lowered test scores for their classrooms (Damore & Murray, 2009; Personal communication with Thomas Morgan, previous principal, October 6, 2011). This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by establishing that there is a change in the general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities when there is a peer advocacy or tutoring program in the general education classroom.

Nature of the Study

I used case study research in this study to examine teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities after students with disabilities worked with a peer advocate. This study involved interviewing teacher participants with the intent to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions. The area of attention was teacher perceived self-advocacy and self-determination behavior observed in students with disabilities who did and did not work with a peer advocate. A characteristic of responsive interviewing is that the interviewer and participants will form

a relationship, with the goal of gaining a depth of understanding rather than breadth (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Research Questions

In order to obtain a significant understanding of each teacher's perceptions about students with disabilities and their self-advocacy skills and to examine any changes in perceptions of students with disabilities after working with a peer advocate, the following questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?

RQ2: How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate?

RQ3: How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

I obtained an understanding of teacher's perceptions through individual interviews, observations, and through examination of survey responses. I provide a description of the process in Section 3.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students worked with a peer advocate. The purpose of case study

research is to understand "the whole individual in relation to his or her environment" (Verma, Mallick, & Neasham, 1998, p. 83). A case study typically involves an intensive analysis of an individual or small group, focusing on individual characteristics (Verma et al., 1998). I attempted to identify teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who were not working with a peer advocate and to determine how self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities changed after they worked with a peer advocate.

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory emphasizes behaviors that serve a function for the individual (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). When self-determined, people are acting in a self-driven way by personal motivations and desires (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Deci and Ryan (1985) defined self-determination as "a capacity to choose and to have those choices, rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives, or any other forces or pressures, be the determinants of one's actions" (p. 38). A person's environment can promote positive personal growth or it can sabotage or disrupt that growth and sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Powers et al. (1996) suggested, "Self-determination can be understood as antithetical to learned helplessness" (p. 259).

Self-determination is an essential skill for goal setting and problem solving. Mithaug (1996) stated that students with self-determination set personal expectations slightly higher than their capability. They then exhibit behaviors based on personal strategy to meet those expectations. Students who are not self-determined do not meet their potential because they have unrealistic expectations, are not able to exhibit

behaviors and strategies to meet those expectations, or fail to adjust their strategy when faced with obstacles (Mithaug, 1996). Mithaug commented that students with disabilities often lack self-determination skills. As a result, teachers spend time identifying needs and plans to address those needs. Consequently, the teacher's actions remove the student from participating in this process, and the student does not learn essential problem-solving skills needed to be successful to transition out of school (Mithaug, 1996).

In the classroom setting, student success is higher when teachers support autonomy and are not controlling (Reeve, 2002). This type of support means "teaching in ways that nurture students' intrinsic motivation and internalization processes" (Reeve, 2002, p. 190). When a teacher supports autonomy, the student is able to pursue individual interests and goals. This leads to intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Reeve, 2002). Incorporating the teaching of self-determination skills into the curriculum leads to student perception of personal choice, focus, and motivation (Reeve, 2002).

There is a direct relationship between the concepts of self-determination, self-advocacy, and the concept of empowerment (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer, 1996). Students cannot learn empowerment. Rather, it is the result of learning self-determination skills, including self-advocacy (Field et al., 1998). If students with a disabilities are empowered to take control of their education, those students are more likely to self-advocate and ask for help, complete the work, and take education seriously (Lee et al., 2008; Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2000; Wood et al., 2004). Self-determination happens within a social context (Walker et al., 2011).

When a peer tutor or advocate assists a student with a disability, both students benefit academically and socially (Calabrese et al., 2008; Campbell Miller et al., 2003; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Miller, 2005; Walker et al., 2011). As a result, the student with a disability learns and practices self-advocacy skills through modeling and practice (Stenhoff & Lignugaris, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). This, in turn, affects the student's involvement in the IEP process and transition planning. If the student has opportunity for success in the classroom, then the opportunities for success beyond secondary education become attainable. If students are empowered to take control of their own educational planning, then those students have more of a stake in the chances of success (Lee et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2000; Wood et al., 2004).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, I provide definitions for the following terms:

Co-teaching: A teaching approach where two teachers, generally one general education and one special education, share the responsibility of instructing all students in an inclusive classroom (Heward, 2006).

Inclusion: The practice of placing students with disabilities into general education classrooms, which is the placement of least restrictive environment (Arends, 2004; Roach, 1995).

Individualized Education Program, also known as Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An individualized educational program for each student with a disability mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) that provides goals,

objectives, and a timeline of activities necessary for the implementation of the

educational program (Department of Education, 1997; Wehman, 2006).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): A part of IDEA that requires that a student

with a disability receive an education as much as possible in the regular classroom along

with nondisabled students. It also requires that the student with a disability receive

appropriate aides and services as stated in their IEP in order to be able to participate in

the regular classroom (Department of Education, 2004).

Peer tutor: An educational strategy where the teacher pairs students together with

the goal of having one student assist the other student with learning material and

completion of academic tasks (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & Marshak, 2012).

Special education: Individually planned, specialized, and intensive outcome-

related instruction that follows the guidelines of implementation as stated in the student's

IEP, which includes research-based instructional methods that are guided by frequent

measures of student performance for students with disabilities (Heward, 2006;

Department of Education, 2004).

Transition planning: Part of the IEP process with the goal of preparing students to

be fully participating members of their communities; program planning that includes

appropriate goals and benchmarks for the appropriate transition (i.e., when leaving one

setting and moving on to another such as the transition from elementary school to middle

school or middle school to high school). As part of IDEA, schools must provide specific

transition plans for students with disabilities receiving special education services by age

16 as part of their IEP (Department of Education, n.d.).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

This study involved interviewing teacher participants, compiling field notes during classroom observations, and reviewing survey responses based on questions from the educator form of the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, Compeau, DuBois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994). I assumed that I obtained adequate data from responsive interviews over a period of one school semester. I assumed the participants answered honestly, and that they participated for the duration of the study. I assumed participants did not modify or change their classroom behavior during field observations. I also assumed teacher perception documented in the survey based on the educator form of the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) supported the data collected through interviews and field observations. Finally, I assumed participants did not exchange answers or interview questions with each other.

Limitations

The teachers participating in the study were limited to those from one middle school in the United States Desert Southwest. Because the chosen method was a case study, the focus was not generalizing the results, but to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they worked with a peer advocate. Stake (1995) stated, "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Furthermore, "case study

is particularization, not generalization" (Stake, 1995). Therefore, I could not definitely

generalize about other peer advocate programs in middle schools from my findings,

because the focus was on uniqueness and understanding of this individual case.

Because the school had a high student transiency rate, the anticipation that some

students with disabilities or students who are peer advocates may withdraw prior to the

conclusion of the study, might cause removal of some teachers in the participant pool.

The withdrawal of a student with a disability might result in a classroom consisting only

of general education students; therefore, the teacher would not have enough exposure or

understanding of the student prior to the withdrawal to make informed responses.

Another limitation was because students with disabilities tend to learn at a slower rate

than their non-disabled peers, some of the participants might not gain sufficient self-

determination or self-advocacy skills, which would have an impact on the responses of

the teacher participants. Finally, varied personalities and teaching styles might have an

influence on the peer advocate, and vary the outcome of the peer advocacy program on

individual students.

Other possible limitations are researcher biases. I was the special education

instructional facilitator at this school for five and a half school years, although I currently

hold the same position, I am no longer at this location. After leaving this school, I did

not interact with any staff at this school outside of my research. While conducting

research at the school, I did not know which students had disabilities and which students

were peer advocates. My role is that of an educational leader and advocate for students

with disabilities within school settings, and is a support to individual schools to ensure a

commitment to improving student achievement. The facilitator communicates and collaborates with the school district special education departments and teams to ensure the implementation of appropriate services to students. The facilitator is a resource for the school administration and staff regarding quality instruction, best practices, and IEP development and compliance issues but does not hold a supervisory or administrative role.

I did not interact with the peer advocates in the program or any other students at this school, nor did I have any knowledge of the students with disabilities and classrooms where they assist. A special education teacher on the school campus organized the peer advocate program. Students interested in becoming a peer advocate completed an application. The application included a short questionnaire about interests and academic progress. Applicants also completed an essay explaining why they wanted to participate in the program. The special education teacher then selected and trained students on disability awareness, student confidentiality, and positive peer support strategies. Next, the special education teacher communicated with general education teachers to determine which classrooms would benefit from having peer advocates. The teacher then met with the special education students individually in these classes to determine if the students were willing to receive help from a peer advocate. The special education teacher then assigned peer advocates to the general education classrooms. The general education teachers worked with the peer advocates in their classroom to ensure students with disabilities received ongoing support. The special education teacher coordinating the program turned over the responsibility of the program to the general education teachers,

and only became involved if concerns arose from the teacher, peer advocate, or student with a disability. During the initial stages of my research, I interviewed the peer advocate advisor to gain an understanding of the local problem. I did not consider this teacher as a possible participant of this study.

The Scope and Delimitations

The Scope

I conducted this study at a middle school in the United States Desert Southwest. The study was limited to general education teachers who are working with students with disabilities in grades 6-8, ages 11-16. I planned to select from a pool of participants consisting of 36 general education teachers. Teachers selected from this pool to participate in the study were general education teachers who had students with disabilities in their classrooms working with a peer advocate, and teachers who had students with disabilities in their classroom with no peer advocate.

I employed a case study research method to focus on the teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who worked with a peer advocate. The measurement of effectiveness will be determined through interviews with general education teachers on the school campus. The areas of attention were on the teacher perceived self-advocacy and self-determination behavior observed in students with disabilities.

To ensure the respect and rights of the participants, I utilized several safeguards. I obtained a letter of cooperation from the school district and the school principal. I provided the research objectives to all participants, both verbally and in writing. I also

gave all participants a consent form to complete prior to the start of my study. I kept the identification of all participants confidential, and I completed a confidentiality agreement for each participant. I made all verbatim transcripts and written reports available to participants to consider the rights, interests, and wishes of teacher participants when reporting data. Finally, teacher participants had the right to exit the study at any time.

Delimitations

For this proposed study, the following delimitations are noted. The delimitation of this study is a middle school in the United States Desert Southwest. This middle school has a smaller population than the average middle school within the district (ABC School District, 2012). It was comprised of students from poor, working, and middle-class families. The school was transitioning to a fully inclusive school, where the majority of students with disabilities received support through the general education environment, where general education and special education teachers worked in a co-teaching team for core subjects. Therefore, the study may not generalize to other schools within or outside of the local school district.

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Significance of the Study

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Prevailing research in special education focusing on self-advocacy has the same common purpose: to show that self-advocacy is an important part of the IEP process. In order for students to successfully transition through high school and beyond, they must possess adequate self-advocacy and self-determination skills (Bremer et al., 2003; Carter et al., 2008; Grigal et al., 2003; Seong et al., 2015; Shogren et al., 2013; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007 Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). There is a positive

relationship between self-determination skills and academic success (Lee et al., 2008).

Students with disabilities tend to struggle when making educational decisions at the

secondary level (Whitney-Thomas & Maloney, 2001). However, if the student is

empowered to take control of his or her education, then the student is more likely to self-

advocate and ask for help, complete the work, and take education seriously (Martin et al.,

2004; Sebag, 2010; Test et al, 2004). One strategy to do this is with peer tutors or

advocates (Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Chadsey & Han, 2005; Copeland et al., 2004;

Hashimoto, Utley, Greenwood, & Pitchlyn, 2007; McDonnell, Mathot-Buckner, Thorson,

& Fister, 2001; McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009; McMaster, Fuchs, & Fuchs,

2007).

Over the past several years, there has been a shift in the thinking about how to

provide special education services. The focus has moved away from servicing students in

a small classroom setting to working towards improvement in the achievement of a

school as a whole (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Kavale, 2002;

Knesting, Hokanson, & Waldron, 2008; Lee, Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001;

Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer, 2010; Riehl, 2008). In addition, the implementation of

Common Core State Standards has increased the need for exposure to grade level

curriculum for students with disabilities (Saunders, Bethune, Spooner, Browder, 2013).

As Black-Hawkins (2010) and Damore and Murray (2009) stated, inclusion must have

participation in order to be successful, and there must be opportunity for active

collaboration for all students. If the culture of the school is one that is not understanding

or tolerant of all student differences, students miss opportunities for decision making and

actions that lead to learning self-determination. Learning these skills relies on collaborative school leadership. At the school level, the administrator is the one who typically initiates empowerment of all students by building a positive and professional learning community. The administrator inspires and empowers the teachers, who in turn, inspire and empower the students. Collaboration includes all members of the school, from administration to the students (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Riehl, 2008).

Students benefit from peer tutoring experiences (McDuffie et al., 2009; Stennhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Walker et al., 2011). Teaching self-advocacy and self-determination to students with disabilities increased student achievement (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2012; Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). However, more research is required. There is little research related to self-determination and increased student achievement in students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Carter, Lane, Crnobori, Bruhn, & Oakes, 2011; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). When utilizing peer advocacy programs, it is unclear which approaches are most effective. In addition, the evidence suggests that peer tutors or advocates benefit from training prior to participating in a program, however, there is no consensus regarding what should be included in the training (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007).

The climate and culture of a school has the biggest impact on its success or failure (Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Research findings suggest that when principals are supportive towards staff, teachers are motivated (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Teachers play a

crucial part in determining success or failure. In order for change to take place, one must engage in reflection (Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Research by Wilkins and Nietfeld, (2004) found that teachers who seem to be the most positive and comfortable with the inclusion model are the ones who feel that they have adequate knowledge regarding special education. Leadership actions will cause a change in school culture from that of autonomy and resistance to a collaborative professional learning community of practice. This will result in increased acceptance of the inclusion model, and in turn, the acceptance of the use peer advocates in the general education setting working with students with disabilities to increase self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

This study will be significant to teachers and schools, as examined the effectiveness of the use of peer advocates or tutors to increase self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities. This study will provide positive social change by giving insight to educators on ways to implement the utilization of peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in their academic and social success, resulting in successful participation in the IEP process and transitioning from middle school to high school.

Summary

Self-determination and self-advocacy skills are often missing in students with disabilities (Test et al., 2004). Yet, strong evidence suggests that these skills are important for these students (Karvonen et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2004; Test et al., 2004; Van Dycke et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has helped put the idea of promoting self-advocacy skills in students with

disabilities in the forefront by placing more importance on the transition from middle school to high school.

Providing peer assistance in the form of tutors or advocates in the middle school years can lead to increased self-determination and self-advocacy for students with disabilities (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). Peer tutoring provides the student with a disability the opportunity to be included in the least restrictive environment possible (Miller, 2005). This, in turn, affects the student's involvement in the IEP process and transition planning (Lee et al., 2008; Test et al., 2004). If the student has opportunity for success in the classroom, then the opportunities for success beyond secondary education become attainable (Martin et al., 2004; Sebag, 2010; Test et al, 2004). If the student is empowered to take control of his or her own educational planning, then that student has more of a stake in the chances of success (Sebag, 2010).

In this study, I explored and described teachers' perceptions of self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities after those students with disabilities worked with peer advocates. The contributions of the teachers could provide other teachers and educational leaders insight on ways to implement the utilization peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in the academic and social success of students with disabilities. The contributions of the teachers could provide other teachers and educational leaders' insight on ways to implement the utilization peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in the academic and social success of students with disabilities, resulting in successful participation in the IEP process and transitioning from middle school to high school. Prevailing research in special education

focusing on self-advocacy has the same common purpose: to show that self-advocacy is an important part of the IEP process, and that in order for students to successfully transition through high school and beyond, they must possess adequate self-advocacy and self-determination skills middle school to high school. In this section, I provided the background of the study, problem statement, and nature of the study, research questions, purpose, and theoretical framework. This section also included definitions, assumptions, delimitations, limitations of the study, and the significance of the research of this case study.

Section 2 includes a review of the literature related to self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities, peer assistance, and tutoring programs, social and academic inclusion, and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The conclusion of the literature review will include the examination of teacher perceptions regarding inclusion, and examines teacher and leadership knowledge and perceptions of students with disabilities regarding inclusion, transition, and cultural climate. Section 3 consists of a discussion of the research methods I will utilize to complete this single-case design case study. In addition, I will explain the context of the study. I will describe procedures to select participants, as well as the steps to protect the participants. I will explain the plan for the collection and the analysis of the qualitative data. I will define the role of the researcher. Finally, I will include an explanation of established validity.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this section, I address a review of the literature related to self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities along with peer assistance and tutoring programs. I also address social and academic inclusion and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the conclusion of the literature review, I examine teacher and leadership knowledge and perceptions of students with disabilities regarding inclusion, transition, and cultural climate. Additionally, I review the research methods I considered and the research method I chose for this study.

Using the online library through Walden University to obtain peer-reviewed journal articles, I conducted a review of the literature. I utilized research databases such as ProQuest, EBSCO, ERIC, and SAGE to search for education-related journal articles. In addition, I used searches through online and publication journal reviews by the Council for Exceptional Children. I found published articles related to self-determination, self-advocacy, transition, IEPs, peer tutoring, teacher perception, school climate, inclusion, and school culture in scholarly journals such as *TEACHING Exceptional Children, Exceptional Children, Remedial & Special Education, Journal of Behavioral Education, Educational Leadership, International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, Remedial and Special Education,* and *Council for Exceptional Children.*

Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

Self-determination is important to student success (Lee et al., 2008; Kleinert, Harrison, Fisher, & Kleinert, 2010; Scanlon et al., 2008). Opportunities that come about for students at the secondary level greatly influence their path beyond high school (Scanlon et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). A study by Scanlon et al. (2008) found that students with a learning disability are usually behind academically as compared to their nondisabled peers. This results in lowered expectations and lowered self-esteem (Scanlon et al., 2008), which in turn results in limited opportunities. Research by Ankeny, Wilkins, and Spain (2009) and Jones and Hensley (2012) confirmed this. Scanlon et al. found that the opportunities for students with a learning disability expand if they are able to learn how to create goals, make and follow plans, exhibit self-awareness, and self-advocate. Prater, Redman, Anderson, and Gibb (2014) also found this to be true. It is important to begin teaching these skills at the latest at the beginning the first year of high school (Scanlon et al., 2008). Hart and Brehm (2013) and Seo (2012) stated that teaching self-determination skills as early as elementary school is crucial. Stang, Carter, Lane, and Pierson (2009) came to the same conclusion in their survey of 891 elementary and middle school teachers. Students with disabilities in inclusive settings require self-determination and self-advocacy skills in order to ensure implementation of IEP accommodations and promote overall learning (Hart & Brehm, 2013).

In order for students with disabilities to become self-determined and self-advocate, they must have an understanding of their disability (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). In their research, Abernathy and Taylor (2009) concluded, "If children reach age

16 unknowledgeable about their disability, their ability to participate in the educational decision making process is compromised" (p. 121). They also found that if teachers perceived students' knowledge and understanding of their disability as being high, they were more likely to discuss and coach self-determination skills. If teachers felt their students' knowledge and understanding of their disability was low, they typically used euphemisms or avoided these discussions and lessons (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). If students are empowered to take control of their own educational planning, then they have more of a stake in the chances of success (Angell et al., 2010; Prater et al., 2014; Wehmeyer, Field, Doren, Jones, & Mason, 2004).

Students learn self-determination through making decisions and acting upon those decisions so that the outcome is success or a lesson is learned (Bremer et al., 2003, Kleinert et al., 2010). In their research, Bremer et al. (2003) found that becoming self-determined is a process of trial and error with many opportunities for successes. Wilson et al. (2012) found that through the process of exploring new experiences, the student with a disability discovers interests and talents. The result is students who have self-confidence and are able to advocate for themselves because they know and understand their limitations and can speak for what they want (Bremer et al., 2003; Prater et al., 2014). The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), focused on academic and functional achievement, access to the general education curriculum, and transition planning (Lee et al., 2008; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007).

Self-determination is an important element in student success (Lee et al., 2008). There is a positive correlation between self-determination and success in the general education environment (Hughes, Cosgriff, Agran, & Washington, 2013; Lee et al., 2008; Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer, 2010; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2004; Wood et al, 2004). Providing self-determination skills instruction such as self-regulation and problem-solving strategies through different activities across varied educational settings may increase goal attainment and access to the general education setting (Bruhn, McDaniel, & Kreigh, 2015; Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012). If the student is engaging in self-determining behavior such as goal setting, problem solving, and independent working, there is less time spent on competing or off-task behaviors (Lee et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2010; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). However, even though IDEA requires transition planning and student participation, teachers lack resources to prepare students for this important task (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, & Johnson, 2004). Training and support is a key element in increasing self-determination (Sebag, 2010).

In order for the student with a disability to be able to self-advocate, the student must learn leadership skills from various members of the IEP team such as the parent, teacher of record, general education teacher, and other IEP team members, such as the transition specialist or speech pathologist (Angell et al., 2010; Van Dycke et al., 2006; Wehmeyer et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2004). To self-advocate, students must possess self-determination skills; that is, they must be able to take control of their own life and educational decisions (Van Dycke et al., 2006; Lehman, Clark, Bullis, Rinkin, &

Castellanos, 2002; Sebag, 2010; Test, Fowler, Wood et al., 2005; Wood et al., 2004).

Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, and Soukup (2013) conducted a

randomized placebo control group study in an attempt to determine if there was a causal

relationship between self-determination interventions and increased self-determination.

Participants were 371 high school students under the label of mental retardation and

learning disabled. They found that both groups showed increased self-determination;

however, the group receiving interventions showed much higher gains (Wehmeyer et al.,

2013). In their review of 31 studies related to transition planning and outcomes for

secondary students with disabilities, Cobb and Alwell (2009) found in order for

successful transition to occur, students with disabilities must feel that they are important

members of the IEP team and that their input is valuable. Ideally, for self-advocacy

coaching to be successful, the student should begin to practice these skills by middle

school (Test, Fowler, Wood et al., 2005). The use of peer tutors or advocates with

students with disabilities results in increased student involvement in the IEP process for

those students with disabilities (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Martin et al., 2004; Stenhoff &

Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). Therefore, the use of peer tutors or advocates in the middle

school years and beyond leads to increased self-determination and self-advocacy in the

student with a disability (Miller, 2005).

Training and support are key elements in increasing self-determination (Ankeny

et al., 2009; Hartman, 2009; Kleinert et al., 2010; Shogren et al., 2007; Walker & Test,

2011). Students with disabilities have fewer supports and opportunities for independence

(choice making based on personal wants and needs) than students without disabilities

(Ankeny et al., 2009; Hartman, 2009; Whitney-Thomas et al., 2001; Jones & Hensley, 2012). Students with disabilities tend to struggle with the decisions that guide their education through the secondary level. In their study of self-determination skills and students with emotional disturbances, Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Glaeser (2006) concluded that emotionally disturbed students are perceived by parents and teachers as having "limited capacity to engage in self-determined behavior" (p. 340). Students with an emotional disturbance had fewer opportunities, both at school and at home, to practice self-determination skills than those students with learning disabilities (Carter et al., 2006). Research by Carter, Trainor, Owens, Sweden, and Sun (2010) also found that students with emotional behavioral disabilities demonstrated self-determined behavior significantly less than students with a learning disability. However, research has found that with the proper supports, students with cognitive disabilities could gain self-determination skills and be successful in the general education environment (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin, & Palmer, 2010; Jones & Hensley, 2012; Hughes et al., 2013). McDougall, Evans, and Baldwin (2010) employed a pretest-posttest experiment to determine if self-determination, sense of personal control, and community participation increased for youth with disabilities and chronic conditions who participated in a program focusing on transition. The program used a service delivery model that covered self-discovery, skill-development, and community experience. The youth participated in the program for one year, and researchers confirmed that there is a causal relationship between self-determination and quality of life (McDougall et al., 2010).

In their review of self-advocacy intervention studies, Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., (2005) found that all the studies examined had shown a positive impact on students from the interventions. The results were increased student performance and positive feedback from students, teachers, and parents. The study by Lee et al. (2012) found that IQ played a limited role in self-determination. Their findings were that student self-determination skills increased with student-directed transition planning instruction (Lee et al., 2012). In their review of peer tutoring studies, Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft (2007) found that the use of peers with students having mild disabilities in the secondary setting resulted in an increase of student performance. Research by Carter et al. (2008) and Grigal et al. (2003) both concluded that parents, special education, and general education teachers felt that self-determination skills were important for students, especially when transitioning through the secondary years and beyond. Research by Hartman, 2009, and Shogren et al., 2013 also confirmed this. Grigal et al. found that schools had opportunities for students to learn self-determination skills if parents felt that it should be an important part of the curriculum. Carter et al. (2008) reported that although teachers place great importance on teaching self-determination skills and stated that they provided opportunities for students to learn these skills, parents, as well as students, felt that teachers did not place enough importance on this and not enough time was devoted to teaching these skills. Carter, Lane et al. (2011) found the same to be true when looking at the perspectives of paraprofessionals. Self-determination and self-advocacy are important factors in determining the success of students with disabilities (Hughes et al.,

2013; Nota et al., 2010, Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Learning these skills relies on collaborative school leadership (Carter et al., 2008).

In their mixed methods study, Abernathy and Taylor (2009) examined teachers' perceptions of students' understanding of their own disability. They focused on the actions teachers took to inform students of a newly identified disability, as well as the actions teachers took throughout the school year to help those students learn about and understand their disability. They found that teachers were reluctant or unskilled to discuss the nature and manifestation of student disabilities, and they seemed to avoid authentic discussions with students about their disabilities (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). Teachers used euphemisms and jargon rather than correct terminology when talking to students about their disability, and even though they had prior training in the characteristics of students with learning disabilities, they chose to use language that students may not understand (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). Some teachers used deflective statements and assumed that the student already had an understanding of the disability (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009). The researchers concluded that teachers reported that they taught self-determination often in their classrooms, but the study did not support this.

In their quantitative and qualitative study of high school students, Hong and Shull (2009) found that there was a strong correlation between teacher disposition and student self-determination. Their research had common themes. First, when students felt that teachers cared and treated them positively, they had strong sense of "self-belief and self-worth" (Hong & Shull, 2009). Second, students felt that their teachers played a significant role in their life; their teachers' opinions influenced their thoughts about

themselves. Therefore, when teachers had positive opinions of the students, the students had positive opinions of themselves (Hong & Shull, 2009). Hong and Shull (2009) found that teachers who cared for and communicated positively with their students about their learning increased self-determination skills in those students.

With the proper modifications and accommodations, students with disabilities can gain self-determination skills and be successful in the general education environment (Lee et al., 2010). Having supports in place for students to use is not enough, as students often do not take the initiative to seek out help (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Bremer et al., 2003). However, if the culture of the school is one that is not understanding or tolerant of all student differences, students miss opportunities for decision making and actions that lead to learning self-determination (Denney & Daviso, 2012; Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

There is little research related to self-determination and increased student achievement in students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Carter, Lane et al., 2011; Karvonen et al., 2004). Carter et al., (2011) confirmed this in their review of 81 studies that included self-determination interventions for students with or at risk of emotional and behavioral disorders. Although self-determination is valued differently across or within cultures, most studies did not include the race or ethnicity of participants (Carter, Lane et al., 2011). Researchers suggest a need for more studies in the area of promoting self-determination skills in culturally diverse students in an effort to help parents (Carter, Lane et al., 2011; Karvonen et al., 2004). One recent study by Zhang, Landmark, Grenwelge, and Montoya (2010) found that when surveying 20 parents from diverse backgrounds regarding self-determination, 30% did not know what the term meant.

Twenty percent of the parents did not discuss their children's strengths and weaknesses with their child. Of the parents surveyed (African American, Asian American, European American, and Hispanic American), European American parents were the only group that was actively preparing their children to transition to independent adulthood (Zhang et al., 2010). They found that parents from Western cultures have a better understanding of self-determination and do more to promote this with their children than parents of the other cultures studied (Zhang et al., 2010). The concept of self-determination is an individualistic value of Western culture, not necessarily seen in other cultures (Leake & Skouge, 2012). In their focus group interviews of teachers from Hawaii and Washington DC, Black and Leake (2011) found that Caucasian participants generally viewed self-determination as an individual, or self-view, while Pacific Island participants generally had a family construct, or others-view. In their phenomenological study, Zhegn, Maude, Brotherson, Summers, Palmer, & Erwin (2015) found parents in China view choice making, self-regulation, and engagement as important foundational skills in developing self-determination. However, for parents in China, the emphasis was within the context on dependence and obedience within the collectivist culture (Zhegn, et al., 2015). Parents are crucial members of the IEP team and are an important part transition plan, and need to be aware of self-advocacy and self-determination training and coaching for their children (Grigal et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2010).

In 2011, Shogren conducted a review of existing research that examined the relationship between culture and self-determination in students with disabilities and identified ten research articles. From this research review, Shogren identified four main

themes. First, specific behaviors associated with self-determination varied across cultures (Shogren, 2011). Shogren also found that practices used to teach self-determination is often culturally inappropriate, as it aligned with mainstream values and conflicted with diverse students' cultural values. In order to identify and understand how students and families of diverse cultures model self-determination, more research must take place. Finally, Shogren found a need for change in the systems that influence students of diversity, such as community and education, so that there is an understanding of cultural variables in self-determination and so conditions that foster and value cultural differences in self-determination can be provided.

Studies found that a varied teacher knowledge regarding strategies to teach self-determination skills exists, with general education teachers lacking expertise (Carter et al., 2008; Denney & Daviso, 2012; Shogren et al., 2007). In addition to teachers lacking knowledge related to teaching self-determination skills, many parents and educators feel that the inclusive setting as a placement for students with disabilities needs more work (Kavale 2002; Palmer et al., 2001). Both parents and teachers need to work together (Carter et al, 2005; Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers, 2008; Grigal et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). Special education and general education teachers also need more collaboration to make this placement beneficial to all students (Kavale 2002).

Teaching self-advocacy and self-determination to students with disabilities increased student achievement and (Cho et al., 2012; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). However, more research is required, as it was also

unclear which programs or components of programs were most effective in teaching self-determination skills, as many studies used multiple strategies (Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). When utilizing peer advocacy programs, it is unclear which approaches are most effective (Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). Limited data exists regarding students from diverse backgrounds or disabilities (Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). In addition, the evidence suggests that peer tutors or advocates benefit from training prior to participating in a program (Dufrene, Noell, Gilbertson, & Duhon, 2005), however, there is no consensus regarding what should be included in the training (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007).

Peer Assistance and Tutoring Programs

Several studies have found that with information and coaching, students beginning at middle school age can make informed decisions about their future by being an active participant in the IEP process and determining a high school course of study that helps them achieve their goals (Bremer et al., 2003; Carter et al., 2008; Gil, 2007; Grigal et al, 2003; Martin et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2006a). Peer tutoring is one way to gain and practice self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft (2007) reviewed 20 research articles on peer tutoring. Their review found that peer tutoring had a positive effect on students with disabilities. Carter and Kennedy (2006), as well as Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mohler, Beranek, Spencer, Boon, and Talbott (2001), and Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft (2007) found that peer tutors provided opportunities to model behaviors for students with disabilities and it gave students with disabilities the chance to practice problem-solving skills on a one-on-one setting that typically did not

happen in the classroom. Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft found that given the opportunity, the student with a disability could build and practice self-advocacy and self-determination skills while working with a peer tutor in the classroom. Several researchers found that once the skills of self-advocacy and self-determination are acquired, the student with a disability can then use these skills to make more important educational decisions, such as IEP planning (Johnson et al., 2002; Mason et al., 2004; Myers & Eisenman, 2005; Mutua & Siders, 2010; Scanlon et al., 2008; Sebag, 2010).

In recent years, educators implemented peer assistance in various ways with various degrees of success. Carter and Kennedy (2006) reviewed peer support interventions as an effective strategy to help students with severe disabilities be successful in the general education curriculum. They found that peer support interventions help build meaningful peer relationships while maintaining student engagement academically (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). These types of supports enable the student with a disability to integrate physically and socially into the general education environment (Carter & Kennedy, 2006).

A case study conducted by Roberts (2007) focused on a student-mentoring program that included a high school mentor with a physical disability and a fifth grade mentee with the same physical disability, with the purpose of increasing self-determination skills in the mentee. In addition to having similar physical limitations, both students had similar backgrounds and interests. During the school year, the mentee made academic gains, but required assistance to function independently and socially with peers and adults, to gain knowledge of his disability, and to gain self-advocacy skills.

The two students met five times. During these interactions, modeling and practice of specific self-determination skills took place (Roberts, 2007). The IEP team noticed an increase in the mentee's self-determination skills, a decrease in negative behaviors, and an increase in independent skills (Roberts, 2007). Although the case study was limited to one mentoring team, the results of this study found that the peer-mentoring program increased the mentee's progress on IEP goals by 75% (Roberts, 2007).

Odluyurt et al., (2014) examined the effects of school counselor supervised peer tutoring interventions related to IEP outcomes for six inclusion students with developmental disabilities. Researchers selected eighteen students as tutees, working with the six students in an elementary and secondary public school. The tutors were in the same classroom as the student they tutored. The counselor paired three tutors, working in a rotation, with each of the six students receiving interventions (Odluyurt et al., 2014). They found that, with training and supervision of the peer tutors by the school counselor, the six students successfully obtained targeted skills (Odluyurt et al., 2014). Odluyurt et al. (2014) found that their study was limited due to the small number of participants and that their measurement of the effects of peer tutoring was based only on teaching chained skills.

Dufrene et al. (2005) evaluated the implementation of a reciprocal peer tutoring program in math that included 37 students in two elementary classrooms. They found that most students maintained accurate implementation (Dufrene et al., 2005). However, Dufrene et al. found that a small group of students showed low or unstable levels of implementation. These low or unstable levels of implementation were clerical errors,

where students recorded scores inaccurately (Dufrene et al., 2005). In addition, some

students showed more serious errors, where the tutors continuously failed to recognize

tutee errors (Dufrene et al., 2005). This study showed that after guidance and training,

students accurately monitored their peers' progress in mathematics (Dufrene et al., 2005).

Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, Newark Public middle schools, with the

help of a Striving Readers grant and the National Urban Alliance, implemented a

program that included students as team teachers (Jackson, Johnson, & Askia, 2010).

Students participated in the team collaboration of lesson planning and strategies, and

eventually taught the lessons to their peers. Every middle school student had the

opportunity to be part of a student teaching team (Jackson et al., 2010). The outcome of

this program was that students became motivated, both as the teacher and as the student.

In addition, student motivation and engagement was increased (Jackson et al., 2010).

The quantitative study by Mastropieri, Scruggs, Norland, Berkeley, McDuffie,

Tornquist, and Conners (2006) compared the outcomes of class wide peer tutoring using

differentiation and active learning strategies to teacher-directed instruction for eight grade

students with mild disabilities in a middle school science class. They found that students

with disabilities had higher approval rate of the class wide peer-tutoring program than

students without disabilities (Mastropieri et al., 2006). The researchers found the

approval rates to be lower in this study when compared to previous studies related to

peer-tutoring (Mastropieri et al., 2006). Researchers felt that a possible reason for this

was that their study focused on the instructional materials used in the class wide tutoring

program, and previous studies focused on the tutoring process (Mastropieri et al., 2006).

Teachers also approved of the class wide peer tutoring program, and felt that it was appropriate for a wide range of ability levels (Mastropieri et al., 2006). However, teachers felt that finding time to implement materials related to the class wide peer tutoring was a challenge (Mastropieri et al., 2006).

Scruggs, Mastropieri, and Marshak (2012) compared the effects of peer tutoring, along with parent training on assisting their child with assignments, to traditional teaching methods in ten inclusive middle school social studies classes. Traditional teaching methods included teacher lecture, class notes, class activities, and the completion of textbook materials (Scruggs et al., 2012). Textbook materials included worksheets that consisted of vocabulary, short answer, filling in blanks, and matching items (Scruggs et al., 2012). Completion of these activities took place through independent work in the traditional teaching group (Scruggs et al, 2012). The peer-tutoring group received the same traditional teaching; however, they completed textbook materials through tutoring dyads that included on student with a disability (Scruggs et al., 2012). Participants reviewed tutoring roles and responsibilities prior to completing the textbook materials (Scruggs et al., 2012). Students reversed roles, giving each student to be the tutor and the tutee (Scruggs et al., 2012). Students had the flexibility to go through the material at their own pace, spending little time on items they knew, and more time on unfamiliar concepts; as long as they followed the guidelines provided by the teachers (Scruggs et al., 2012). The results of their experiment showed that the intervention of peer tutoring combined with parent training resulted in higher achievement than traditional teaching alone (Scruggs et al., 2012). In addition to gaining direct learning

effects, the peer-tutoring group also gained indirect learning effects; gaining additional knowledge related to the critical information taught (Scruggs et al., 2012).

Richards, Heathfield, and Jenson (2010) conducted a multiple-baseline design experiment with three multi-grade classrooms, from third to sixth, in a charter school to increase on-task behavior using a videotaped class-wide peer modeling intervention package. Students viewed videos made specifically for the purpose of the study, depicting peer models in various classroom settings completing schoolwork and demonstrating on-task behaviors, each lasting approximately four minutes. The researchers observed before and after the use of the peer-modeling intervention video tapes. Richards et al. (2010) found that the class-wide peer modeling intervention package increased student on task behaviors. However, they found that there was a decline in the treatment effect, showing that maintenance interventions were required to maintain targeted class-wide student behavior (Richards et al., 2010).

A study conducted by Scheeler, Macluckie, and Albright (2010) focused on the effects of feedback delivered by peer tutors on the oral presentation skills of high school students with disabilities. In this study, researchers selected four female high school students to receive immediate feedback from a peer tutor via wireless technology (Scheeler et al., 2010). After gathering baseline data, each student with a disability identified a specific behavior she wanted to change, such as excessive movement or pacing of speech (Scheeler et al., 2010). Over a period of approximately six weeks, each of the four students received feedback while practicing oral presenting. This study found that the targeted behaviors decreased while receiving feedback from a peer tutor, and all

students maintained the low rates of behavior after the intervention was removed (Scheeler et al., 2010). Although this study had several limitations, such as the limited number of participants and all participants being female, the implementation of immediate feedback by a peer tutor was successful (Scheeler et al., 2010).

Utilizing peers as a classroom supports instead of individually assigned paraprofessionals is an alternative that Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, and Kurkowski found in their 2007 study to be effective. Participants in their study were four high school students with severe disabilities and four peers without disabilities attending a large, ethnically diverse high school in a metropolitan school district. They compared occurrences of peer interactions with the students with severe disabilities when working with a paraprofessional to occurrences of peer interactions working with a peer. Their observations found that the students with disabilities had more peer interactions when paired with a peer (Carter et al., 2007). They concluded that although the study participants had deficits in the areas of speech, language, or communication, the barrier to social interaction seemed to be due to restricted social interaction opportunities and not deficits in social skills (Carter et al., 2007).

One program that promotes critical reading skills and accommodates the needs of diverse students is the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) (McMaster et al., 2007; Kroeger, Burton, & Preston, 2009). Saddler and Graham (2005) combined the PALS strategy with sentence writing. They determined that using peer-assistants with instruction on sentence combining increased the writing skills of fourth-grade students with learning disabilities and weak writing skills (Saddler & Graham, 2005). Saddler,

Asaro, and Behforooz (2008) expanded upon the study by Saddler and Graham and similarly paired fourth grade students with disabilities to tutor each other in sentence combining, but focused on generalizing the sentence writing skills (Saddler & Graham, 2008). This resulted in quality in student writing (Saddler & Graham, 2008). However, sample size was small and was limited to one grade level, and only one writing genre was used (Saddler & Graham, 2008).

Rafdal, McMaster, McConnell, Fuchs and Fuchs (2011) studied the effectiveness of the Kindergarten Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (K-PALS) program when used with students with disabilities in the general education kindergarten classroom. The K-PALS program is an intervention that targets word attack, spelling, and oral reading skills (Rafdal et al., 2011). Their findings were similar to previous research that found the K-PALS program to be an effective intervention for both general education students and students with disabilities (Rafdal et al., 2011). Similarly, Marr, Algozzine, Nicholson, and Dugan (2011) studied the effectiveness of a peer-mediated fluency-building intervention for struggling readers in the second grade. Researchers selected participants to receive the intervention and students to be in the control group, from elementary schools with large numbers of students at risk for failure. They randomly selected 17 students from 7 treatment schools and 17 students from 7 control schools Marr et al., 2011). Marr et al., (2011) then paired students to work together during independent work time that was part of a district-wide literacy instructional block. Teachers monitored students engaged in roles of tutor and tutee, with a strong reader paired with a struggling reader, and provided guided and independent practice (Marr et al., 2011). Marr et al.,

(2011) found that students receiving the peer-mediated intervention had statistically significantly higher oral reading performance than the students did in the control group who received only typical classroom instruction.

The study by Mastropieri et al. (2001) focused on using peer tutors to increase reading comprehension in a middle school with students with disabilities. When asked, 83% of the students stated that they liked peer tutoring, and 75% stated that they would like tutoring in other subjects. Fifty percent of the students stated that peer tutoring increased their reading scores (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Teachers stated that the peer-tutoring program was positive (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Respondents felt that more time was spent practicing reading and students were more actively engaged than when traditional instruction methods were used (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Some stated that they were able to combine tutoring with combining the teaching of various strategies (Mastropieri et al., 2001). For example, one teacher used the tutoring process to teach and practice summary strategies (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Peer tutoring provided opportunity for practice and repetition that was not available with the traditional teaching models (Mastropieri et al., 2001).

In addition to the academic of peer tutoring, Mastropieri et al. (2001) also found that other benefits not originally anticipated, for both students and teachers. There was a reduction in behavior problems, as students were involved and engaged in the tutoring program (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Students' behavior had to meet classroom expectations in order to participate in the program (Mastropieri et al., 2001). For teachers, the peer-tutoring program provided opportunity for collaboration (Mastropieri et

al., 2001). Overall, all participants felt that the program was beneficial (Mastropieri et

al., 2001). Similarly, research by LaGue and Wilson (2010) found that both tutors and

students receiving tutoring had increased reading enjoyment as well as increased

comprehension after participating in a peer tutor program.

Although all involved felt that the program was beneficial, some challenges

existed. First, teachers had difficulties with finding good matches between students

(Mastropieri et al., 2001). Teachers also had to come up with a plan to handle student

absences during tutoring sessions (Mastropieri et al., 2001). Another issue was that

teachers had concerns about procedures, and felt that ongoing monitoring was crucial in

order to ensure students are following the proper procedures (Mastropieri et al., 2001).

Finally, some teachers were concerned about the tutors' ability to identify and correct

errors (Mastropieri et al. 2001). Some students felt that some of the tutoring assignments

were difficult (Mastropieri et al., 2001). However, with these challenges, the study found

that the students participating in the peer-tutor program outperformed the students in the

traditional instructional setting on reading comprehension after five weeks in the program

(Mastropieri et al., 2001).

Dufrene, Reisener, Olmi, Zoder-Martell, McNutt, and Horn (2010), focused on

peer tutors for reading as an effective alternative approach for students needing increased

academic supports. Their study focused on the practicality of using peer tutors as a way

to address the remediation needs of middle school students, with four students receiving

tutoring in the study. After training, tutors conducted tutoring sessions. The researchers

found that tutors effectively implemented the program, and tutees' reading

comprehension increased (Dufrene et al., 2010). Dufrene et al., (2010) also found limitations with using peer tutors. Tutors did not consistently correct tutee errors, and did not implement the program with integrity. Motivation also had an impact, with one tutor appearing to less motivated than others did. Tutees were to receive tickets as part of a reward system (Dufrene et al., 2010). Tutees did not provide consistent rewards. Another challenge was that the study took place within the school day, with daily schedules and activities causing some scheduling inconsistencies within the tutoring schedule (Dufrene et al., 2010). However, the overall results of the study found that reading comprehension skills in students receiving peer tutoring increased, and using peer tutoring to assist with struggling students is a successful approach (Dufrene et al., 2010).

Other peer-assisted strategies include class wide peer tutoring (Hashimoto et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 2001). McDonnall et al (2001) studied the effects of a class wide peer-tutoring program on three junior high school students with severe disabilities. Students in this study acted as both the student providing and receiving assistance (McDonnell et al., 2001). The study found that when the tutoring was combined with accommodations, the students had improved academic success and reduced negative behaviors (McDonnell et al., 2001). This type of program may provide a way for teachers to implement varied and interactive learning activities for all students in an inclusive setting as it benefitted students with disabilities and did not negatively affect general education students (McDonnell et al., 2001). Hashimoto et al., (2007) utilized modified class wide peer tutoring to determine its effect on spelling skills on third-graders with limited success. These studies, although successful, have some limitations.

It is not known if the strategies used in the first study will be effective with students with other disabilities not included in the studies, and it is not known if teachers are open to the idea of this type of program in an inclusive setting (McDonnell et al., 2001). It is also unclear if the spelling mastery interventions result in skill generalization (Hashimoto et al., 2007).

Fetko, Collins, Hager, and Spriggs (2013) examined the effectiveness of using peer tutors to teach leisure activity embedded with unrelated science core content facts to students with disabilities. A special education teacher implemented the investigation with three middle school students with disabilities (tutees), and three students without disabilities (tutors). The special education teacher, along with a para educator, conducted a training session with the tutors. The special education teacher provided the tutors with a list of non-targeted core content to add into praise statements as instructive feedback while teaching the tutees the leisure activity of a card game (Fetko et al, 2013). Fetko, et al, (2013) found that the three students with disabilities participated in the card game more successfully and enjoyed the activity more than prior to the investigation, and two of the tutees gained science core content facts.

Academic and Social Inclusion

Peer assistance programs are one way to help students with disabilities (Ruppar, 2013). In addition to peer assistance programs aimed at helping students academically, several programs exist to help students socially. Examples of these types of programs are friendship circles (Campbell et al., 2003), Peer Buddies (Copeland et al., 2004; Hughes, Guth, Hall, Presley, Dye, & Byers, 1999), the Circle of Friends program (Calabrese et al.,

2008), or peer praise notes (Peterson Nelson, Caldarella, Young, & Webb, 2008). The goal of these types of programs is to increase opportunities for the social inclusion of students with disabilities by pairing them with non-disabled students (Carter, Asmus, Moss, Cooney, Weir, Vincent, Born, Hochman, Bottema-Beutel, & Fesperman, 2013, Ruppar, 2013). Vinoski, Graybill, and Roach (2016) concluded that when students with disabilities hold leadership roles along with students without disabilities, all students benefit from the full inclusion in extracurricular activities. Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chung, and Sisco (2011) concluded that students with severe disabilities who received support through peers had increased social interactions in the general education classroom, and this peer support did not negatively influence academic engagement.

Social inclusion is important because it is a factor related to quality of life (Campbell, 2007; Schleien, Green, & Stone, 1999). Outcomes related to self-determination and qualities of life are access to community resources; ability to self-manage; community acceptance and participation; and emotional, material, and physical well-being (Walker et al., 2011). Quality of life and having a high level of social inclusion are related (Campbell, 2007; Schleien et al., 1999). This means enjoying activities with friends, making new friends, and acceptance by one's peers (Campbell, 2007; Schleien et al., 1999). These experiences happen naturally for most non-disabled students (Schleien et al., 1999). However, for this to happen for a student with a disability, the environment must be conducive. It must be open and inviting, non-disabled peers must be open and welcoming, and these peers must be able to encourage, prompt, and reinforce positive social behaviors (Campbell, 2007; Chadsey & Han, 2005;

Copeland et al., 2004; Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009; Sautner, 2008; Schleien et al., 1999; Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2005). Although some students with disabilities may be in the general education setting and interacting with several other students in the classroom, they may not have social relationships that involve high levels of social interaction (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2005). Peer assistance programs are valuable tools to increase both social and academic success in an inclusive environment (Hughes et al., 1999; Patterson et al., 2008). Peer networks are the strongest support networks for adolescents (Stanton-Salazar & Uso Spina, 2005). With these types of programs, once established, students typically maintained these interactions, as Peterson Nelson et al., (2008) state, most "likely due to their reinforcing qualities" (p. 12). These interactions carry over into the general education setting and beyond into the community (Calabrese et al., 2008; Muta & Siders, 2010; Newburn & Shiner, 2006).

Yssel, Engelbrech, Oswald, Eloff, and Swart (2007) compared parent views about the inclusion process for their children with disabilities in South Africa and the United States. Using focus groups, the researchers centered on the topics of parental rights and advocacy, placement decisions, general education teachers, general education students' acceptance, and having a child with a disability (Ysell et al., 2007). Participant parents from both countries expressed feelings of alienation and disrespect (Ysell et al., 2007). Many parents understood and fought for their rights. Some did not fully know their rights and accepted the school's decision on the placement of their child (Ysell et al., 2007). Parents from both countries also expressed that they had to be advocates for their

child and often had to educate the teachers and schools about their child's disability (Ysell et al., 2007). Parents, however, did not view this negatively. They felt that they were an important member of the IEP team. Parents from both countries also expressed concerns that their child fit in with others and have positive social interactions. Parents felt that their children had positive social experiences in the inclusive setting, although, they were concerned that their children did not establish strong friendships. Both groups of parents had concerns that teachers were uneducated or inexperienced with having students with disabilities in their classroom. Some parents felt that the general education teachers made an effort to learn about their child, while others were frustrated that the general education teachers made no effort. Parents did not feel that acceptance of general education students was a concern; all felt that students were generally accepting. All parents expressed difficulties in general in their discussions of having a child with a disability. Ysell, et al. found that despite cultural, political, and ethnic backgrounds, parents from both South Africa and the United States share the same experiences when dealing with their child in an inclusive setting.

The benefits of these types of programs are that students learn appropriate social behavior when interacting with a non-disabled peer (Campbell et al., 2003). With appropriate behavior models and supports, students with disabilities are more likely to have similar behavior as non-disabled students in the general education setting, resulting in a reduction of feelings of separation or alienation (Calabrese et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 1999). Some schools utilized peer-mediation programs to promote school-wide positive behavior (Noaks & Noaks, 2009). Noaks and Noaks

(2009) utilized teacher questionnaires to obtain teacher perceptions of an elementary school peer-mediation program and the reduction of negative behaviors. Their study found that the program reduced the number of negative interactions, as the program taught students how to resolve peer conflicts (Noaks & Noaks, 2009).

Dolva, Hemmingsson, Gustavsson, and Borell (2010) studied the peer interactions of students with Down syndrome with typical peers in inclusive settings. Their study found that peers used different support strategies to include students with Down syndrome in play and academic situations (Dolva et al., 2010). Peers modified their activities and tasks with minimal direction from teachers in order to include students with Down syndrome. Researchers found two different types of interactions that took place during the study: equal and unequal interactions. They saw equal interactions most during play activities, where students with Down syndrome typically invited others to play. They also observed students had equal roles during play activities. Peers generally took on the role of the leader or the more skilled student during unequal interactions (Dolva et al., 2010). During unequal interactions, peers divided academic tasks, and generally took the lead and completed harder parts of the task and students with Down syndrome completed the tasks that were at their ability level. This study was limited by focusing only on positive interactions, excluding frequencies, and solitary activities (Dolva et al., 2010). However, Dolva et al. concluded that their results provided a better understanding of the conditions required for the inclusion of students with Down syndrome in the inclusive school setting.

Educators have promoted peer-mediated programs as a way to aid in teaching students with Autism who are highly functioning academically appropriate social skills (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). For students with more complex needs, an intervention for initiating and sustaining peer interactions is the use of peers for social skills training (Kamps, Mason, Thiemann-Bourque, Feldmiller, Turcotte & Miller, 2014; Sartini, Knight, & Belva, 2013). The implementation of Common Core State Standards by many states has resulted in an increased emphasis on speaking and listening skills (Constable, Grossi, Moniz, & Ryan, 2013). Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders often lack the ability to understand general concepts and do not understand non-verbal cues (Constable et al., 2013). Constable et al. (2013) found that the evidence-based strategy of peer-mediated instruction and intervention for students with Autism in English Language Arts was effective. However, before the acceptance of a student with Autism into an inclusive setting, peer education on Autism Spectrum Disorders must take place first (Campbell, 2007). Peer-mediated programs decrease dependency on adult intervention while providing opportunity for active involvement with peers in an inclusive setting (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). This also provides opportunity for the student with a disability to practice such skills as self-management and self-determination (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Reid, 1996). For the student with a disability, these programs have resulted in increased self-esteem, increased self-determination, and increased participation in social activities both in school and in the community (Copeland et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 1999). One interesting study used program to teach social skills to students with Autism as described by Ganz, Earles-Vollrath, and Cook (2011) and Ogilvie (2011) is video

tapes of peer mentors modeling appropriate skills and social interactions. For these types

of programs to be successful, the school climate must be on that accepts inclusion

(Calabrese et al., 2008; Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009).

Perceptions

Educator Perceptions

Carter, Sisco, and Lane (2011) found that although paraprofessionals were the

main support for students with disabilities in an inclusive setting, the amount of

knowledge regarding self-determination skills varied and training in this area was

infrequent. Denney and Daviso (2012) also found this to be true. Lane, Carter, and Sisco

(2012) found that paraprofessionals spent increasingly more time supporting self-

determination skills to students with disabilities, and viewed these skills as important. In

their phenomenological study, Martin, Morehart, Lauzon, and Daviso (2013) examined

special education teachers' views of students' self-determination skills and citizenship.

Participants in the study were an elementary, a middle school, and a high school special

education teacher in a rural school district. All agreed that self-determination skills were

important for students in the school setting and beyond (Martin et al., 2013). They found

that the participants did not consider self-determination as an important part of transition

to citizenship. Participants did not consider self-determination as an important outcome

of special education instruction, and saw self-determination as actions related to personal

responsibility and choice-making (Martin et al, 2013). Martin et al, (2013) noted that the

teachers did not make connections between citizenship and classroom practices utilized

to teach self-determination skills. When Martin et al. asked teachers to describe

specifically what they do to promote self-determination with students, they stated that they allow students to make choices and experience consequences. Researchers concluded that the participants' lack of knowledge of special education laws and the requirements of student involvement in transition planning resulted in inconsistencies in teaching self-determination skills (Martin et al., 2013).

Stang et al. (2009) focused on the perceptions of elementary and middle school educators and the value and instruction in self-determination skills. They found that the most important self-determination skills for the teachers surveyed were problem solving, self-management, self-regulation, decision-making, and goal setting (Stang et al., 2009). Stang et al. found self-advocacy and self-awareness seemed to be important only in the context of IEP meetings and peer interactions. Teachers addressed instruction regarding problem solving, self-management, and self-regulation in the classroom, but not other areas of self-determination (Stang et al., 2009). Finally, Stang et al. found opportunities for instruction on self-determination existed in both general education and special education classrooms. This is important, because in order for students with disabilities to acquire self-determination skills, frequent and sustained opportunities must exist to acquire, refine, and maintain the skills taught (Stang et al., 2009).

Cameron and Cook (2013) focused their study on teachers' goal and expectation of their students with mild and severe disabilities who are in an inclusive setting. Seven inclusive classroom teachers participated in the study. Participants identified specific students with disabilities as the focus, and then the researchers interviewed the participants regarding the students. Cameron and Cook (2013) found common goals

among the participants. Teachers reported that the emphasis for students with mild

disabilities was improving self-confidence. Teachers were not concerned with the

academic progress of students with severe disabilities (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

Cameron and Cook (2013) found that the teachers focused on behavior in students with

mild disabilities and social development in students with severe disabilities. Teachers

described behavior as staying on task, following classroom rules and procedures,

completing work, and asking appropriate questions at appropriate times (Cameron &

Cook, 2013). Teachers defined social development as making friends, interacting with

non-disabled peers (Cameron & Cook, 2013). Researchers found that many teachers

assumed that students with severe disabilities were unable to fully participate in an

inclusive setting, and felt that they were not responsible for teaching academic goals.

Teachers stated that the academic abilities of these students were unknown to them.

Cameron and Cook concluded that teachers' low expectations and lack of knowledge of

student educational goals influenced the students' education in areas other than social

development. Their study was limited because they did not address the area of teacher

goals and expectations alignment with student IEP goals (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

Reed, McIntyre, Dusek, and Quintero (2011) examined friendships, social skills,

problem behavior, and self-confidence among third-grade and fifth-grade students, both

with and without disabilities, in inclusive school settings. Participants included 30

students, 12 identified as students receiving special education services. Four teachers

participated, as well. Reed et al. (2011) found that teachers ranked students with

disabilities as having more externalizing and internalizing behavior problems than

students without disabilities have. Teachers also ranked students with disabilities as scoring below average academically (Reed et al., 2011). Students with disabilities perceived themselves as being in the medium/medium high range socially and academically (Reed et al., 2011). Reed et al. observed that students with disabilities rarely received first choice when students were picking a partner or group for academic or social activities. Students with disabilities usually nominated another peer with a disability as a preferred partner. Although students with disabilities indicated that they preferred interacting with other students with disabilities, less than 20% were able to identify a reciprocal friend (Reed et al., 2011). Over 50% of non-disabled students were able to identify a reciprocal friend (Reed et al. 2011). They found that students with disabilities may be at risk for negative social-behavioral outcomes, and they suggested that there was a need for social skills and academic interventions for students with disabilities Reed et al, 2001).

Ross-Hill (2009) surveyed 73 teachers in the Southeastern United States to determine differences in perceptions regarding inclusion at the elementary and secondary level. The findings of this study were that the majority of regular education teachers support inclusion and feel that they have adequate training to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Ross-Hill, 2009). Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker (2000) found similar results when they surveyed the perceptions of high school teachers regarding inclusion. They found that for inclusion to work, teachers must have training and support (Van Reusen et al., 2000). When Horne and Timmons (2009) conducted interviewed 25 teachers to obtain their perceptions regarding inclusion, they

also found that those who have had training and understood disabilities were more favorable regarding inclusion. This is also confirmed by Shippen's et al., (2005) survey of pre-service general education teachers as well as in Leatherman's (2007) narrative study of teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion, and the study by Glazzard (2011) questioning teacher's perceptions on stressors in an inclusive classroom. The results indicated that general education teachers who had increased knowledge regarding special education were less apprehensive about having students with disabilities in the general education classroom. They concluded that if teachers were less anxious about special education then inclusion was more likely to be successful (Leatherman, 2007; Shippen et al., 2005). Forlin and Chambers, (2011) Forlin, Earle, Loreman, and Sharma (2011), and Rana, (2012) also found this to be true in their focus on pre-service teachers. Interestingly, the study by Scott, Jellison, Chappell, and Standridge (2007) found a different perspective regarding knowledge of disabilities. They interviewed 43 teachers, both elementary and secondary, who taught music, and the teachers in this study stated that it was more important to learn about the individual students in the classroom and not about disabilities in general (Scott et al., 2007).

Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, and Merbler (2010) surveyed university faculty from teacher education programs across the United States. Their research focused on pre-service teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms. The sample included faculty respondents from programs including special education, elementary and secondary education, and curriculum and instruction (Harvey et al., 2010). Harvey et al. (2010) found a concern that training in collaboration mainly took place in special education

programs and were not a course of study for general education teachers. Respondents

indicated concerns regarding resources, money, time, and co-teaching opportunities for

pre-service teachers Harvey et al., 2010). Researchers commented that limitations

existed, such as a limited number of responses, several responses in the neutral range, as

well as non-responses from nine states (Harvey et al., 2010). In addition, Harvey et al.

stated that there are new challenges to pre-service teacher programs related to inclusion,

as they conducted the survey five years ago.

Carter and Hughes (2006) also found in their survey of 100 general and special

education teachers, paraprofessionals, and school administrators employed in eleven high

schools, that students with disabilities benefitted from being in the general education

classroom; and that training and supports must be in place in order for inclusion to be

successful. Special education and paraprofessionals found more barriers to the success of

including students with disabilities in the classroom (Carter & Hughes, 2006). Some of

the barriers reported were limited collaboration time, lack of resources, and behavioral

challenges (Carter & Hughes, 2006). Research by Glazzard (2011) had similar findings.

Glazzard's study found key barriers to successful inclusion were the lack of funding and

training. In their research, Symeonidou and Phitiaka (2009) found that teachers had

conflicting views about inclusion and students with disabilities. Teachers were often

unclear in their role in the inclusion process, and felt that specialists knew more about

meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Symeonidou & Phitiaka, 2009). Many

believed that the educational approach for students with disabilities was based on a

medical or charity model and favored segregation by specific groups (Symeonidou &

Phitiaka, 2009). They concluded that pre-service teacher training must focus more on inclusive practices while taking participants' prior knowledge and believes into consideration (Symeonidou & Phitiaka, 2009). Research described by Bergin and Logan (2013) also concluded that teacher alignment with inclusion practices and student support, including participation in the IEP process is best supported though appropriate teacher development. Finally, from their research, Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) surmised that the school system's approach to inclusion is a probable influence on teacher perception, and over time teacher beliefs may change to align with the philosophy of their school.

Kemp and Carter (2005) surveyed teachers over a five year period to identify skills in students needed to be successful in an inclusive setting, and to determine teacher perceptions regarding students with disabilities. They identified skills that teachers related to student success: listening, responding, participating, self-help, independent behavior, compliance, and appropriate peer interactions (Kemp & Carter, 2005). Lowe and Chapparo (2010) surveyed 50 teachers and 44 parents regarding perceptions related to participation in an inclusive environment. The respondents they surveyed had similar responses as the study by Kemp and Carter (2005). The results showed that sharing and cooperation were important.

In their study focusing on the participation of transition planning of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Griffin, Lounds Taylor, Urbano, and Hodapp (2014) found that students who spent more time in the general education setting were typically higher functioning and had the self-advocacy skills required to participate in transition planning.

They deduced that teachers and parents viewed these students as more capable and in turn, provided more opportunities and encouragement for involvement than students perceived as not having skills (Griffin et al., 2014).

When looking at challenging behaviors, Lohrmann, Boggs, and Bambara (2006) found the same conclusion as Carter and Hughes (2006) in their survey of teacher attitudes related to students with developmental disabilities and challenging behaviors. Lohrmann et al., (2006) interviewed 14 general education teachers. Of the fourteen, ten of the teachers stated that they felt apprehension because they lacked information and training regarding students with disabilities in the classroom who exhibit challenging behaviors (Lohrmann et al., 2006). Brackenreed (2011) also found teacher apprehension related to challenging behaviors in questionnaire responses of 269 teachers. Lohrmann et al., (2006) established that many of the teachers in the study also had apprehensions about working with other adults in the inclusive classroom, such as special education teachers and paraprofessionals (Lohrmann et al., 2006). This study, like the studies by Van Reusen et al. (2000) and Horne and Timmons (2009), found that teachers who had positive perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom had outcomes that are more favorable. Research by Glazzard (2011) also confirmed this.

The study conducted by Montague, Enders, Cavendish, and Castro (2011) investigated academic and behavioral outcomes for at-risk students, from elementary to high school. Montague et al., (2011) focused on 628 students from a school district in the southeastern United States. Their goal was to see if early achievement in reading and math predicted high school achievement, and to see if early teacher ratings of student

behavior predicted behaviors in high school. Finally, researchers wanted to determine if differences in achievement existed between high school students with internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Montague et al., 2011). Researchers divided at-risk students into two categories: one group received special education services and the other group did not receive these services (Montague et al., 2011). They found that teacher ratings of student learning and behavior problems declined over the years, with the exception of at-risk students. One possible reason was due to attrition: some students moved out of district or left school (Montague et al., 2011). Student self-reports also found behavioral issues to decline in high school. Montague et al. noted that the at-risk categories declined more significantly and had more variances than students classified not at risk. Montague et al. discovered the variation of student self-reports of students receiving special education services for emotional problems and attitudes towards school to be due to negative student perception. Their overall findings were that teacher ratings of learning and behavior problems were credible predictors of future performance. Students with internalizing behavior problems were possibly more at risk for poor academic outcomes than students with externalizing problems (Montague et al., 2011).

Carter, Pratner, Jackson, and Marchant (2009) interviewed six pairs of collaborative teams of elementary teachers from five different elementary schools. The researchers provided the co-teaching teams with a collaborative planning model to develop accommodations and adaptions for students with disabilities in their classrooms. Each pair consisted of a general and a special education teacher. They looked at teacher attitudes regarding their opinions of the abilities of students with disabilities, and found

that teachers either went through the collaborative process with little difficulty, or encountered barriers that prevented collaboration (Carter et al., 2009). The determining factors that influenced collaboration success were teacher philosophy and beliefs about the nature of disability, beliefs about inclusion, and collaboration skills. They found that teachers were better able to work together if they had similar philosophies and perceptions about students with disabilities. Teachers with differing perceptions struggled to address how to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009). The differing perceptions focused on student control. The central focus of this debate was whether students with disabilities were able to focus and pay attention in class (Carter et al., 2009). Some general education teachers felt that the students with disabilities could control their disability. Some special education teachers felt that the students with disabilities were not in control of their disability (Carter et al., 2009). Some teachers set up their classroom environment so that they could provide accommodations to the students with disabilities. However, others expected the students with disabilities to adapt to the classroom (Carter et al., 2009). An additional challenge of the collaboration process, expressed by all participants, was finding time to plan. Participants in the study seemed to respect their co-teaching partner's knowledge and expertise, however, when they encountered differences, they did not resolve these differences together (Carter et al., 2009).

Blecker and Boaks (2010) surveyed 546 teachers, ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade from 54 schools in southern New Jersey, to obtain teacher perceptions of school climate and inclusive practices. From the survey responses, researchers found that

teachers agreed that students with disabilities benefit from interactions with peers in the general education environment. Many had concerns that there was a lack of time for planning and professional development, which is crucial for effective collaboration. Experienced teachers expressed these concerns at a greater rate than those who were educators for less than seven years. Special education teachers utilized differentiated instruction more often than general education teachers, and considered special education as separate program within the school, and not a part of regular education. In their research, Blecker and Boaks concluded that their findings were conflicting with the perception that general education teachers are opposed to the idea of inclusion.

Student Perceptions

When looking at student friendships during late elementary school years, Estell, Jones, Pearl, and Van Acker (2009) found that students with learning disabilities typically had the same number of friends as their typical peers from grades four to six. The students with learning disabilities typically had a higher proportion of friends with a disability (Estell et al., 2009). However, students with learning disabilities tended to have fewer stable friendships than their typical peers, and their friendships tended to change from semester to semester (Estell et al., 2009). These differences in friendships between students with learning disabilities and their typical peers existed even with those students who have been in inclusive classrooms for most of their education (Estell et al., 2009). In their study, Estell et al. concluded that merely being in an inclusive classroom is not enough for students with learning disabilities to be able to make and maintain friendships. As social and emotional development is linked to academic success, an

effort must be made to put supports into place to address this issue with students with learning disabilities (Estell et al., 2009).

Litvack, Ritchie, and Shore (2011) looked at the perceptions of average-achieving and high-achieving elementary students in inclusive classrooms regarding students with disabilities. Their study found that average-achieving students were more likely to feel that the classroom presence of students with disabilities did negatively influence their learning (Litvack et al., 2011). High-achieving students reported more negatively about the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom, and reported that they learned less, that the teachers conducted lessons at a slower pace, and that there were more disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Litvack et al., 2011). However, the high-achieving students did not interpret the disruptive behaviors as being related to a disability, but related to personal problems (Litvack et al., 2011).

Jones (2007) surveyed ten to eleven year old students, paired with students with Autism for weekly peer tutoring sessions. The purpose of the study was to understand the effect of peer tutoring students with Autism on the peer tutors. Eleven girls and seven boys completed the survey. All of the students in the survey reported that the experience of peer tutoring was positive and they enjoyed it. Survey participants reported that they learned several things from the experience, such as gaining an understanding of students with differences, increasing self-control, being more responsible, and learning how to look after someone with a disability. The researchers also surveyed the parents of the peer tutors, and they responded that they felt it was a valuable experience for their children. They also reported several benefits that they felt their children gained from the

experience, such as a sense of personal achievement, awareness of how to relate to others with Autism, learning how to be accepting of others and less judgmental, and becoming aware of individual differences (Jones, 2007). One parent, whose daughter was struggling both behaviorally and academically, stated that the experience was positive and resulted in increased confidence (Jones, 2007). The researcher also surveyed school staff, and reported that the children with difficult behaviors were excellent peer tutors (Jones, 2007). The staff had the same positive perceptions as the parents (Jones, 2007).

Although researchers noted that the overall response was positive, they observed some negative responses. Some students worried about the time they were missing from their own instruction in order to tutor, and a few parents expressed the same concern. The school staff responded that they were concerned about the exposure of peer tutors to challenging behaviors of the students with Autism, such as scratching, hitting, or kicking. The staff felt that the tutors should rotate every six weeks. The tutors disagreed and felt that they needed more time in order to build a relationship with the students they were tutoring (Jones, 2007). Even though there were some concerned expressed in the survey, the overall perception was that, the tutoring experience was positive and it promoted the idea of acceptance and the inclusion of all students in the general education setting (Jones, 2007).

Copeland et al. (2004) studied the perceptions of general education high school students who were peer buddies, paired with students with severe learning disabilities to help them access the general education curriculum. Their study focused on the students' perceptions regarding the benefits of the program. They found that the general education

students felt that the program helped the students with disabilities to gain more access to not only the general education curriculum, but it also broke down some of the boundaries between disabled and non-disabled students on the campus (Copeland et al., 2004). It helped the students with disabilities gain acceptance by increasing the understanding of disabilities by all students. It also helped general and special education teachers in the classroom, as the peer buddies had the role of instructional assistant, advocate, and friend (Copeland et al., 2004). This study did find some limitations to this program. The students with disabilities were not likely to initiate interactions without prompting (Copeland et al., 2004). Due to the severity of some of the disabilities, students were not likely to participate in classroom discussions (Copeland et al., 2004). During observations of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, Short and Martin (2005) also found that students with disabilities often do not participate in classroom discussions. However, overall the participants in this study felt that the program promoted access to the general education for students with disabilities, even though they found that many teachers were unsupportive of having participants in their classrooms (Copeland et al., 2004). Short and Martin (2005) found that some teachers has negative perceptions regarding students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

In their phenomenological study, Borisov and Reid (2010) explored the perceptions of five teens with intellectual disabilities who were peer tutors or teacher assistants in a physical education program in segregated school in a large metropolitan city. They found that all participants communicated that they had positive experiences while acting as a peer tutor. Four participants stated that they felt connected to others,

and felt proud about their accomplishments. Three of the participants spoke about career aspirations and self-identity related to being a helper. Two discussed having responsibilities towards others, and one participant described having feelings of altruism. These were new results, not found previously, possibly because previous studies focused primarily on the academic benefits of tutees and not benefits gained by tutors (Borisov & Reid, 2010).

Frederickson (2010) examined the broad view that students with disabilities are generally less accepted, more rejected, and more often victims of bullying than their typical peers by reviewing prevailing research related to the acceptance of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Her review found that the research showed that communication was important for establishing positive relationships in the inclusive classroom (Frederickson, 2010). The researcher found older children to be more understanding and tolerant of students with disabilities when staff explained the characteristics of the disability in a positive and professional manner. Researchers found that generally, students were more accepting of a student if they knew about the student prior to the student entering the class. Students were generally accepting of disability related behaviors, such as the Autistic behaviors of avoiding eye contact or hand flapping. The avoidance of students with disabilities was mainly due to negative behaviors, such as aggression, and not due to the label of having a disability. Frederickson found that educators should not avoid labeling, but that her review found that labeling could be beneficial.

Inclusion

Peer assistance programs support inclusive classroom settings (Allen & Harriott, 2011). Sun (2007) found that there is a positive relationship between hours spent and the percentage in an inclusive setting and the likelihood of independence. He concluded that inclusive placements make a difference in the lives of students with disabilities, as well as their families; and therefore, a least restrictive environment is favorable (Sun, 2007). Allen and Harriott (2011) explained that the idea of inclusion is that students with disabilities should be included in the general education setting, and that appropriate resources should be available so that these students have the opportunity for success.

Pijl and Frostad (2010) focused on the relationship between peer acceptance and self-concept when they focused on 498 seventh graders from 12 schools. They found that there is a moderate relationship between peer acceptance of students with disabilities and self-concept. They found that students with disabilities, not accepted by their typical peers, had a lower self-concept (Pijl & Frostad, 2010). Their results led them to the conclusion that this relationship is bi-directional (Pijl & Frostad, 2010). Their findings suggested that the students not accepted by their typical peers were likely to develop low self-concept, and students with low self-concept were likely to have reduced acceptance at school. They determined that other influences such as parents, siblings, and neighbors influenced self-concept. These influences may balance negative effects of school. The cause and effect was difficult to determine, but it was clear that there was a relationship between peer acceptance and self-concept in students with moderate learning disabilities (Pijl & Frostad, 2010). They concluded that meaningful peer relationships were

important for students with disabilities, and educators and parents should not

underestimate the importance of being accepted and having friends (Pijl & Frostad,

2010).

When looking at the transition to middle school for students with mild disabilities,

Knesting et al. (2008) found that the students receiving special education services in their

study preferred to be in the general education setting and not in a separate special

education classroom. Short and Martin (2005) found this to be true. Leyser and Kirk

(2004) found that inclusive practices occur more at the elementary school level than at

the secondary level. Teachers reported a reduction of negative labeling of students with

disabilities in the general education setting, but continued negative labeling of students in

the special education setting (Knesting et al., 2008). Parents are often apprehensive about

the transition to middle school and fear social isolation for their child (Campbell, 2007;

Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Research by Knesting et al. found that peer connections are vital

to the success of transitioning to middle school. Carter et al. (2005), and Chadsey and

Han (2005), confirm this as well. Students who make peer connections adjust faster and

have a sense of belonging and teachers can facilitate this by providing opportunities for

peer assistance within the classroom (Knesting et al., 2008).

Hughes et al. (2013) found that students with severe intellectual disabilities

attending schools that are more inclusive demonstrated more self-determination skills

than students at less inclusive schools did. The researchers focused on high school

students at three high schools. Their results found that the students with fewer

opportunities outside of the special education classroom had fewer opportunities for self-

determination (Hughes et al., 2013). Hughes et al. (2013) found that opportunity to engage in self-determination in an inclusive setting was associated with participation in the IEP process. Hughes et al. (2013) suggested that students with limited school and community participation had limited participation in transition planning and post-secondary goal success.

Shogren, Plotner, Palmer, Wehmeyer, and Paek (2014) examined teacher perceptions related to student capacity and opportunity for self-determination. Participants were from 38 high school campuses in 20 school districts in the Midwest and South Central United States. The study was a randomized control trial, which examined the impact of the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* (SDLMI) (Shogren et al., 2014). Shogren et al., (2014) concluded that there was a direct relationship between changes in teacher's self-determination instructional practices and their perceptions regarding student self-determination outcomes. They concluded that when teachers completed training and supported to implement the SDLMI with students with disabilities, their perceptions of student capacity and opportunity for self-determination increased as compared to teachers who did not implement the SDLMI (Shogren et al., 2014). Kleinert, Harrison, Mills, Dueppen, and Trailor (2014) analyzed the effectiveness of the SDLMI and self-determination goals that students self-selected. They concluded that the SDLMI was effective and students with disabilities had the ability to complete self-determined goal selection and implementation (Kleinert et al., 2014). They found that students with disabilities could use the SDLMI to set goals, monitor goals, and evaluate individual progress (Kleinert et al., 2014).

In order to have a move inclusive environment, leaders must work more collaboratively to develop initiatives, processes, people, and strategies to increase student achievement (Boscardin, 2007; Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009; Riehl, 2008; Sautner, 2008; Sobel, Iceman-Sands, & Basile, 2007; Van Reusen et al., 2000). This is a shift from a more traditional view of responsive leadership to that of a more collaborative leadership (Hatch, 2009). "Problem-solving and system progress monitoring, however, complement leadership team models with the need for data from multiple sources. Data collected from multiple sources strengthens leadership decisions and opportunities to support positive learning outcomes" (Boscardin, 2007, p. 195). The school leader must ensure the needs of each student while raising the achievement level of all students (Boscardin, 2007; Horne & Timmons, 2009).

One inclusive environment that requires collaboration is in the co-taught classroom (Damore & Murray, 2009; Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2009). There is often a general dissatisfaction with co-teaching amongst both general education and special education teachers (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Among those surveyed in the research completed by Kohler-Evans (2006), the three main factors causing dissatisfaction with co-teaching were the lack of common planning time, the lack of a positive working relationship, and the lack of a shared responsibility and philosophy between co-teaching partners. The school must have a climate that fosters collaboration in order to make positive change (Kohm & Nance, 2009). There must be opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership in order to solve problems (Damore & Murray, 2009; Kohm &

Nance, 2009). This takes place when there is communication and open and honest dialogue (Kohm & Nance, 2009).

In their review of public debates over inclusion, Connor and Ferri (2007), found that there is opposition to inclusive practices. They found that inclusion was often viewed as a way to save money, although inclusive practices is often more costly than separate classrooms for students with disabilities. Their review found that although parents were generally supportive of inclusion, teachers are unwilling or not equipped to include students with disabilities in the general education setting. They found that the perception of general education classes was inadequate for students with disabilities. They also found that historically, special education was a means to remove students perceived as a disruption to the learning of others. In addition, they found that many experts (school psychologists and clinicians) held on to outdated and inaccurate beliefs about the potential abilities of students with disabilities (Conner & Ferri, 2007). Adding to this is negative view is that many parents were found to believe that the needs of students with disabilities are ignored in a general education setting (Conner & Ferri, 2007).

Leadership

Successful schools integrate multiple sources of leadership to focus on teaching and learning (Sheppard & Dibbon, 2011). Successful schools require active participation from all stakeholders (Kowalski, 2012). The leadership style of those in control positions impacts stakeholders directly, because what is happening outside of the school influences what is happening inside the school (Hatch, 2009; Riehl, 2008). Positive change occurs

when both teachers and principals open to new ideas and are willing to try new ideas

(Kearney & Smith, 2010). The school leader is "the liaison to those outside the school

and act as the spokesperson, negotiator, and champion of the school's interests" (Hatch,

2009, p. 17). Without connections outside of the school, the school leader, as well as the

school, cannot be successful (Hatch, 2009). School leaders must have a vision.

However, a vision is not enough. School leaders must also have an action plan (Allen &

Harriott, 2011). As Allen and Harriott (2011) found, input of stakeholders is important

for a successful action plan development. Stakeholders have a large influence on the

school, and it is the responsibility of the school leadership to ensure student success by

acquiring the resources needed, hiring a qualified and caring staff, coaching the staff,

while ensuring that all stakeholders understand the school's mission and vision (Hatch,

2009; Nidus & Sadder, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

In order for a principal to be successful, he or she must develop "three clusters of

relationship skills and qualities: acting as consultants to translate pedagogical knowledge

into practice, mediating conflict and reaching consensus, and valuing relationships"

(Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie, and Ackerman, (2009, p. 10). To be an effective

consultant, the principal must take the concerns of the stakeholders and turn them into

actions (Donaldson et al., 2009). An effective principal listen to all stakeholders

(Donaldson et al., 2009). The principal listens "attentively and appreciately to the

rational and emotional concerns of stakeholders" (Donaldson et al., 2009, p. 11). The

effective principal must become a mediator and consensus builder (Donaldson et al.,

2009). Principals must focus on both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Donaldson et

al., 2009). Finally, and effective principal is a person who values relationships. Culture

builds on relationships, which include values (Donaldson et al., 2009). This final quality

is a value system that focuses on people and relationships (Donaldson et al., 2009). By

focusing on people and relationships, the principal sends the message that everyone's

opinion and feelings matter. This focus on personal interactions builds a strong, positive

school culture (Knight, 2011; Sautner, 2008).

Research by Parrett and Budge (2009) focused on high-poverty schools and

increased student achievement. Their findings were that school leaders had to work

collaboratively with staff to achieve school success (Parrett & Budge, 2009). In addition,

the research found it important to construct positive relationships with students, families,

and the community. In their research, Parrett and Budge concluded that there were two

main factors in increasing school success: data based decision making and fostering

caring relationships. School leaders who participated in the study had two main

concerns: maintaining staff and providing support for the lowest-performing students

(Parrett & Budge, 2009). Maintaining staff was found to be important because if fostered

caring relationships within the school. This, in turn, provided positive and consistent

support for low-achieving students (Parrett & Budge, 2009).

A factor in the creation of a positive school environment is the principal, and the

support the principal provides for special education teachers (Correa & Wagner, 2011).

Principals are responsible for ensuring the success of inclusion in their school (Allen &

Harriott, 2011). A survey by McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, and Terry (2010) examined

the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of administrator preparation

programs. They surveyed 61 administrators from a large metropolitan school district in the southeastern United States, and the researchers found that education related to exceptional students (both students with disabilities and gifted students) was infused throughout leadership programs, and not taught in separate courses (McHatton et al., 2010). They also found differences in the areas of emphasis in preparation programs and district professional development: preparation programs focused on legal and funding issues, and district professional development focused on modifications and accommodations. The survey respondents felt that professional development provided more training than preparation programs. In the area of discipline and special education, both preparation programs and district professional development provided minimal training, even though IDEA has strong discipline compliance requirements. Overall, school leaders felt that they had adequate training in the area of exceptional students, even though leadership programs provided minimal training (McHatton et al., 2010).

Leadership actions, along with additional teacher training, will cause a change in school culture from that of autonomy and resistance to a collaborative professional learning community of practice (Kohm & Nance, 2009; Sobel et al., 2007). Confident leaders empower others to lead (Jackson & McDermott, 2009). Empowerment can happen on two levels: on the individual level and on the community level (Field et al., 1998). When administrators empower their faculty to lead, the faculty, in-turn, empowers their students to lead themselves (Covey, 2009). As Field et al. (1998) states: one cannot teach empowerment. Empowerment is the result of learning self-determination skills, including self-advocacy. Miller and Chan (2008) found that there is

a positive correlation between self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students

with disabilities and positive transition experiences to adulthood, including employment

and independent living, and positive quality of life, and satisfaction.

Research Methodologies

Creswell (2009) outlined three research design approaches to consider prior to

selecting a research plan: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Merriam (2009)

stated that the first step in conducting a qualitative study is to create a question about

something that one is curious about, which forms the basis of the research problem or

problem statement. After I developed questions and determined a research problem, I

reviewed and considered the three design approaches, and determined that the qualitative

method is most appropriate. Merriam & Associates (2002) described several approaches

to qualitative research, such as phenomenology, experimental, and case study design.

Phenomenology examines the meanings of basic human experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Experimental design research has a controlled context with few variables (Yin, 2014).

Case study research involves the examination and analysis of a particular phenomenon,

or case (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2012), and provides qualitative data that is an

in-depth investigation of an individual or group of individuals (Creswell, 2009; Yin,

2012). Case study involves the examination of a bounded system (Merriam &

Associates, 2002; Yin, 2012). Typically, case study research in education involves

people and programs (Stake, 1995). I chose case study research because my plan focused

on teacher's perceptions.

Stake (1995) stated, "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Furthermore, "case study is particularization, not generalization" (Stake, 1995). I intend to conduct case study research in order to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they work with a peer advocate. Because the chosen method is case study, the focus is not generalizing the results, but to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions.

Creswell (2009) explained that the process of selecting a research design involves philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and specific research methods. I plan to utilize the advocacy/participatory worldview (Creswell, 2009). The position of this view is that post positivist beliefs do not address the issues related to social justice and the marginalized. Neuman (as cited in Creswell, 2009) stated that this design draws from the works of such writers Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, and Freire. Fay (as cited in Creswell, 2009), Heron and Reason (as cited in Creswell, 2009), and Kemmis and Wilkinson (as cited in Creswell, 2009), are contemporaries of this perspective. The advocacy/participatory worldview centers on the needs of the participants, and the "participants are collaborators in their inquiries" (Creswell, 2009, p. 10).

Conclusion

The climate and culture of a school has the biggest impact on its success or failure (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Teachers play a crucial part in determining success or failure

(Kohm & Nance, 2009; Sautner, 2008; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). In order for change to take place, one must engage in reflection (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Teachers who feel they have expert knowledge of special education favor inclusion more than teachers who feel they lack special education knowledge (Watnick & Sacks, 2006; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Having knowledge of special education and favorable attitudes do not ensure successful inclusionary practice (Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker, 2000; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). The biggest factor in the success or failure of inclusion is teacher attitude and perception (Sautner, 2008; Sobel et al., 2007; Van Reusen et al., 2000; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Favorable teacher perceptions regarding inclusionary practices will result in increased acceptance of the inclusion model (Sautner, 2008; Sobe et al., 2007). In turn, the acceptance of the use peer advocates in the general education setting working with students with disabilities to increase self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

Summary

In this section, I addressed a review of the literature related to self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities. The review of the literature found that there is little research related to self-determination and increased student achievement in students from culturally diverse backgrounds. There is a need for more research in the area of promoting self-determination skills in culturally diverse students, and in the area of parent assistance. The literature review included the effectiveness of peer assistance and tutoring programs, social and academic inclusion, and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I

discussed the role of school leadership. I reviewed research methodologies. The conclusion addressed the relationship between climate and culture, teachers, and school success or failure.

Section 3 includes a discussion of the research methods I will utilize to complete this single-case design case study. In addition, I will explain the context of the study. I will describe procedures to select participants, as well as the steps to protect the participants. I will explain the plan for the collection and the analysis of the qualitative data. I will define the role of the researcher. Finally, I will include an explanation of established validity.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students worked with a peer advocate. The purpose of case study research is to understand "the whole individual in relation to his or her environment" (Verma et al., 1998, p. 83). A case study typically involves an intensive analysis of an individual or small group, focusing on individual characteristics (Verma et al., 1998). I attempted to identify teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who were not working with a peer advocate and to determine how self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities changed after they worked with a peer advocate.

Research Design

I used a case study research design for this study. Case study research involves the examination and analysis of a particular phenomenon, or case, and provides qualitative data that is an in-depth investigation of an individual or group of individuals (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2012). Case study involves the examination of a bounded system (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2012). Typically, case study research in education involves people and programs (Stake, 1995). The technique I used in this study was one that Rubin and Rubin (2005) defined as responsive interviewing. Responsive interviewing is preferred because it emphasizes that the interviewer and the

interviewee form a relationship during the interviewing process that is mutually influencing, which creates obligations for the interviewer. The interviewer has to be self-aware of biases and expectations that may influence the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In addition, this approach provides flexibility throughout the process. According to Rubin and Rubin, the researcher first asks questions that set the general direction of the research, and the interviewees' responses then guide the research through the conversation so that the researcher can focus on some areas and ignore others. This back and forth process of mutual influence encourages participants to discuss concerns and meanings that are important to them (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

One research method that I considered was experimental design. Experimental design research has a controlled context with few variables (Yin, 2014). I chose case study research over experimental design research; because the environment I studied was natural, and I felt the best approach was to observe within a real-life context (Yin, 2014). Another research method considered was phenomenology. Phenomenological research examines the meanings of basic human experiences (Merriam, 2009). I chose case study research over phenomenology because case study research focuses on a particular program or event (Merriam, 2009). A final method considered was survey design research. Survey design research may be utilized to study a phenomenon and context, but the ability to explore context is limited (Yin, 2014).

Research Questions

In order to obtain a significant understanding of each teacher's perceptions about students with disabilities and their self-advocacy skills and to examine any changes in

perceptions of students with disabilities after the students worked with a peer advocate, the following questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?

RQ2: How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate?

RQ3: How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

I attempted to obtain an understanding of teachers' perceptions through individual interviews, observations, and examination of anonymous survey responses.

Context of Study

The Setting

This case study took place at a middle school in an urban area in the United States Desert Southwest and included general education teachers who have students with disabilities, both with and without peer advocates, in their classrooms. The school employed 36 general education teachers and 8 special education teachers. The student population totaled approximately 902 students, with 127 of those students categorized as having a disability and receiving special education services through an IEP.

The Sample

Case study involves the examination of a bounded system (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin 2012), and in education, the research typically involves people and

programs (Stake, 1995). This study included one case, general education teachers within the contexts of the general education classrooms. The goal of this single case study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand how general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students worked with a peer advocate. Therefore, the participants of this study were general education teachers who had students with disabilities who did and did not work with a peer advocate in their classrooms.

I used a purposeful sample of five general education teachers for this study. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stressed the importance of selecting participants who are experienced and knowledgeable about the research topic and that a variety of perspectives should be included. Yin (2012) stated that there is no formula for determining the number of cases to include in a study. Yin (2012) cautioned against using sampling logic, stating that criteria regarding sample size are not important. The sample size should be a decision based on the number of case replications that the researcher would like to have in a study (Yin, 2014).

Procedures for Ethical Protection

Prior to beginning the study, I completed the course offered by the National Institute of Health for Human Research Protections to gain an understanding of the risks associated with conducting research. I acquired Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University (approval no. 20-30-14-0136062). Prior to completing the proposal, I obtained conditional approval from the principal of the middle school.

Once I obtained IRB approval, I obtained approval from the superintendent of the school district. I then sent invitations to participate through e-mail to the school staff. Once I obtained responses, I obtained informed consent. As part of the informed consent, I outlined the purpose of the study and the right to discontinue participation at any time. I acquired approval for data collection from participants as well as approval for data use.

In this study, I examined perceptions of participants; therefore, confidentiality was of great importance. The use of pseudonyms known only to me in the data collection and coding process protected the identities of study participants. The study contained no identifying names of individual participants or organizations. I changed the name of the school, district, state, and participants to ensure anonymity. All computer data was password protected on a computer only accessible to me, and all audio tapes were in a locked cabinet that is only accessible by me when they are not in use. Both the computer and file cabinet used to hold data collection are stored at a location other than the research site. After transcribing and analyzing interview data, I used member checking to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). At the conclusion of the study, I secured and locked all data in a personal file away from the research site and accessible to no one, where it will be kept for five years.

Role of the Researcher

I was the special education instructional facilitator at this school for the past 5 and a half school years; although I currently hold the same position, I am no longer at this location. My role is that of an educational leader and advocate for students with disabilities in school settings and as a support to individual schools to ensure a

commitment to improving student achievement. The facilitator communicates and collaborates with the school district special education departments and teams to ensure the implementation of appropriate services to students. According to a special education support guide of the ABC School District (2014), the facilitator is a resource for the school administration and staff regarding quality instruction, best practices, and IEP development and compliance issues but does not hold a supervisory or administrative role.

I did not interact with the peer advocates in the program or any other students at this school, nor do I have any knowledge of the students with disabilities and classrooms where the peer advocates assist. A special education teacher on the school campus organized and advised the peer advocate program, which included selecting and training students as peer advocates, communicating with teachers to determine areas of need for peer advocates, and communicating with the students receiving help from the peer advocates. During the initial stages of my research, I interviewed the peer advocate advisor to gain an understanding of the local problem. I did not consider this teacher as a possible participant of this study.

Yin (2012) stated that good case studies use multiple sources of evidence. Because of this, I relied upon recorded interviews as well as observations and survey responses. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Observations included the observation and documentation in field notes of teacher actions in the classroom. Survey questions included responses to questions related to self-determination and self-advocacy based on the AIR Self-Determination Scale educator form (Wolman et al., 1994), which

are often completed by teachers for the purposes of documenting present levels for IEP

development. The survey was provided to participants at the conclusion of the initial

interview. Once completed, participants returned the surveys in person, via school

district mail, or electronically, with no identifying information. Finally, the participants

checked to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of their interview responses as part of the

validation procedure (Yin, 2012).

Criteria for Selecting Participants

In a case study, the case is composed of a bounded system or phenomenon (Yin,

2012). According to Yin, (2012), one research option for a single case study is a holistic,

single-case study design. According to Yin (2012), the case serves as "the main unit of

analysis in a case study" (p. 7-8). Case study design does not incorporate sampling logic

and does not have typical criteria for sample size (Yin, 2014). A criterion for selecting

case study participants is that the participants exhibit characteristics that are of interest to

the researcher (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Stake (1995) emphasized that the purpose

of case study is "particularization, not generalization" and that the goal should be to

understand the "case itself" (p. 8). I selected a purposeful sample of participants to

participate in this study. Merriam and Associates (2002) described a purposeful sample

as one from which the researcher will be able to "understand the meaning of a

phenomenon from the perspectives of participants" (p. 12). I used responsive

interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because this type of interviewing has a

narrow focus mainly on events on processes, I conducted a deep inquiry. Therefore, I

considered the participants of this study as a purposeful sample, comprising five general

education teachers. All participating teachers had students with disabilities in their

classroom. Participants had students with disabilities working with peer advocates in

their classroom and students with disabilities with no peer assistance. The total number

of participants represented approximately 14% of the total general education teachers.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection activities began after site administrator approval and IRB

approval. Next, I submitted a cover letter, application to conduct research, and all

protocol to the Coordinator of Research with the ABC School District Department of

Research to obtain additional approval. Upon approval, I contacted general education

teachers via email with an invitation to participate (Appendix B), describing my study,

and asking for potential participants. I then obtained informed consent from the five

responses meeting participant criteria. Once participants provided consent, I conducted

initial individual interviews, lasting approximately one hour, outside of the teacher

contract time, at the time most convenient for participants.

Prior to the start of the initial interview, each participant reviewed the signed

consent form and had the opportunity to ask questions about the informed consent or the

interview process. Each interview was audio recorded. Initial individual interview

protocol (Appendix C) consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to

invoke responses pertinent to the research questions. The interviews were conversational

in nature, and dialogue was encouraged, beginning with broad questions, followed by

more specific, open-ended questions. I kept documentation of observations, in the form

of field notes, during each interview. Upon completion of the interviews, I developed

transcriptions of the audio recordings.

I used responsive interviewing techniques. According to Rubin and Rubin

(2005), the goal of this type of research is to find how others gain an understanding of

what they have experienced. This technique begins with general topics and questions and

the line of questioning is adjusted based on interviewee responses (Rubin & Rubin,

2005). In planned to conduct the one-hour interviews over a two-week period, with the

times and dates based on the convenience of the volunteer participants. I planned to meet

for face-to-face interviews, at a location mutually agreed upon, to ask open-ended

questions. Open-ended interviewing allows participants to share their perspectives in

their own words (Hatch, 2002). This helped keep the focus on the research topic and

cover major portions of the study (Rubin & Rubin). Individual follow up sessions then

took place, lasting approximately thirty minutes, where participants reviewed the

previous interview transcripts for accuracy. Any clarifying questions regarding the initial

interview took place, and the participants had an opportunity to ask questions or provide

additional insight.

Following interviews, the observational technique of field notes were utilized,

using an observation protocol form (Appendix D), that included notes that are both

descriptive and reflective, to gather first-hand information about participant behaviors in

the classroom (Janesick, 2004). Observations allow a researcher to see things that the

participant may assume and that therefore may not come up in the interview process

(Hatch, 2002). The observations took place during a class period lasting approximately

55 minutes in inclusive settings. Teacher behavior was observed and documented on the observation protocol form (Appendix D), specifically; the number of opportunities the teacher provides for student self-determining or self-advocating behaviors. As the focus is on teacher behaviors, there was no identifying student information. I intended to review observation notes to analyze the setting, both verbal and non-verbal communications, and any notable happenings or non-happenings. This helped to gain an in-depth picture of the cases being studied (Janesick, 2004).

Finally, I collected and reviewed survey responses based on questions from the educator form of the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) (See Appendix E). The AIR Self-Determination Scale is a tool used by the school to gather information related to self-determined behaviors, used by IEP teams at the school to develop social/functional behaviors for present levels (See Appendix A for approval). The American Institutes (AIR), Teachers College, and Columbia University developed the AIR Self-Determination Scale to measure student capacity and opportunity for self-determination. The main purpose of the scale is to assess and develop strategies for improving a student's level of self-determination (Wolman et al., 1994). The scale creates a profile of a student's level of self-determination, identifies student strengths and weaknesses, and identifies specific goals transferrable to the student's IEP (University of Oklahoma, n.d.). The responder rates each area on a scale, ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, almost always, to always. I used a survey, based on the educator form of this scale, to gain participant perceptions regarding the self-determination in students with disabilities. The four areas that I focused on in the educator response survey were

student knowledge, ability, perception, and opportunity at school. I looked for

relationships between the survey responses, interviews, and observations. I used the

documents to substantiate the information collected from the interviews and observations,

for triangulation in order to establish validity.

Data Analysis

I conducted a triangulated qualitative case study. Triangulation involves using

multiple sources of evidence to substantiate the same occurrence (Yin, 2014). I

organized data by cases to prepare for analysis. Organization of the data included

interview protocol forms, consent forms, notes and transcriptions from interviews, field

notes, and survey responses. Data was sorted and arranged by case and date retrieved. I

categorized data by using factors such as teaching experience and subject taught. Both

Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) state the process of case study involves gathering data,

analyzing and classifying data, reviewing and interpreting data, and finding patterns or

relationships. The case is the target (Stake, 1995). As suggested by Stake, during the

process of conducting interviews, observations, and review of survey responses refined

my plan to focus on the issues central to my research questions. I looked for evidence

related to my research questions, as Stake stated meanings and relationships become clear

to the researcher after conducting observations while focusing on categories or key events

and paying attention to influencing conditions. I looked for patterns and themes in the

data to show descriptive cases by coding issues related to my research questions. I

reduced the data to a coding system to generate themes: perceptions about inclusion, the

benefits of inclusion, and opinions regarding students with disabilities working with peer advocates. I used descriptive analysis to present the information in a narrative.

Validity

A major strength of case study research is that this research method provides the researcher with the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). In case study research, the researcher has the opportunity to go beyond the limits of measuring and recording of experimental outcome, the recording of verbal behavior recorded in survey methods, or the documentation of the past in histories (Yin, 2014). Because of the use of multiple sources in this study, the strategy to increase validity was triangulation. According to Yin, collecting data from many different sources is a strength of case study data collection, because using multiple sources of data results in "converging lines of inquiry," resulting in more accurate findings (Yin, 2014, p. 120). By utilizing data triangulation, the researcher is able to address the potential of construct validity, because the use of multiple sources of information provides multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

I intended to complete interview questions, conduct interviews, transcribe the interviews, and then analyze the data. According to Yin (2014), this may lead to researcher bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall, or reflexivity, which are threats to internal validity. To address these threats to internal validity, I did not share personal opinions with the interviewees. I developed interview questions prior to meeting with interviewees, and the interviewees signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure confidentiality. Participants checked interview transcripts for accuracy. I utilized

member checks to ensure that the final data was correct, to reduce the threat to internal validity (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

I utilized documents in the form of survey responses based on the educator responses to the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) Educator Form. Documents are an important tool to use to substantiate findings from other sources (Yin, 2014). Yin stated that using documents as a source of evidence has many strengths. For example, when using documents, the researcher has the ability to view the documents as needed. Creation of documents is to provide information that supports material from other sources and not because of case study (Yin, 2014).

Summary

This section described the methodology I used to conduct this single-case design case study with the purpose to explore and describe teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who are working with peer advocates. I sent an invitation via email to potential participants and received responses from five general education teachers to participate in interviews, classroom observation, and supply survey responses to supply further details on teacher perceptions. I used an interpretive analysis to present data in the form of a narrative, and included charts and tables for analysis to search for patterns in the data. In Sections 4 and 5, I will discuss the details of the data analysis findings and results.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities and to understand if their perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate. The purpose of case study research is to understand "the whole individual in relation to his or her environment" (Verma et al., 1998, p. 83). A case study typically involves an intensive analysis of an individual or small group, focusing on individual characteristics (Verma et al., 1998). I attempted to identify teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who were not working with a peer advocate and to determine how self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities changed after they worked with a peer advocate.

Yin (2012) stated that good case studies use multiple sources of evidence. Because of this, I relied upon recorded interviews as well as observations and survey responses. The participants checked to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of their interview responses as part of the validation procedure (Yin, 2012). In order to obtain a significant understanding of each teacher's perceptions about students with disabilities and their self-advocacy skills and to examine any changes in teacher perceptions of students with disabilities after the student worked with a peer advocate, the following questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?

RQ2: How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate?

RQ3: How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

Data Collection Procedures

I obtained an understanding of teacher's perceptions through individual interviews, observations, and through examination of survey responses. Both Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) state the process of case study involves gathering data, analyzing and classifying data, reviewing and interpreting data, and finding patterns or relationships. Prior to inviting and selecting participants, I obtained IRB and school district approval to conduct research. At the start of the school year, September, 2015, I contacted all general education teachers at the school via e-mail with an invitation to participate and then obtained informed consent participant criteria. Over the next several weeks, I waited for responses to my invitation. In November, 2015, I sent a second invitation via e-mail to participate. I then received five responses over the next two months. I was unable to obtain additional responses for several reasons. First, the school was in transition to becoming a full magnet school, and all students participated in the magnet curriculum. Because of this, the peer advocate program was in the process of elimination. In addition, because of the small size of the school, the pool of participants

was small. Furthermore, several teachers with knowledge of the peer advocacy program

transferred to other schools with the change of administration and the school transitioning

to a full magnet school.

I arranged to meet with each participant individually at a time that was convenient

for them in order to review and obtain consent and to conduct the interview. The first

interview took place in November, 2015, and the final interview took place in January of

2016. I conducted and recorded initial individual interviews. The interviews lasted

approximately 1 hour, and I used semi structured, open-ended questions designed to

invoke responses pertinent to the research questions. The interviews were conversational

in nature, and dialogue was encouraged, beginning with broad questions, followed by

more specific, open-ended questions. I then transcribed the interviews and met with each

participant approximately 1 week after the initial interview to go over the transcribed

interview. The participants checked to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of their

interview responses as part of the validation procedure (Yin, 2012).

Documents are an important tool to use to substantiate findings from other

sources (Yin, 2014). Yin stated that using documents as a source of evidence has many

strengths. For example, when using documents, the researcher has the ability to view the

documents as needed.   The creation of documents is not solely for the purpose of a case

study. The use of documents is to find information that supports material from other

sources (Yin, 2014). For this study, I used survey questions that included responses to

questions related to self-determination and self-advocacy based on the AIR Self-

Determination (Wolman et al., 1994) educator form, which frequently used by teachers

for the purposes of documenting present levels for IEP development. The AIR Self-Determination Scale is a tool used by the school to gather information related to self-determined behaviors, which is used by IEP teams at the school to develop social/functional behaviors for present levels. I focused on four of the five areas of the educator response survey: student knowledge, ability, perception, and opportunity at school. I did not survey participants on opportunity at home, as my focus was on the school setting.

Participants received the survey at the conclusion of the interview. Participants then completed the survey at their leisure and, once completed, returned the surveys in person, via school district mail, or electronically, with no identifying information. I looked for relationships between the survey responses, interviews, and observations. I used the documents to substantiate the information collected from the interviews and observations for triangulation in order to establish validity.

Observations included the observation and documentation in field notes of teacher actions in the classroom. Observations allow a researcher to see things that the participant may assume and that therefore may not come up in the interview process (Hatch, 2002). My observations took place during a 55-minute class period. During the observations, I referred to Soukakou's (2012) characteristics of an inclusive classroom to develop the areas of focus for my observations such as having a layout that encourages student interaction, with access to materials and where teachers encourage student participation through positive interactions. I focused on teacher instructional strategies, teacher strategies and behaviors to encourage student engagement, teacher interactions

with students, classroom arrangement, teacher movement, and student movement. I also noted observations that did not fit into any of the previous categories but had an impact on the climate of the classroom.

Triangulation involves using multiple sources of evidence to substantiate the same occurrence (Yin, 2014). I organized data by cases to prepare for analysis. I looked for evidence related to my research questions. As Stake (1995) stated, meanings and relationships become clear to the researcher after conducting observations while focusing on categories or key events and paying attention to influencing conditions. I reviewed the data several times and looked for patterns and themes in the data to show descriptive cases by coding issues related to my research questions. I used the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) as a guide to find emerging themes regarding teacher perceptions about students with disabilities in the general education classroom: knowledge of self-determination behaviors, ability to perform self-determination behaviors, perception of knowledge and ability to perform self-determination behaviors, and opportunity to perform self-determination behaviors at school.

Findings

After I compiled data from interviews, surveys, and observations, I used the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) as a guide for finding themes: (a) knowledge of self-determination behaviors, (b) ability to perform self-determination behaviors, (c) perception of knowledge and ability to perform self-determination behaviors, and (d) opportunity to perform self-determination behaviors at school. During my classroom observations, I took field notes and categorized my observations into the

following categories: (a) teacher instructional strategies, methods, teacher strategies and behaviors to encourage student engagement; (b) teacher interactions with students; (c) classroom arrangement; (d) teacher movement; (e) student movement; and (f) other. I used the category of other to add observations that I felt were important but that did not necessarily fit into another category. Based on results, I categorized the data from the interviews, anonymous surveys, and observations to answer my three research questions.

Interview Results

I conducted and recorded individual interviews that lasted approximately one hour. I used semi structured, open-ended questions designed to invoke responses pertinent to the research questions. The interviews were conversational in nature, and dialogue was encouraged, beginning with broad questions and followed by more specific, open-ended questions. I then reviewed the transcribed interviews (Appendix F), and, using my research questions as a guide, I looked for relationships based on the themes described from the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994).

To attempt to gain an understanding of general education teacher perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, I asked open-ended questions related to self-determination and self-advocacy.

1. What does inclusion look like at the school?

2. How do you feel about inclusion?

3. What are the benefits and challenges of including students with disabilities in your general education classroom?

4. In your classroom, how to students with disabilities participate in group activities, group discussions, group projects, and presentations?

5. Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

6. How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

7. How would you define self-determination and self-advocacy?

8. Do you see self-determination and self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom? Why do you think that is?

To determine if teachers perceive a difference between students with disabilities working with peer advocates and students with disabilities with no peer advocate, or if teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities changed after having a peer advocate in their classroom, I asked questions related to peer advocates.

1. Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

2. If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met, both academically and socially, in your classroom?

3. Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

4. Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

5. What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

I also asked questions related to participant demographics: subject taught, number of years teaching, and number of years teaching in an inclusive setting. Table 1 shows a summary of participant demographics.

Table 1

Teacher Participant Characteristics

	Teacher 1 Language Arts	Teacher 2 Science	Teacher 3 Social Studies	Teacher 4 Math	Teacher 5 Social Studies
Peer Advocate currently in classroom	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Peer Advocate last year in classroom	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Number of years teaching	23	3	12	23	22
Number of years at current school	13	2	2	8	22
Number of years teaching an inclusive class	5	5	10	8	5
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male

For this case study, my first research question was, "What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?" The first few interview questions related to inclusive practices. All teachers responded similarly to the question, "What does inclusion look like at the school?" At the school, inclusion was students receiving instruction in the least restrictive environment, students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom with their peers without disabilities. When asked how teachers felt about inclusion, most responded similarly. Teacher 1 commented, "I don't have a problem with inclusion, we just have to understand that it's a different classroom

environment." Teacher 4 commented, "I feel it works for most of my kids and with some kids that are not functioning even close to grade level; they need more one on one. More instruction at the grade level where they're at, or closer to where they're at." Teacher 5 commented, "I think it's great. Some of the kids that I have in those classes are some of my favorite students." Overall, teachers felt favorable about inclusion.

The next few interview questions focused on the benefits and challenges of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Teachers perceived several benefits. Teacher 1 felt that both students with and without disabilities learn to get along with other people. Teacher 2 also felt that the inclusive setting benefitted both students with and without disabilities, and stated, "I think it really helps the regular students. It teaches them to become compassionate and understanding, and to see the differences in others that they have and then learning how to help others; and not to mention when they start teaching they become more, I guess you would say they take more ownership in their education when they are teaching another student. So, I think that's hugely beneficial to them, and obviously the obvious benefits for special needs kids are that they get to see social interactions, real, you know, real-world—how all their peers are always interacting." Teacher 3 said, "I think it's important for regular ed. students to see how fortunate they are to not have learning disabilities and to learn some patience, and for the special education students to have general ed. models in the class." Teacher 4 stated, "They see to what level they should be performing, they get a clear picture of where their deficiencies are, and they also get to be working with their peers. Their peers see them as regular general education kids rather than someone that's in a

different program that might be viewed as different." Finally, Teacher 5 had comments similar to the other teachers, and stated, "Well, obviously there are benefits for them, being able to join the general population. They are going to feel more included, they are going to gain some more socialization skills. But, I really think it helps the other students as well, dealing with someone who is not exactly the same as they are. The way we have it divided up was that the general ed. kids are with others exactly like them and also the accelerated kids are with accelerated, and even mixing those two groups is a challenge sometimes. This way, they get to mix with the population that they don't see every day, at least in every class, so I think it's a benefit to them, too."

When discussing the challenges of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom, teachers had similar issues. Time was a big factor. Teachers felt that they did not have enough time in the classroom to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Teachers commented that differentiation was challenging in some situations, because the students with disabilities in their general education class were several grade levels lower than the other students, and this resulted in lesson pacing difficulties. Finally, teachers commented that behavior was also a challenge.

All participants stated that they used similar strategies to encourage the participation of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Teachers used pairing and cooperative learning groups to ensure participation for all students. All teachers commented that they used some sort of groupings for classroom arrangement. All participants stated that they expect all students to participate in group activities, group discussions, group projects, and presentations. Teachers stated that students planned and

discussed topics within their groups prior to participating in class activities. Participants indicated that students with disabilities tended to participate in all activities, but did not typically take the role of a leader. All respondents stated that they do not see difficulties with participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

All teachers responded with similar statements when asked to define self-determination and self-advocacy. Generally, teachers felt that self-determination was persevering, not giving up, and knowing what one wants and devising a plan to meet personal goals. Self-advocacy, as defined by participants was speaking out, asking questions, and requesting help. Three teachers stated that students in their classroom were exhibiting self-determination and self-advocacy skills, while two teachers stated that this is not always true. One teacher stated that students with disabilities are not typically demonstrating these skills, because these students are typically quiet and shy. The other teacher stated that seeing a student self-advocate or use self-determination depended on the student's disability, how others addressed the disability with the student, and that all students were at a different level of having these skills. Another teacher had a similar opinion and commented that these skills are often present in students with disabilities because self-advocacy is often an IEP goal, and the student was taught self-advocacy and self-determination skills.

Of the five teacher participants, two had peer advocates helping in the classroom at the time of their interview and three did not. One teacher, who did not have a peer advocate, has never had an advocate helping in the general education classroom. One of the teachers, who had an advocate, did not have one during the previous school year.

One of the teachers who had an advocate also had an advocate during the previous school year. Finally, two of the teachers who did not have an advocate at the time of the interview had advocates helping in the classroom during previous years.

The three teachers without peer advocates had different responses to the question regarding how they ensure that they meet the needs of students with disabilities, both academically and socially, in the classroom. Two teachers mentioned the challenge of remembering or following IEPs. Both mentioned the difficulty of meeting the needs of all students in the classroom while ensuring accommodations for students with disabilities. The one teacher who had no experience with peer advocates used the strategy of making modifications for all students in the classroom. Overall, the three teachers without peer advocates stated that meeting the needs of students with disabilities was a significant challenge.

Teachers saw benefits of having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting. One teacher stated that students learn best from other students, a peer advocate is able to rephrase something in "kid terms." Advocates helped others understand the lesson. One teacher stated that the peer advocate in the classroom read to students, organized notes for students, and acted like "a little teacher." Another teacher stated that the peer advocate was "a copy of me." Teachers with advocates noted that once the advocate became familiar with the teacher and the class, the teacher did not have to spend time directing the advocate. The advocate often came into the class and began helping immediately. With all of the benefits, teachers also commented on disadvantages of having peer advocates helping in the classroom. One teacher, previously with an

advocate, commented that the advocate must be the right person to effective help

students. An advocate who sees the position as a reward and is not motivated to help

others is not effective. In addition, an advocate and student who do not get along are also

not effective. Finally, the teacher with no experience with having a peer advocate in the

classroom felt that a peer advocate is a management issue for the teacher, especially

when assigned to a student who needs no assistance. Overall, teachers felt that having a

peer advocate in an inclusive classroom was beneficial.

When asked if teachers saw differences in students with disabilities who are

paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not paired with a peer

advocate, all but one teacher stated that they saw differences. The teacher who did not

notice a difference was the teacher with no experience with a peer advocate. The teacher

remarked that having a peer advocate was "almost like a crutch." The teacher felt that an

advocate was similar to having a personal aide, and that there was help for all students in

the classroom, so having the advocate was a deficit. The teacher also emphasized the

personal lack of experience with peer advocates. Other teachers remarked that students

working with advocates showed differences both academically and socially. Words used

to describe this were confidence, comfort, security, and protection. Teachers felt students

had support of the advocate, which increased confidence, which in turn, increased

participation in the classroom. One interesting observation from one teacher was that the

peer advocate in the classroom was female, and she assisted with the females bonding in

the classroom. The teacher did not observe the same interactions with the boys in the

classroom. Again, overall, teachers felt that there was a positive change in students working with an advocate in the general education setting.

Survey Results

Participants completed the anonymous survey after their interviews, individually, and at their leisure. Participants then returned the completed surveys in person, via school district mail, or electronically, with no identifying information. I focused on four of the five areas of the educator response survey: student knowledge, ability, perception, and opportunity at school. I did not survey participants on opportunity at home, as my focus was on the school setting. The responder rated each area on the educator scale, ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, almost always, to always. I sorted participant responses by each area of self-determination, as well as by each participant.

Overall, participants scored most positively to the questions related to students with disabilities having the opportunity to perform self-determined behaviors at school, with the majority of responses of always or almost always. Overall responses in the remaining three categories did not show an area with the majority rated positively or negatively. When I looked at the responses of individual participants, I found differences in rating responses. For Example, Teacher 3 rated 13 of 24 questions as almost never or never, rated eight questions as sometimes, and rated three questions as almost always, with the ratings of almost always in the area of opportunity to perform self-determined behaviors at school. Teacher 5 rated 3 questions as almost always, and the remaining 21 as sometimes.

Knowledge of self-determination behaviors. When responding to knowledge of

self-determination behaviors in students with disabilities, all participants agreed that students with disabilities sometimes or almost always know their own abilities and limitations. Most participants agreed that students sometimes know how to set expectations and goals to satisfy their own interests and needs, however, one participant felt that students with disabilities never know how to set expectations and goals. Three participants agreed that students with disabilities sometimes know how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations, while two participants felt that students almost never know how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations. Four participants agreed that students with disabilities sometimes know how to take actions to complete their own plans successfully, while one participant felt that students were almost never able to do this. Three participants felt that student with disabilities sometimes know how to evaluate results of actions to determine what was effective, while two participants felt that students were almost never able to do this. When responding to the statement that students with disabilities know how to change actions or plans to meet goals and satisfy needs and wants, one participant responded almost always, two responded sometimes, and two responded almost never.

Ability to perform self-determination behaviors. When responding to questions related to students with disabilities having the ability to perform self-determination behaviors, two participants felt that students almost always express their own interests, needs, and abilities, while three participants felt that students sometimes express their own interests, needs, and abilities. All responded that students with disabilities sometimes set expectations and goals that will satisfy their own interests,

needs, and wants. Two participants responded that students with disabilities almost never know how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations, while three participants responded that students with disabilities sometimes know how to do this. Three participants responded that students with disabilities sometimes initiate actions on their own choices and plans, while two responded that this was almost never the case. When responding to the statement that students with disabilities gather information on results of their own actions, four participants responded with almost never, and one participant responded with sometimes. Finally, four participants responded that students with disabilities sometimes change their actions or plans to satisfy exceptions and goals if necessary, and one participant responded with almost never.

Perception of knowledge and ability to perform self-determination behaviors. When responding to questions related to students with disabilities having the perception of knowledge and ability to perform self-determination behaviors, three participants responded that students with disabilities almost never feel free to express their own needs, interests, and abilities, even when facing opposition from others. Two participants responded that students with disabilities were sometimes able to do this. Four felt that students with disabilities sometimes felt free to set their own goals and expectations, even if they were different from the expectations others have for them. One participant felt that students with disabilities almost never felt free to do this. When responding to the statement that students with disabilities feel free to make their own choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations, one participant responded almost

always, two responded with sometimes, one responded with almost never, and one responded with never. Three participants responded with sometimes to the statement that students with disabilities feel confident about being able to successfully complete their own plans, while two responded with almost never. Two responded that students with disabilities are sometimes confident about using feedback to evaluate results of their own work, while three responded with almost never. Finally, three participants responded with never to the statement that students with disabilities change plans again and again to meet a goal without getting discouraged, while two responded with sometimes.

Opportunity to perform self-determination behaviors at school. The final questions related to students with disabilities having the opportunity to perform self-determination behaviors at school. One responded with always, two responded with almost always, and two responded with sometimes to the statement that students with disabilities have opportunities at school to explore, express, and feel good about their own needs, interests, and abilities. When reviewing the statement that student with disabilities about opportunities at school to identify goals and expectations that will meet personal needs, interests, and abilities, to set goals, and to feel good about them, there was one response as always, two as almost always, one as sometimes, and one as never. One felt that students with disabilities always have opportunities at school to learn about making choices and plans, to make them, and to feel good about them, while two responded with almost always and two responded with sometimes. When responding to the statement that students with disabilities have opportunities at school to initiate action to meet expectations and goals, two responded with always, two responded with almost

always, and one responded with sometimes. One responded with always, and four

responded with almost always to the statement that students with disabilities have

opportunities at school to get results of actions taken to meet their own plans. Finally, the

response to the statement that students with disabilities have opportunities at school to

change actions and plans to satisfy their own expectations was one reply as always, one

reply as almost always, and two replies as sometimes. Table 2 details each survey

question, Table 3 provides responses from each participant, and Table 4 shows a

summary of responses for each survey area.

Table 2

Anonymous Survey Question Identifiers

Identifier	Question
	Knowledge of Self-Determination Behaviors
SQA1	Students with disabilities know their own abilities and limitations.
SQA2	Students with disabilities know how to set expectations and goals that satisfy own interests and needs.
SQA3	Students with disabilities know how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet own goals and expectations.
SQA4	Students with disabilities know how to take actions to complete own plans successfully.
SQA5	Students with disabilities know how to evaluate results of actions to determine what was effective.
SQA6	Students with disabilities know how to change actions or plans to meet goals and satisfy needs and wants.
	Ability to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors
SQB1	Students with disabilities express their own interests, needs, and abilities.
SQB2	Students with disabilities set expectations and goals that will satisfy their own interests, needs, and wants.
SQB3	Students with disabilities know how to make choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations.
SQB4	Students with disabilities initiate actions on their own choices and plans.
SQB5	Students with disabilities gather information on results of their actions.
SQB6	Students with disabilities change their actions or plans to satisfy expectations and goals, if necessary.
	Perception of Knowledge and Ability to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors
SQC1	Students with disabilities feel free to express own their needs, interests, and abilities, even when facing opposition from others.
SQC2	Students with disabilities feel free to set their own goals and expectations, even if they are different from the expectations others have for them.
SQC3	Students with disabilities feel free to make their own choices, decisions, and plans to meet their own goals and expectations.
SQC4	Students with disabilities feel confident about being able to successfully complete their own plans.
SQC5	Students with disabilities are confident about using feedback to evaluate results of their own work.
SQC6	Students with disabilities change plans again and again to meet a goal without getting discouraged.
	Opportunity to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors at School
SQD1	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to explore, express, and feel good about their own needs, interests, and abilities.
SQD2	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to identify goals and expectations that will meet personal needs, interests, and abilities; to set these goals; and to feel good about them.
SQD3	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to learn about making choices and plans, to make them, and to feel good about them.
SQD4	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to initiate actions to meet expectations and goals.
SQD5	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to get results of actions taken to meet their own plans.
SQD6	Students with disabilities have opportunities at school to change actions and plans to satisfy their own expectations.

Note: From *AIR self-determination scale and user guide,* by Wolman, J., Campeau, P., DuBois, P., Mithaug, D., & Stolarski, V. (1994). Reprinted with permission (See appendix A).

Table 3

Detail of Anonymous Survey Question Responses

Identifier	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
	Knowledge of Self-Determination Behaviors				
SQA1	Sometimes	Almost Always	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQA2	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQA3	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQA4	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQA5	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQA6	Sometimes	Almost Always	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
	Ability to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors				
SQB1	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Always	Almost Always
SQB2	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQB3	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQB4	Sometimes	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQB5	Almost Never	Almost Never	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQB6	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes
	Perception of Knowledge and Ability to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors				
SQC1	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQC2	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
SQC3	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never	Almost Always
SQC4	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQC5	Sometimes	Almost Never	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes
SQC6	Sometimes	Never	Never	Never	Sometimes
	Opportunity to Perform Self-Determination Behaviors at School				
SQD1	Almost Always	Always	Sometimes	Almost Always	Sometimes
SQD2	Almost Always	Always	Almost Never	Almost Always	Sometimes
SQD3	Almost Always	Always	Sometimes	Almost Always	Sometimes
SQD4	Almost Always	Always	Almost Always	Always	Sometimes
SQD5	Almost Always	Always	Almost Always	Almost Always	Almost Always
SQD6	Almost Always	Always	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes

Table 4

Summary of Anonymous Survey Question Responses

Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
		Knowledge of Self-Determined Behaviors		
6:6 Sometimes	2:6 Almost Always 4:6 Sometimes	1:6 Sometimes 5:6 Almost Never	3:6 Almost Always 3:6 Almost Never	6:6 Sometimes
		Ability to Perform Self-Determined Behaviors		
4:6 Sometimes 2:6 Almost Never	4:6 Sometimes 2:6 Almost Never	3:6 Sometimes 3:6 Almost Never	3:6 Almost Always 3:6 Almost Never	1:6 Almost Always 5:6 Sometimes
	Perception of Knowledge and Ability to Perform Self-Determined Behaviors			
1:6 Almost Never 5:6 Sometimes	3:6 Sometimes 2:6 Almost Never 1:6 Never	2:6 Almost Always 3:6 Sometimes 1:6 Almost Never	2:6 Always 4:6 Almost Always	1:6 Almost Always 5:6 Sometimes
	Opportunity to Perform Self-Determined Behaviors at School			
6:6 Almost Always	6:6 Always	2:6 Almost Always 3:6 Sometimes 1:6 Almost Never	2:6 Always 4:6 Almost Always	1:6 Almost Always 5:6 Sometime

Observation Results

My observations took place during a 55-minute class period. As previously noted, observations allow one to see details that the participant may assume and that therefore may not come up in the interview process (Hatch, 2002). My observations took place during a 55-minute class period. Soukakou (2012) described the characteristics of an inclusive classroom as having a layout that encourages student interaction with access to materials, where teachers encourage student participation through positive interactions. I referred to Soukakou's (2012) characteristics when I developed the categories for my field notes, and categorized my observations into the following groupings: (a) teacher instructional strategies, methods, teacher strategies, behaviors to encourage student engagement, (b) teacher interactions with students, (c) classroom arrangement, (d) teacher movement, (e) student movement, and (f) other. I used the category of other to

add observations that I felt were important, but that did not necessarily fit into another category.

Teacher 1. Teacher 1 has had an inclusive classroom for the past five years. This teacher had no experience with a peer advocate assisting in the classroom. The teacher had the classroom arranged in rows of four desks, along the sides of the room, with the center of the class left open. Teacher 1 sat at the front of the classroom, presented the lesson by lecturing to the students, and then assigned students to complete their work independently. The teacher explained the topic and concepts related to the lesson in many ways, and asked open-ended questions to check for understanding. Teacher 1 used an authoritative tone with students, using phrases such as, "you guys," and "everyone," when referring to the class. During my observation, I saw little teacher movement, with the teacher sitting at a desk in the front of the room. The teacher appeared to ignore students with raised hands. Students sat during the observation period, working independently. During the observation period, I observed that several students not engaged, off task, and some were whispering to each other, off topic.

After completing this classroom observation, my overall impression of the classroom was negative. First, the arrangement of the classroom was not conducive to any type of student interaction. Students all faced forward in rows, with much space between the rows. The teacher sat at the front of the room at a desk facing the students, but I did not see him interact with students individually. Even though the teacher faced the students, he did not respond to students with raised hands. In addition, when the teacher responded to the class in general, he spoke in general terms to the entire class,

and used an authoritative tone. I did not hear the teacher refer to the class as "we" or

"us" and used the terms "you" and "you all" when talking to the class. The teacher's tone

and word choice gave me the impression that he was disengaged or irritated with the

class as a whole. My impression of this classroom was that students seemed reluctant to

ask for help.

   Teacher 2. Teacher 2 is a 5-year veteran, teaching Science at the current school

site for two years. This teacher has had an inclusive classroom for all five years of

teaching. This teacher has had a peer advocate assisting in the classroom during both

years teaching at this site. The teacher arranged the classroom into eight tables, with

groups of four students at each table, facing each other. Teacher 2 used a variety of

instructional approaches by lecturing to the students, facilitating group activities for

students to practice the lesson, and arranging cooperative learning groups where students

facilitated their own learning. This teacher explained each step of the lesson, provided

modeling, and asked questions to give examples. During the observation period, Teacher

2 used cues, such as, "eyes up," to ensure that students were on task. This teacher used a

casual tone, and referred to the class as "we" throughout the lesson. This teacher used

positive reinforcement throughout the observation period, and used no negative

comments. Teacher 2 continuously moved around the room. Students also moved

around. I observed students reading aloud, and students encouraged each other to sound

out words. This class had a peer advocate assisting the class. I observed the peer

advocate moving around, assisting individual students. The peer advocate appeared to

assist students without directions from the teacher, students signaled the advocate for

assistance. Students started the period working in groups, and then moved around for other group activities, changing groups several times. During the 55-minute observation period, all students were on task, student discussions were on topic, and all students appeared to be enjoying the lesson.

My impression of this classroom was positive. The arrangement of students in groups facing each other encouraged student discussion. The approach of the teacher using questions to the class engaged students and encouraged students to interact with each other. The teacher's casual tone was positive. This class was controlled chaos, students moved around to group to group, asking questions and having discussions with other students. Almost all students moved around the room and participated. The peer advocate appeared to be assisting a few students throughout the room by guiding them into a group and encouraging them to interact. I did not observe any side conversations not related to the lesson topic.

Teacher 3. Teacher 3 is a 12-year veteran, teaching Social Studies at the current school site for two years. This teacher has had an inclusive classroom for the past ten years, and this is the first year there is a peer advocate assisting in the classroom. This teacher arranged the classroom with four tables on each side of the room, with four students at each table, with all students facing the front of the classroom. Teacher 3 used direct instruction in the form of lecture, group discussions, and independent work during the observation. The teacher explained the purpose of the lesson, asked students' opinions, and encouraged student interaction, but then interrupted when students began talking to each other. During my observation, Teacher 3 used sarcasm often, and

reprimanded students frequently. The teacher used both phrases, "you," and "we," when referring to the class. The teacher moved little during my observation, and sat at the front of the room during most of the period. Students sat at tables, with no movement during my observation. This classroom also had a peer advocate assisting in the classroom; however, the teacher stated that the advocate was helping in another room at the time of my observation. I observed several students off task, some were disruptive, and many appeared to be confused about the instructions the teacher provided. At the start of the observation, students sat quietly and listened to the instruction. At one point towards the end of the observation period, the teacher stopped the lesson and directed students to go outside and run up and down the steps outside the classroom door to "burn off some energy."

My overall impression of this classroom, after observing, was negative. During the observation, several students seemed confused about the lesson. Students whispered to each other and some laughed when the teacher became sarcastic. I found the teacher confusing, because during the lesson, she made positive comments and used the term "we" and then was negative and sarcastic, using the term "you people." The classroom layout did not encourage student engagement and the teacher did not encourage student interaction during my observation. I found the teacher's instructions and behavior confusing.

Teacher 4. Teacher 4 is another 23-year veteran teacher. This teacher has taught Math at the current school site for eight years, and has had an inclusive classroom during this time. Teacher 4 does not currently have a peer advocate helping in the classroom;

however, the teacher has had peer advocates during the past several years. The teacher arranged the desks in six rows in the middle of the room, with a large against each side of the room. The teacher began the lesson with lecturing in front of the class and then students participated in a group activity that lasted for most of the observation period. Teacher 4 first explained the activity, encouraged student questions, and modeled the expectations. The teacher then asked students to explain the activity to each other. The teacher used a positive, casual tone, encouraging students to work together. During discussions, the teacher referred to the class as "we." During the lesson and group activity, the teacher constantly moved around the room. Students first worked with shoulder partners at their seats, then moved around the room during the group activity. During the observation period, all students appeared to be on task, and seemed excited about the group activity. Discussions were on topic, and students assisted each other throughout the observation period.

This classroom had a positive atmosphere. The desks were arranged in several rows. Once the teacher explained the lesson, students moved their desks into groups. Some students moved to different groups. The teacher pointed out several resources around the room to help students with the math problems. The mood of this class was very positive and similar to the tone of Teacher 2's classroom.

Teacher 5. Teacher 5 is a 22-year veteran teacher, teaching Social Studies at the current school site for all of the 22 years. This teacher has had an inclusive classroom for the past five years. Teacher 5 also does not currently have a peer advocate helping in the classroom; however, the teacher has also had peer advocates during the past several

years. The teacher arranged the class in groups of four desks around the room, with six groups of students. The teacher began the lesson with a lecture, had students practice independently, then moved to group work. During the observation, the teacher used a positive, casual, and encouraging tone. The teacher referred to the class as "we." Teacher 5 gave students the choice of assignments to complete during the period, as well as the choice of independent or partner work. The teacher continuously moved around the room, while students either sat and worked independently or moved to different groups. Throughout the observation, students moved around, asking for assistance from each other or from the teacher. The teacher allowed students to use technology (personal phones or tablets) for their research. During the observation period, most students appeared to be on task, and were helping each other. I observed a few students having off topic discussions.

This classroom had a very positive casual mood. During the observation, students seemed to have positive reactions about having different options for completing the assignments. The teacher used only encouraging words when students encountered difficulty during the assignment. The teacher encouraged students to help each other. Students seemed to enjoy being in the classroom. Table 5 shows field notes taken during classroom observations.

Table 5

Classroom Observation Field Notes

Themes	Teacher 1 Language Arts	Teacher 2 Science	Teacher 3 Social Studies	Teacher 4 Math	Teacher 5 Social Studies
Teacher instructional strategies, methods	Direct instruction, lecture, independent work	Direct instruction, group activities, cooperative learning	Direct instruction, group discussion, independent work	Direct instruction, group activity	Direct instruction, independent practice, group work
Teacher strategies, behaviors to encourage student engagement	Explained concept in many ways, asked open-ended questions	Explained each step, provided modeling. Asked students to give examples	Explained purpose of lesson, asked student opinion, encouraged student interaction	Explained activity, encouraged student questions, provided modeling, asked students to explain activity to each other	Gave students choice of assignment and choice of independent or partner work
Teacher interactions with students	Teacher used authoritative tone with students, used "you guys" and "everyone" when referring to the class	Used cues, "eyes up," checked each table to ensure understanding, casual tone, Used "we" throughout lesson, positive reinforcement used Tables, 8 groups of 4 students each	Used sarcasm, reprimanded students frequently, used "we" and "you" when referring to the class	Positive, casual, encouraged students to help each other, used "we" when referring to the class	Positive, casual, encouraging, used "we" when referring to the class
Classroom Arrangement	Desks in rows of 4 each, along sides of walls, middle of class open		Tables, 4 tables on each side of room 4 students each, middle open	Desks in 6 rows in the middle of the room, two tables on side of room	Desks in groups of 4, 6 groups around the room
Teacher Movement	Sat in front of room	Continuously moved around room	Stood and sat in front of room	Continuously moved around room	Continuously moved around the room
Student Movement	Sat and worked independently	Worked in groups, moved around during group activities, changing groups	Sat at tables	Students worked with shoulder partner at seat, then moved around the room during the group activity	Sat in groups, moved around the room
Other	Several students not engaged, off task, some whispering to each other	All students on task, student discussions were on topic, all students enjoying the lesson	Several students off task, some disruptive, many seem confused	All students on task, excited about activity, discussions were on topic, groups helped each other	Students allowed to use technology (phones or tablets) for research, students on task, helping each other, some students having off topic discussions

After completing the classroom observations and compiling my field notes, I

noted some differences between the classrooms. First, teachers that used a positive and

encouraging tone, which consistently referred to the class, as "we" appeared to have more

students engaged and on task. Students appeared to be on task and engaged when teachers constantly moved around the classroom. The classrooms where I observed positive interactions, student engagement, and more student on-task behavior were the classrooms with teachers who had previous experience with peer advocates in their classrooms.

Discrepant Cases

The purpose of case study research is to understand "the whole individual in relation to his or her environment" (Verma, Mallick, & Neasham, 1998, p. 83). A case study typically involves an intensive analysis of an individual or small group, focusing on individual characteristics (Verma et al., 1998). The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after they work with a peer advocate. Stake (1995) stated, "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Furthermore, "case study is particularization, not generalization" (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research involves the reporting of different realities or perspectives of individuals. No discrepant cases appeared during the data collection and data analysis process.

Evidence of Quality

In this case study, I collected data through interviews, survey data, and field notes during classroom observations. According to Yin, collecting data from many different

sources is a strength of case study data collection, because using multiple sources of data results in "converging lines of inquiry," resulting in more accurate findings (Yin, 2014, p. 120). By utilizing data triangulation, the researcher is able to address the potential of construct validity, because the use of multiple sources of information provides multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014). In order to establish a reliable and valid study, I used member checking and triangulation. I used the documents to substantiate the information collected from the interviews and observations, for triangulation in order to establish validity. Participants checked interview transcripts for accuracy. I utilized member checks to ensure that the final data was correct, to reduce the threat to internal validity (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). I used the literature review in Section 2 of this study as the foundation of my case study. For this study, I used a purposeful sample of five general education teachers who had students with disabilities who did and did not work with a peer advocate in their classrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after they work with a peer advocate. I used case study research in this study to examine teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities after students with disabilities worked with a peer advocate. This study involved interviewing teacher participants, with the intent to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions. The areas of attention were on the teacher

perceived self-advocacy and self-determination behavior observed in students with disabilities who did and did not work with a peer advocate. I attempted to identify teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who were not working with a peer advocate and to determine how self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities changed after they worked with a peer advocate. The findings of this study resulted in the development of four themes presented in Section 4. Evidence showed that all teachers felt that students with disabilities had the opportunity to perform self-determined behavior at school. Teachers stated that they used cooperative learning groups and other strategies to ensure participation of students with disabilities in the classroom. Classroom observations did not support this for all teachers. Overall, teachers saw differences in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students. Section 5 includes a discussion of the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, implications for social change, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students worked with a peer advocate. I attempted to identify teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who were not working with a peer advocate and to determine how self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities changed after they worked with a peer advocate. In order to obtain a significant understanding of each teacher's perceptions about students with disabilities and their self-advocacy skills and to examine any changes in their perceptions of students with disabilities after working with a peer advocate, the following questions guided this case study:

> RQ1: What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?
>
> RQ2: How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate?
>
> RQ3: How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

I obtained an understanding of teacher's perceptions through individual interviews, observations, and through examination of survey responses.

All teachers felt that students with disabilities had the opportunity to perform self-determined behavior at school. Teachers stated that they used cooperative learning groups and other strategies to ensure participation of students with disabilities in the classroom. Classroom observations did not support this for all teachers. Overall, teachers saw differences in students with disabilities who were paired with peer advocates and students.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this study, I examined general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities in order to gain an understanding whether their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students worked with a peer advocate. In Section 4, I present my analysis of data gathered during this case study that was based on semi structured interviews, survey responses, and observations. I provide my interpretation of the data to address my three research questions.

RQ1: What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities? Several studies found teacher knowledge regarding strategies to teach self-determination skills is varied, and general education teachers often lack expertise (Carter et al., 2008; Denney & Daviso, 2012; Shogren et al., 2007). Kemp and Carter (2005) identified skills that teachers related to student success: listening, responding, participating, self-help, independent behavior, compliance, and appropriate peer interactions. Blecker and Bloaks

(2010) found teachers agreed that students with disabilities benefit from interactions with peers in the general education environment.

Based on the results of data gathered for this case study, all teacher participants described inclusion similarly: students with disabilities receiving instruction in the least restrictive environment, which means in the general education environment with their peers without disabilities. Overall, teachers felt favorable towards inclusion. Although all perceived inclusion positively, teachers noted some challenges. Teachers felt that they did not have enough time in the classroom to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These results are similar to the findings of Blecker and Boaks (2010). Their survey found that teachers agreed that students with disabilities benefit from interactions with peers in the general education environment. Their participants similarly had concerns regarding lack of time for planning. Although teachers overall favored inclusion, they commented that differentiation was challenging in some situations because the students with disabilities in their general education class were several grade levels behind the other students, and this resulted in lesson pacing difficulties.

During interviews, teachers commented on student behavior and inclusion. All felt that inclusion benefitted both students with disabilities and students without disabilities socially. Teachers described students with disabilities as gaining socialization skills while in the inclusive setting. With appropriate behavior models and supports, students with disabilities are more likely to have similar behavior as nondisabled students in the general education setting, resulting in a reduction of feelings of separation or alienation (Calabrese et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 1999). Research

found that teachers with positive perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom had outcomes that were more favorable (Horn & Timmons, 2009; Glazzard, 2011; VanReusen et al., 2000).

All teachers responded with similar statements when asked to define self-determination and self-advocacy. Generally, teachers felt that self-determination was persevering, not giving up, and students knowing what they want and devising a plan to meet personal goals. Self-advocacy as defined by participants meant speaking out, asking questions, and requesting help. Teachers had different responses when asked if they see students demonstrating self-advocacy or self-determination skills in the classroom. Some said students were demonstrating these skills while others did not see this. One teacher stated that students with disabilities are not typically demonstrating these skills because these students are typically quiet and shy. Another teacher stated that seeing a student self-advocate or use self-determination depended on the student's disability, how others addressed the disability with the student, and that all students were at a different level of having these skills. Another teacher had a similar opinion and commented that these skills are often present in students with disabilities because self-advocacy is often an IEP goal, and the student was taught self-advocacy and self-determination skills.

All teachers stated that they used similar strategies to encourage the participation of students with disabilities in their classrooms such as pairing and cooperative learning groups to ensure participation for all students. All stated that they used some sort of groupings for classroom arrangement. All stated that they expected all students to fully

participate in all classroom activities and students with disabilities fully participated, though they did not typically take the role of a leader. All teachers stated that they do not see difficulties with participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. When responding to survey questions related to students with disabilities having the opportunity to perform self-determination behaviors at school, all responses ranged from always to sometimes, with only one response as never. Lee et al., (2010) found that with the proper modifications and accommodations, students with disabilities can gain self-determination skills and be successful in the general education environment.

Observations allow a researcher to see things that the participant may assume and that therefore may not come up in the interview process (Hatch, 2002). During classroom observations, I took field notes and categorized my observations, focusing on teacher strategies and behaviors that encouraged student engagement, teacher interactions and movement, student movement and interactions, and classroom arrangement. I also made notations of observations that I felt were important but did not necessarily fit into a previously mentioned category.

In their quantitative and qualitative study of high school students, Hong and Shull (2009) found that there was a strong correlation between teacher disposition and student self-determination. They found that teachers who cared for and communicated positively with their students about their learning increased self-determination skills in those students. My observations found similar results. Teachers who used a positive and encouraging tone, who referred to the class as "we" appeared to have more students engaged and on task. Teachers who used an authoritative tone, used sarcasm, or referred

to students as "you" had less student engagement and on-task behavior. Teachers who moved around the room and interacted with students positively had more student engagement and less off-task behavior. Classrooms arranged in groups with students sitting across from each other as opposed to in rows also had more students exhibit on-task behavior. Teachers using a positive and encouraging tone also used the classroom arrangement of groups. Theses teachers also utilized varied instructional methods with active learning and had no disruptive behaviors. The teachers who had little interaction had students sitting in rows. These teachers did not utilize group activities and relied mainly on independent work. I did not see full participation of every student in all classroom observations.

Kemp and Carter (2005) surveyed teachers to identify skills in students needed to be successful in an inclusive setting and to determine teacher perceptions regarding students with disabilities. They identified skills that teachers related to student success: listening, responding, participating, self-help, independent behavior, compliance, and appropriate peer interactions (Kemp & Carter, 2005). Lowe and Chapparo (2010) surveyed teachers and parents regarding perceptions related to participation in an inclusive environment. The respondents they surveyed had similar responses as the study by Kemp and Carter (2005). The results showed that sharing and cooperation were important.

All survey responses indicated that students with disabilities sometimes or almost always knew their own abilities and limitations. All but one participant agreed that students with disabilities knew how to set expectations and goals to satisfy their own

interests and needs. All felt that students with disabilities sometimes set expectations and goals that would satisfy their own interests, needs, and wants. Teachers did not come to a consensus regarding students with disabilities knowing how to make choices, take actions, evaluate, or change actions or plans to complete plans successfully. Responses to questions related to students with disabilities being able to perform self-determination behaviors were varied, from almost always to almost never. Similarly, when responding to questions related to perception of knowledge and ability to perform self-determined behaviors, responses again varied. Finally, three participants responded with never to the statement that students with disabilities change plans again and again to meet a goal without getting discouraged, while two responded with sometimes. Interview and survey responses both indicated a wide range of teacher perceptions regarding self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities.

RQ 2: How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities change after the students work with a peer advocate? When asked if teachers saw differences in students with disabilities who were paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who were not paired with a peer advocate, all but one teacher stated that they saw differences. The teacher who did not notice a difference was the teacher with no experience with a peer advocate. The teachers with advocates remarked that students working with advocates showed differences both academically and socially. Words used to describe this were confidence, comfort, security, and protection. Teachers felt students had support of the advocate, which increased confidence, which in turn, increased participation in the classroom. One interesting

observation from one teacher was that the peer advocate in the classroom was female, and she assisted with the females bonding in the classroom. The teacher did not observe the same interactions with the boys in the classroom. Again, overall, teachers felt that there was a positive change in students working with an advocate in the general education setting.

RQ 3: How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate? Allen and Harriott (2011) stated that the idea of inclusion is that students with disabilities should be included in the general education setting, and that appropriate resources should be available so that these students have the opportunity for success. Several researchers concluded that the student learns and practices self-advocacy skills through modeling and practice (Martin et al., 2004; Miller, 2005; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005). If the student has opportunity for success in the classroom, then the opportunities for success beyond secondary education become attainable (Martin et al., 2004; Sebag, 2010; Test et al, 2004).

Teachers saw benefits of having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting. Teachers stated peer advocates helped students by rephrasing concepts in language that is easier to understand, helped others understand the lesson, read to students, organized notes for students, and acted like "a little teacher." Another teacher stated that the peer advocate was "a copy of me." Teachers with advocates noted that once the advocate became familiar with the teacher and the class, the teacher did not have to spend time

directing the advocate. With all of the benefits, teachers also commented on disadvantages of having peer advocates helping in the classroom. One teacher, previously with an advocate, commented that the advocate must be the right person to effective help students. Finally, the teacher with no experience with having a peer advocate in the classroom felt that a peer advocate is a management issue for the teacher. When a peer tutor or advocate assists a student with a disability, both students benefit academically and socially (Calabrese, Patterson, Liu, Goodvin, Hummel, & Nance, 2008; Campbell Miller, Cooke, Test, & White, 2003; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Walker, Rummel, & Koedinger, 2011). Peer tutoring provides the student with a disability the opportunity to be included in the least restrictive environment possible (Miller, 2005).

The teachers with the most favorable perceptions regarding students working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom were Teacher 3, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5. Teacher 3 currently had a peer advocate in the classroom at the time of the interview and observation. Teacher 4 and 5 did not have a peer advocate at the time of the interview and observation. However, both had peer advocates in their classroom during previous school years. Teacher 3 did not have advocates in previous years, and had one assigned to the classroom at the start of the school year. This teacher was less positive regarding peer advocates than teachers 4 and 5 were. Finally, Teacher 1 did not see students with disabilities working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom as positive.

Limitations of the Study

The teachers participating in the study were limited to those from one middle school in the United States Desert Southwest. Because of the small sample size and the

limited time span of the study, I obtained limited results. Because the chosen method was a case study, the focus was not generalizing the results, but to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they worked with a peer advocate. Stake (1995) stated, "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Furthermore, "case study is particularization, not generalization" (Stake, 1995). Therefore, I could not definitely generalize about other peer advocate programs in middle schools from my findings, because the focus was on uniqueness and understanding of this individual case.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the results of this study, further recommendations for research related to the literature review are presented. Peer assistance programs support inclusive classroom settings (Allen & Harriott, 2011). Teachers who feel they have expert knowledge of special education favor inclusion more than teachers who feel they lack special education knowledge (Watnick & Sacks, 2006; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). However, having knowledge of special education and favorable attitudes do not ensure successful inclusionary practice (Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker, 2000; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). The biggest factor in the success or failure of inclusion is teacher attitude and perception (Sautner, 2008; Sobel et al., 2004; Van Reusen et al., 2000; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). A suggestion for further research is to explore the relationship between school culture and teacher attitudes and perceptions related to inclusion of students with disabilities in

order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that ensure and prohibit the success of inclusion. When utilizing peer advocacy programs, it is unclear which approaches are most effective (Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). Limited data exists regarding students from diverse backgrounds or disabilities (Test, Fowler, Brewer et al., 2005). Another suggestion for further research is to gain a deeper understanding of effective approaches of peer advocacy programs is to continue the examination of such programs at different school sites, and to focus on programs that include diverse students. Finally, because the current study was limited to one site, and included only five participants, expanding similar studies to more sites and participants will provide additional information and a deeper understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they work with a peer advocate.

Implications

This study is important because, through the process, I gained an understanding of teacher perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and of their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they worked with a peer advocate. This study is significant to teachers and schools, as it examines the effectiveness of the use of peer advocates to increase self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities. This study will provide positive social change by giving insight to educators on ways to implement the utilization of peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in their academic and social

success, resulting in successful student participation in the IEP process and transitioning from middle school to high school.

Conclusion

Carter and Kennedy (2006), as well as Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mohler, Beranek, Spencer, Boon, and Talbott (2001), and Stenhoff and Lignugaris-Kraft (2007) found that peer tutors provided opportunities to model behaviors for students with disabilities and it gave students with disabilities the chance to practice problem-solving skills on a one-on-one setting that typically did not happen in the classroom. Given the opportunity, the student with a disability could build and practice self-advocacy and self-determination skills while working with a peer tutor in the classroom. Peer tutoring provides the student with a disability the opportunity to be included in the least restrictive environment possible (Miller, 2005). Being in this environment provides more opportunity for positive social interaction and improved peer relationships for students with disabilities (Miller, 2005). Once the skills of self-advocacy and self-determination are acquired, the student with a disability can then use these skills to make more important educational decisions, such as IEP planning (Johnson et al., 2002; Mason et al., 2004; Myers & Eisenman, 2005; Mutua & Siders, 2010; Scanlon et al., 2008; Sebag, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand how their perceptions about students with disabilities changed after they work with a peer advocate. Based on the data collected during this

study, all participating teachers were positive regarding inclusive practices and saw the

importance of self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities.

Participants with experience having a peer advocate in the inclusive classroom saw a

positive change in students with disabilities, both socially and academically. Students

with disabilities gained more confidence, resulting in increased participation in the

classroom.

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Appendix A: Approval to Use AIR Assessment

TEACHERS   COLLEGE   COLUMBIA   UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK   NEW YORK 10027

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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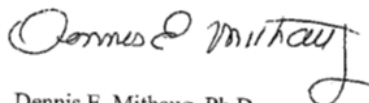
January 30, 2006

Dear Dr. Martin,

I am pleased that you can make the AIR assessments and User
Guide available for download from your OU website. This will provide a
valuable service to schools across the country.

You have my permission to place the AIR Educator, Parent, and Student
assessment tools on the Zarrow Center web site for free downloading. You
also have my permission to place the AIR User Guide on your web site for free
downloading

Respectfully,

Dennis E. Mithaug, Ph.D.
Professor

Appendix B: Invitation to Participation

Title: Teacher Perceptions of Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills in Students with Disabilities when Paired with Peer Advocates

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities, and to understand their perceptions about students with disabilities change after they work with a peer advocate.

PROCEDURES: I plan to interview and observe general education teachers who have students with disabilities in their classroom who are working with a peer advocate, and who have students with disabilities in their classroom who are not working with a peer advocate. I have chosen the following criteria for participation in this study; each teacher must be a general education teacher with an inclusive classroom that includes students with disabilities. Within this population of teachers, I am asking for eight volunteers: four general education teachers who have students with disabilities in their classroom who are working with a peer advocate, and four general education teachers who have students with disabilities in their classroom with no peer advocate. I expect the initial interview to last approximately one hour. The observation will take place in the general education classroom during one class period. The follow up interview will last approximately thirty minutes.

Why Participate? I am requesting your voluntary participation in this study so that I may gather the needed information in order to answer the study's research questions:
1. What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?
2. How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students work with a peer advocate?
3. How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

Benefits of Study: This study will be significant to teachers and schools, as it will examine the effectiveness of the use of peer advocates or tutors to increase self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities. This study will provide positive social change by giving insight to educators on ways to implement the utilization of peer tutors or advocates with students with disabilities to aid in their academic and social success, resulting in successful participation in the IEP process and transitioning from middle school to high school.

Your perceptions and experiences will be documented in this doctoral study. Teachers who work with students with disabilities in an inclusive setting may benefit from the instructional practices and information shared in this study. In addition, because the peer

advocacy program is utilized in few schools within the ABC School District, other schools may consider developing a similar program in order to increase self-advocacy and self-determination skills in students with disabilities.

Privacy of Information: All data gathered during the interviewing and observation process will be confidential. Sharing of individual data will not occur. To prevent the linking of comments back to a participant, I will employ a pseudonym system to label all interviewing and observation materials. In addition, I will securely store materials (word document files, recordings, transcripts, and researcher notes) at all times.

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION: If you meet the above criteria for participation and would like to participate in the interview and observation, please compete this page and return it to my mailbox. Please retain a copy this document, "Invitation to Participate," for your records.

I would like to participate in this study:

_____
Print your name

_____
Your signature

_____
Date

Appendix C: Teacher Perception Initial Interview Guide

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

1. **Introduction:**

   Welcome interviewee and thank her/him for time and participation
   Review:
        Introduction letter and Informed Consent

        Purpose of Study
             Why participant was chosen (general education teacher
             with students with special needs in their classroom
             working/not working with a peer advocate)

        Procedures
             Recording and transcribing interview
             Confidentiality
             Length of interview
             Follow up interview after observation
             Transcript review and additional questions for clarification
             No incorrect answers, teacher perceptions

2. **Review of Research Questions**

   1. What are general education teachers' perceptions about self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities?

   2. How do general education teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities changed after the students work with a peer advocate?

   3. How do teachers' perceptions differ about students with disabilities between those working with peer advocates in the inclusive classroom and those in the inclusive classroom with no peer advocate?

3. **Guiding Questions of Interview**

   1. What does inclusion look like at the school?

   2. How do you feel about inclusion?

   3. What are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

4. What are the challenges of including students with disabilities included in your general education classroom?

5. Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

6. If so, what does the advocate do to assist the students academically and socially in your classroom?

7. If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met both academically and socially in your classroom?

8. Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

9. Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting?

    a. Why or why not?

10. What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

11. In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in:

    a. Group Activities

    b. Group Discussions

    c. Group Projects

    d. Class Presentations

12. Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

13. If so, how do you address this?

14. How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

15. What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

16. How would you define self-determination?

17. How would you define self-advocacy?

18. Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

    a. Why or why not?

19. If you have peer advocates in your classroom, what guidance do you give them?

20. Do you see a difference in students with disabilities before and after working with peer advocates? If so, what do you see?

21. How many years have you been a teacher?

22. What subject/s do you teach?

23. How many years have you been at this school?

24. How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

25. Do you have any questions for me?

4. **Conclusion**

Thank you for your time and participation
Reminder of interview and transcript confidentiality
Reminder of observation and follow up interview

Appendix D: Observation Protocol Form

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Participant Observed: _____

Themes	Notes to Self: **Thoughts, reflections, biases, distractions, other insights**	Observation: **What I see and hear**
Teacher Instructional strategies/methods		
Teacher strategies/behaviors to encourage student engagement		
Teacher interactions with students		
Other		

Appendix E: Teacher Perception Initial Interviews

Teacher 1

Q: What does inclusion look like at the school?

A: It's students with IEPs and students without IEPs in the same classroom with the same assignments and the same work. For IEP students it's with modifications as needed based on teacher observation, and of course, with what the IEP provides.

Q: How do you feel about inclusion?

A: I don't have a problem with inclusion. We just have to understand that it's a different classroom environment and it can't be treated the same by administration on the outside as it is on the inside you see that the class may need a little extras, a little TLC as you might say, prior to getting the kids up and running.

Q: What are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

A: Oh, yes, I see benefits for the students both with and without disabilities. First of all, learning how to get along with other people. But, there are also disadvantages that go along with it.

Q: What are the challenges of including students with disabilities included in your general education classroom?

A: For example, emotionally disturbed students in the room have behavior that disrupt those   around them, it disturbs the whole process where you may have one or two students that set off an entire class or cause a table to not be productive. They may play with things, throw things, fling things and the other students aren't learning so may have a half-dozen students or a whole table learning because one student isn't doing what they should be doing.

Q: Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: No

Q: If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met both academically and socially in your classroom?

A: Well, the best way to do that is to treat everyone in the inclusive class as if they have an IEP. It's so hard to remember who does and who does not have an IEP when you are moving around so much in the classroom. It's best to modify something for all students. It's hard modify something for one student and to have one student next to them say, "How come?"

Q: Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

A: In years past, it's been quite a while. It's been maybe 3 or 4 years ago, and that was in the later part of the year. I've had no experience with peer advocates in my classroom.

Q: Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

A: Um, you know, someone who is going to be a peer advocate has got to be a mature, self-   regulating person. When the student in the classroom, when the peer advocate becomes a management issue a lot of times it's because the student they are working with doesn't need any help, and then they have nothing to do. It becomes then, "What do I do, what can I do?" And then there is another student, the peer advocate becomes another student what you need to manage, but who isn't your student.

Q: What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

A: Well, what I've seen is that these students just become dependent on the peer advocate and then are unmotivated because they have the advocate. They have the advocate to do everything for them.

Q: In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in: group activities?

A: We usually pair them with shoulder partners, or sometimes as a table. We try not to get a whole lot of movement going on, because it's hard sometimes to get the students moving around the room. We usually pair by shoulder partners.

Q: Group Discussions?

A: Oh, yes, they all participate.

Q: Group Projects?

A: Yes, we do group projects. Our kids are 6th grade, so I'm not sure how much project work they've done previously. I don't see any practice or skill or familiarity with projects. But, we do a lot of pairing in threes and working together.

Q: What about presentations?

A: Oh, yes. We do a lot of presentations. They are comfortable with it.

Q: Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

A: I don't see any difference between them and the regular ed. students. There are those that want to participate and there are those who don't.

Q: How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

A: We are at tables, two tables put together, no nobody is in isolation for the most part. It's a management issue, so they are just another kid in the room, everyone is expected to participate.

Q: What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

A: We use the same strategies as with the regular ed. students. It can be options, do another assignment; or your assessment can be A, B, or C, you can select what you want to do. You can work with a partner, shoulder partners, you can work on the questions together, you can work in a group, you can come together when you do the presentations, everyone can work out their part so they present it like it's a play.

Q: How would you define self-determination?

A: Deciding for yourself what you are going to do.

Q: How would you define self-advocacy?

A: Speaking up

Q: Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: Yes

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: Because either they've been taught, "Hey you need to advocate," Sitting in on IEPs, self-advocacy is often one of the goals. But, they do speak up, and they are comfortable speaking this room. We always joke around with each other, so nobody feels like they are part of the class. Nobody feels isolated. Humor and playing seems to relax the students, and they are willing to participate. Here, everyone self-advocates. It doesn't matter if they are special education or regular education, I can see all students advocating.

Q: Do you see a difference in students with disabilities before and after working with peer advocates? If so, what do you see?

A: I don't know any students currently with a peer advocate. In going back, do I see a difference? I honestly have to say it's been a while. But, the one thing that does come to mind is that the peer advocate was almost like a crutch. It was actually worse for the student, I think, because there is plenty of help in this room with two teachers and good kids in the room. There is help for anyone who needs it. Just having your personal aide in the room, is almost to me it is a deficit for some. I haven't' had vast experience with peer advocates.

Q: How many years have you been a teacher?

A: 23—this is my 23rd year

Q: What subject/s do you teach?

A: Elementary, 3rd grade for 9 years, then I came here

Q: How many years have you been at this school?

A: About 13 or 14 years

Q: How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

A: About 5 years

Teacher 2

Q: What does inclusion look like at the school?

A: At the school or in my class?

Q: Either one

A: First of all, this is only my third year teaching, so I'm still…and we're in science, science is going through changes itself. So, I haven't seen anything the same. As far as inclusion as I have seen it in my class, I've kind of evolved it from an area, if it's a large group of special needs kids that have an assistant who comes in, I have started them in a group and then once things organize, I've spread them out because there are so many. Last year, when I had a small group, they just came right in. What I've done this year, though, is change my entire seating arrangements so that they are placed everywhere, and placed next to, try to find students who can help them along a little bit so that aren't bogged down, or wouldn't be bogged down or they wouldn't have to move to a lower level to trying to help. I've kind of spread them out in levels.

Q: How do you feel about inclusion?

A: I think it's got a lot of good points, but I think there are limitations to it; and I think the limitations are the amount of students with special needs that you put in one class is a big deal—that I'm dealing with this year. Their levels—if they are too low it's going to make it very, very difficult—not only if it's academically, and not just behaviorally challenging. I mean, if they are able to read at all, then I think it becomes a behavior problem just because they're not able to participate. And then, they just feed off of each other. So, I think the limitations, for me are,

knowing the special ed. teacher has to know, the expert. Like, "I think maybe this kid could be in the class." And I think that's where there could be problems. I have two separate class where I have inclusion, and they are night and day. I had a special ed. teacher last year bring in kids with a peer advocate, it was awesome. This year, doing great. I have another special ed. teacher, seems like a nice person, but I don't think he understands. But, I don't even know what to do myself, as a third year teacher. It's not helpful.

Q: So, you answered my next question regarding what are the challenges, what are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

A: I think it really helps the regular students. It teaches them to become compassionate and understanding, and to see the differences in others that they have and then learning how to help others; and not to mention when they start teaching they become more, I guess you would say they take more ownership in their education when they are teaching another student. So, I think that's hugely beneficial to them, and obviously the obvious benefits for special needs kids are that they get to see social interactions, real, you know, real-world—how all their peers are always interacting.

Q: Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: Yes, in one of my inclusion classes.

Q: Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

A: Yes, one last year.

Q: Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

A: Usually, it's sometimes its reading to them, sometimes it's organizing the notes, taking my notes and taking—because I provide my own notes—so sometimes their kind of like little teachers. So I think for the most part, it's where I don't' have to stop what I'm doing in order to give my attention all over to their needs. So, usually, it's not much I have to communicate with them they know what I'm doing, what they need to do, so they just kind of find those needs and fill them.

Q: What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

A: Okay, so I have the one class that has the inclusion kids without the peer advocate. The problem with that comparison is that they are a totally different group. Different levels, like huge between the classes.

Q: Is your peer advocate in the higher class or the lower class?

A: The higher, with the ones that really should be here. The lower class, I honestly think it's not helpful. I honestly believe that. There's a couple in there, but there are ten of them in one class, ten in a class of too many. So, it's hard for me to make that judgement, but I would say, that going off last year, and this year, having the peer advocate; last year, the kid last year was really good. She was awesome. The one this year is good, too. She is super polite. But, it's just, the kids they are helping really look up to them, and they see them as almost like their security. They can look up and say "Okay, that am I supposed to be doing?" If they get lost, they are not too apprehensive anymore, because they build their confidence because now they feel like—especially if we are having a whole group discussion they wouldn't normally feel as confident enough to raise their hand and share now they raise their hand any maybe get a little whisper, and maybe sometimes not even get a whisper. They'll be confident enough to participate with just having a peer advocate standing next to them.

Q: In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in: group activities?

A: Yes

Q: Group Discussions?

A: When we're doing group activities, usually, I'll just—I'm trying to think of an example. But, It's just really the group I surround them with I guess is the main difference I just have to know what group they're sitting with so that they have the proper support so that if they are not in a group that isn't going to benefit them then it's not going to work for anybody. So really, it's just the supports I put them in the beginning.

Q: Group Projects or Presentations?

A: Yes, I pretty much treat them like I treat everyone so there really is no difference. I try to make it so there is no difference and they are just led by the group, they participate with the group. They get guided through it obviously, because they are put in a group of kids that will have good direction and are polite kids that can be good examples.

Q: Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

A: I don't really have a problem with the peer advocate group. Because they participate, they do fine. The other group without the peer advocate: some of them I think are just lost and they're more concerned about anything else, some of them not all of them, more than half of them, you can tell, are just not following along and when they are not following long it's hard to participate because they just don't have a knowledge of any of it. If they don't have any knowledge, then they don't want to participate. I've moved them and tried different groups. I've tried different support with my assistant and asked for her suggestions. I've tried talking to them one on one, and I got through. One student, I talked to and I found out that she can be completely off task and be a behavioral nightmare. But, if she gets an ounce of praise she becomes a worker bee, and then she almost becomes the teacher to the girl next to her.

Q: How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

A: I have numbers around the room, I get them up and walking around in stations. The tables are set up for grouping. When I can get them up and walking around I use the whole room.

Q: What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

A: I have them in groups. I have them helping each other.

Q: How would you define self-determination?

A: Self-determination, I guess your own ability to motivate yourself to accomplish something.

Q: How would you define self-advocacy?

A: Your ability to speak up for yourself.

Q: Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: Yes.

Q: If you have peer advocates in your classroom, what guidance would you give them?

A: The guidance I would give them is to just learn my routine, know, just to see what I've done before and learn the routine. Then they don't even have to ask, they just know what to do.

Q: Do you see a difference in students with disabilities before and after working with peer advocates? If so, what do you see?

A: In the class with the peer advocate, confidence. Confidence and comfort, I just think it's like their security to know that they don't have to worry about sounding dumb. That helps them with that little protection with the advocate. It helps with their confidence.

Q: How many years have you been a teacher?

A: This is my third year.

Q: What subject/s do you teach?

A: I've taught first year fourth grade general ed., then the last two years Science.

Q: How many years have you been at this school?

A: This is my second year here; last year was my first year here.

Q: How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

A: Just while I've been here, my first year students were pulled for assistance.

Teacher 3

Q: What does inclusion look like at the school?

A: I feel that we do a very good job with inclusion. It is the least restrictive environment for the students.

Q: How do you feel about inclusion?

A: 90% of the time, all for it. It is difficult sometimes.

Q: What are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

A: I think it's important for regular ed. students to see how fortunate they are to not have learning disabilities and to learn some patience, and for the special education students to have general ed. models in the class.

Q: What are the challenges of including students with disabilities included in your general education classroom?

A: The constant differentiation and keeping up with all the students' needs and not holding or slowing down the pace of the class for the other students.

Q: Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: I do.

Q: If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met both academically and socially in your classroom?

A: She, academically, moves around between the students and maybe reads something to them that they can't read themselves. She listens to them, a lot of them can't really write I think just that she to them, that she listens to what they have to say really helps them. I think it really helps because a lot of them are severely learning disabled. And, I think it really helps her, I've seen her grow since she's been in here.

Q: Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

A: No, this is my first year.

Q: Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

A: I think that students learn best from other students a lot of the time, to rephrase something in kid terms. That comes naturally to a peer advocate.

Q: What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

A: I saw them before she came in, so I think that they did feel more comfortable that there was someone else there to help them to answer their questions, so they weren't so needy or anxious about getting questions answered because they know there are now three of us there to help them, because we also have an aide in here to help them.

Q: In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in: group activities?

A: Just more to pair them with students that I know are going to be helpful and kind, and to let them contribute whenever they need to even if it's to draw.

Q: Group Discussions?

A: Yes, they do.

Q: Group Projects?

A: Yes, but they have not done a group project yet.

Q: What about presentations?

A: They have done, not all of them, because it was voluntary, but yes some of them have gotten up and presented, even if it was just a warm up and to talk about how they felt about it.

Q: Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

A: Sometimes, some of them want to share all of the time, then there are a few who do not participate in whole group. I sometimes let them take a pass.

Q: How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

A: As far as the layout, students are intermixed. Some are on one side of the room because they leave early.

Q: What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

A: We do a warm-up every day and the warm-up is always not content based, like for example, if we looked at ancient Greek music, I would ask them how then felt about music. So, it would be something that any student can share.

Q: How would you define self-determination?

A: Perseverance, not giving up

Q: How would you define self-advocacy?

A: Understanding, no scratch that. Speaking out, asking questions, speaking up respectfully, and asking for help.

Q: Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: Yes, I do. I see some, absolutely; and then I see some who are not.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: I, I think it depends on the disability, maybe how the disability has been handled. I know that, I mean I see the teachers—one boy specifically one boy who is super, super shy and won't speak up asks every time, "can I do this can I do this." So, I know we're working on it with him but I just think it's his nature and how he was treated before. You know, I don't' know that part.

Q: If you have peer advocates in your classroom, what guidance would you give them?

A: To, as much as that person could, make sure that she is helping them get to where they need to go, and not getting them there herself.

Q: Do you see a difference in students with disabilities before and after working with peer advocates? If so, what do you see?

A: Yes. Again, I think that them knowing that she's there almost helps them a little bit. An not be as anxious about you know trying to figure it out because they know that she is going to come around help them if they need it. I think, what else do I see? Since my peer advocate is a girl, it seems that the girls have bonded a little more and she probably has something to do with that. I don't necessarily see that in the boys. She hasn't been here all that long, so other than that, not a whole lot more.

Q: How many years have you been a teacher?

A: This is 12.

Q: What subject/s do you teach?

A: I taught 5th grade for 10 years. Last year, I taught English, and then this year, I'm teaching Social Studies.

Q: How many years have you been at this school?

A: This is my second year.

Q: How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

A: Since I started teaching. Probably, well since my second year teaching. I had the special education cluster as a fifth grade teacher. So, this will be my eleventh year teaching with a special ed. cluster.

Teacher 4

Q: What does inclusion look like at the school?

A: I would say inclusion means that we have all the major subjects, and all of the kids are in the regular classrooms for the major subjects, rather than getting the instruction in a pull out classroom. We have co-teaching in English classrooms and math classes. We have instructional assistants helping in our science classrooms. Students are receiving instruction in the least restrictive environment.

Q: How do you feel about inclusion?

A: I feel it works for most of my kids with some the kids that are not functioning even close to grade level; they need more one on one. More instruction at the grade level where they're at, or closer to where they're at.

Q: What are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

A: They see to what level they should be performing, they get a clear picture of where their deficiencies are, and they also get to be working with their peers. Their peers see them as regular general education kids rather than someone that's in a different program that might be viewed as different.

Q: What are the challenges of including students with disabilities included in your general education classroom?

A: Well, the challenges have been that they themselves push themselves. They need to build self-esteem and part of my job is to help them build self-esteem. That they know and understand that they can do it. That they don't give up. The challenge seems to be, "I want you to do if for me, I want you to always help me, and if you're not going to help me then I'm not going to do anything." They expect to be coddled, always have that calculator as a crutch. They have challenges that are mainly about self-esteem.

Q: Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: No

Q: If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met both academically and socially in your classroom?

A: Well, I have to make sure that I'm following their IEPs. For example, if it says they have to have directions re-read to them, I have to make sure that I'm doing that or my co-teacher is doing that; that we're pulling them into small groups, and working on the accommodations with them. It's just a lot of observation on my part to see if they're getting it, and if they're not getting it, then to question them to find out why. Hopefully, they can identify that so that I can help them move on.

Q: Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

A: I had peer advocates about 3 years ago.

Q: Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

A: I would say yes, if the peer advocate was good and knew what they were doing, and they liked each other, then it worked. If the special education student didn't appreciate having the help then they were fighting with each other. Then I would basically have to tell the advisor that I can't use her peer advocate. I didn't appreciate peer advocates being there just because it was a kind of reward for them, because they were a behavior problem and they had to find a place for them. There were some good ones, because they would take notes for a person who was not taking notes. I can't remember the name of the student, but they were not able to write because of their disability. It's not that they were there to take notes, because I could provide it for them. They would help them understand the notes better.

Q: What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

A: Oh, yes, because they were just another copy of me. If they did their job right, they were there to keep them on task, question them, guide their understanding, help them take notes, help them with an activity like be their partner in an activity where other people might not want to work with them. The peer advocate would talk to me about problems that the child was having understanding something. They were better in explaining it to me than the child themselves.

Q: In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in: group activities?

A: When I set up my groups, I try to have high, medium, low. I don't want all my low kids together, I don't want all my behavior kids together. So, I would say, if it's a child that has a problem and in their individualized education program—if they have a problem with working with others, then that's something that I'm there to help them learn how to do. Like the Autistic kid that I have, it says in his plan they he may blow up, possibly, if he losing a game and that has happened in here. He did blow up once because he was losing a game. Thank goodness, the person working with him understood what was going on. I held them both after class, and he eventually apologized to her. I don't know if that would have happened if it was some else besides her.

Q: Group Discussions?

A: Well, we have things like there is a talking chip; so when you have the chip, it's your turn to talk or your turn to solve the problem first, so that not one person is doing all the problems or all the talking. We have coaches, where it's your turn to do the problem and the other person coaches you. And then you switch roles.

Q: Group Projects?

A: We have group projects where, we did a ratio and proportions project, where they had to read a word problem and work together on it.

Q: Is that with your groups?

A: Yes.

Q: What about presentations?

A: Well, I call everybody up to the ELMO. With the kids that are shy, then I tend to have them come up with a partner. I don't do presentations or projects too often.

Q: Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

A: You see difficulty until they start opening up. So, again, it's all about self-esteem. I remember going this year up to an IEP meeting for one of my students who was really shy. I probably heard him talk once. Then I met him and his family, and then he told me about problems he was having in class, and a student who was bothering him. But, he opened up about it. So, from then on, he's been very vocal about when that child is bothering him. In class, he doesn't wait anymore. He actually now tells that person to be quiet in class.

Q: So, the next question is if so, how would you address the difficulties, but you've pretty much answered this, because you've said it's pretty much by talking to them.

A: Yes, it's by getting to know them. You can't just assume that they don't want to participate or can't participate, or are too shy. You have to find out what's going to make them open up.

Q: How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

A: Well, normally, I would be in groups of four. But, I've not done that at all this year, because of the lack of space, and the lack of support from my co-teachers. So, now they're just in pairs, so they talk to their buddy or they work with their buddy. I would rather be in groups of four or five, but it has not been conducive this year.

Q: What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

A: What I use most often are the white boards. My partner teacher is helping me set up the responders, because I've used them before with my other co-teacher. They like the responders in her class. And, of course, when we're in groups, we have the talking chip. It's just about making them accountable.

Q: How would you define self-determination?

A: Self-determination is that you are not going to allow your disability to inhibit what you can achieve. You will push forward and try, not give up. That you'll not be allowing something to stop you, like shyness or speech problems, or what have you. You are going to do your best to achieve the level of achievement that you want.

Q: How would you define self-advocacy?

A: Well someone that needs help raises their hand and asks for help. Someone in my classroom should be talking to their neighbor, looking at their neighbor's work, because the only time we don't do that is when we're taking a test. I'm always saying, "Talk to your neighbor about how to go about solving this problem." I have a rule: you must first look at your notes, you must then talk to

your partner, then if all else fails, then you raise your hand for the teacher's help. They can't give up, they have to try everything before they can think about giving up.

Q: Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: More than often not, because I have to say a lot of my special ed. kids are quiet and they like to be invisible, and when I call on them then they clam up and don't respond. Even though I try my best to be a cheerleader and say, "Yeah, I like that idea," or whatever, I would say—I have extremes: I have a really quiet kids, that don't advocate for themselves and don't say anything and then I have obnoxiously loud kids that could care less what the math problem is.

Q: Do you see a difference in students with disabilities before and after working with peer advocates? If so, what do you see?

A: I would definitely say to find out what your partner can and cannot do and find out how best you can help them. Whatever their weaknesses are, that would be your area to help them through. Don't just build on the strengths, we need to build up their weaknesses.

Q: How many years have you been a teacher?

A: 25

Q: What subject/s do you teach?

A: Elementary from 1991-2007 (4th grade), Math 6, 7, 8 since 2008.

Q: How many years have you been at this school?

A: Since 2008

Q: How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

A: All 8 years at this school.

Teacher 5

Q: What does inclusion look like at the school?

A: We have, at least in my classroom; we have two classes where we have students who are normally in self-contained classes with the general population. Both of those classes are accelerated classes, the other students (self-contained) are all in the accelerated program. That's something that we changed last year. They were going to the general ed. classes and I had them switch them switch to my class first, because I had an accelerated class that was particularly small. I thought, the accelerated kids can act like peer advocates in general, and it worked really well last year. So, they've done that with all the classes, so whenever now when they have the self-contained students put into the general population they are put in accelerated classes. I think it's been less successful this year, as far as getting the accelerated kids to be advocates. But, I still think it's better than if they were in general ed. classes.

Q: How do you feel about inclusion?

A: I think it's great. Some of the kids that I have in those classes are some of my favorite students. They're really interested in participating. They really want to please the teacher. They want to accomplish something, and there are very few problems with them other than situations where I don't have enough time to focus, on the attention that they need

Q: What are the benefits of including students with disabilities?

A: Well, obviously there are benefits for them, being able to join the general population. They are going to feel more included, they are going to gain some more socialization skills. But, I really think it helps the other students as well, dealing with someone who is not exactly the same as they are. The way we have it divided up was that the general ed. kids are with others exactly like them and also the accelerated kids are with accelerated, and even mixing those two groups is a challenge sometimes. This way, they get to mix with the population that they don't see every day, at least in every class, so I think it's a benefit to them, too.

Q: What are the challenges of including students with disabilities included in your general education classroom?

A: The big challenge is the time. I have one class, which I have 22 accelerated students and 8 students in my class for the one that they are not in self-contained. We have an instructional aide who is usually here. When she is, everything runs really well, and when she's not, those kids don't get enough attention.

Q: Do you have peer advocates working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: No, I have no peer advocates this year.

Q: If not, how do you ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met both academically and socially in your classroom?

A: It's really difficult without a peer advocate. You spend the time that you can with them, and hopefully, you are meeting the requirements for each one, and they are all different. They all have different needs. Some need something read to them and something explanations and some need redirection. And, at the same time, you're dealing with the rest of the class. It's seldom that I feel completely happy with the way everything worked out. I always feel like there's someone that got shortchanged on my attention somewhere.

Q: Have you had peer advocates participating in your classroom in the past?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you see any benefits in having peer advocates helping in an inclusive setting, or are there disadvantages?

A: Definitely. I had a class last year with approximately the same number of students I have now and at one point, I had three peer advocates in there for about eight students that they were working with. You could mix them up how you needed them. I had one student who needed somebody to help them write everything, so I had one peer advocate just devoted to him. Then the other two could cover the other seven students, and that way, everyone got pretty much everything they needed.

Q: What differences do you see in students with disabilities who are paired with peer advocates and students with disabilities who are not?

A: There is so much on a case-by-case basis, but usually, I would say the big thing is that they are less easily lost in the material. Sometimes I'm surprised that the one class they put students into is social studies, because it's a fairly reading and language intensive class. Having a peer advocate to keep them on track is a really big benefit.

Q: In your classroom, how do students with disabilities participate in: group activities?

A: We do, in the class where I have an instructional aide, of the eight students that I have in here, six of them stay together and work as a group with the instructional aide. The other two prefer to be with the other students, and so they will be with two other small groups and they will be separated. In the other class, where I have three students, they're the same way, they're split up into three separate student groups and usually I try to have heterogeneous groups anyway. I try to have a high achieving student, a low achieving student, and some middle students in each group; and it works pretty well. One of my students who is one of my inclusion students is actually an extremely high achiever and usually ends up being a really important part of her group. She's not a leader, because socially, she's not as assertive as the other students are. But, academically, she above most of them.

Q: Group Discussions?

A: We do have the traditional whole class discussion. We're trying to do more of student discourse so that they'll speak with each other in their small group before they contribute to the whole class. Since the group of six has the instructional aide, she'll guide them through that, and the other students in class just work with their groups.

Q: Group Projects?

A: Yes.

Q: What about presentations?

A: It's been a while since we did a presentation, I'm trying to think if I had the inclusion students when we did that, and I think I did. We did just finish a big project, and we had some of the inclusion students were working together and

some of them were working in other groups. They were designing a game that was based on American History, and the game that the group of students who were working together came out very good. The girl who I mentioned who was academically high, she's just amazing, her game was actually too complicated to have worked played as a game. She did very good work; it definitely met the criteria. The criteria were to demonstrate knowledge of the topic and use appropriate vocabulary. It was very vocabulary rich.

Q: Do you see any difficulties with the participation of students with disabilities?

A: I would say no.

Q: How does the layout of your classroom encourage participation of students with disabilities?

A: Well, we've got them in small groups and that works well. We've designed it since we're at desks, we can form them into big groups, small groups, and go back into rows for test time.

Q: What strategies do you use to increase engagement in students with disabilities?

A: The biggest thing is not let any students get used to being with just one group of students. I try to mix them up as much as possible, and that can be difficult because the teacher gets used to them working in certain groups, too. But sometimes, you have to put them with people that they wouldn't necessarily at first work together well with in order to get them working.

Q: How would you define self-determination?

A: I don't know if I know the context for that.

Q: What about define self-advocacy?

A: Okay, I guess the most obvious things that we see that are part of self-advocacy are asking questions not only about material, but how they are doing in class and what's expected of them. Going back to self-determination, one of the things that we are trying to do is add a lot of choice it seems like self-determination. And so, we are doing more things like an option of doing several assignments. Off the top of my head, just something we just did was studying the song, "Follow the

Drinking Gourd." Then they had an option of doing one of two things. "Follow the Drinking Gourd" is a slavery song, which is really a description for how slaves should escape. It tells them where to go. They can think of their own neighborhood and write lyrics that would describe their own neighborhood. But if they have a problem with that, they could simply just write a short story, describing slaves escape from a plantation. And so, some of them will choose to do one and some will choose to do the other.

Q: Do you see self-determination or self-advocacy skills being demonstrated by students with disabilities in your classroom?

A: The answer is yes, but not with all of them.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: Well, they are all so different, I mean, there is…every single one of the kids in that group talk to me in a different way. I have one who knows exactly what to do every time, but needs assurance that she is doing it right. I have two that really, really struggle with reading, but they come and ask me what the words are, and they ask me how to spell some things. It runs the full spectrum all the way down to on who really has almost no focus at all, except at what you are pointing out to him. He, like some of the other general ed. kids, I think, thinks school is just something that happens to him.

Q: If you had a peer advocate come into your class, what guidance would you give them?

A: One direction would be, depending on which student they were dealing with. I would think of one right off; I have two young ladies who struggle so much with English, they would be the first ones I would want a peer advocate for, and that would be to help them with the difficult vocabulary. Most of the peer advocates we have, seem like the really know how to approach students. I don't know what kind of training that they've had through the program or if they're just very empathetic. If I had to offer any advice, I'd say, you're here to help this student with a specific thing, and otherwise, just try to be a good helper or classmate to them.

Q: When you had peer advocates, did you see any difference in the students before they worked with a peer advocate and then after?

A: Yes, thinking of the students that I had last year, they were generally more successful with an advocate for both academic and social reasons. I had a student last year whose main difficulty was social interaction. Having a peer advocate there was a big help with that, and others whose problems were academic, having someone help them work through the difficult vocabulary and language.

Q: How many years have you been a teacher?

A: 22

Q: What subject/s do you teach?

A: History, English, Computers, Writing, and Journalism.

Q: How many years have you been at this school?

A: 22

Q: How long have you had a classroom that was inclusive?

A: Five years.