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Circumstances and Experiences of Regular and Special Education Teachers in Inclusion

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Abstract

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MA, University of Texas San Antonio, 2009

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Special Education

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Abstract

Implementation of federally mandated classroom inclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs) in the United States is inconsistent. Research has been limited on how teachers implement inclusion in classrooms, which has prevented systemwide improvements of inclusion practices. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in 3rd to 6th grade inclusion classes. The theory of organizational learning served as the conceptual framework for the study. Data were collected in interviews with 7 regular education teachers (RETs) and 5 special education teachers (SETs) from 3 public school districts in a south-central U.S. state. Data were analyzed using open coding to identify themes and patterns. Results indicated that SETs served SWDs from multiple classes and sometimes from multiple grades rather than following 1 student throughout the day. Further, RETs had students with and without disabilities from up to 7 different grade levels in their inclusion classrooms. Findings also revealed that none of the participants engaged in collaborative content planning. Almost all participants expressed the need for additional teachers to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio and for more training for RETs to support inclusion of SWDs in their classes. Findings may provide information to leaders at the building, district, regional, state, and legislative levels regarding how inclusion can be improved in classrooms, including how systemic change in public school systems may be implemented.

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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this work to my wonderful family: my husband, Brad, and my children, Cassidy and Elijah. May this inspire them to be lifelong dedicated learners and to always work hard for the goals that they set for themselves. I will always share this accomplishment with them; my success is for our family to share and celebrate.

I also dedicate this study to my loving family: my parents and my two younger sisters who strongly believe in hard work and education. Although they are in other parts of the world, I have always felt the love and encouragement to push through. My mother, Corazon, whose footsteps were not easy to follow, set such an example that encouraged me to be the mother, wife, career woman, and lifelong learner that I became. My daddy, Florencio, instilled the value of faith and goal setting. He always prayed for nothing but the best for all his girls; he loves hearing stories of our endeavors. Both my sisters, Rhea and Hanna, inspired me at an early age to always do better; they've stood by me through failure and success. They will always be a big part of who I have become and who I aspire to be.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The provision of special education in the United Sates has progressively changed since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. The access of students with disabilities (SWDs) to appropriate education in their least restrictive environments (LREs) has evolved from placement in segregated institutions to immersion in general education classrooms. With further advances due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, the legislators and educators' focus on providing LRE has shifted from placement to the quality of services (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). As a result of this change of focus, learning in the inclusion class (i.e., the general education class that includes SWDs) has also changed, not only for SWDs but also for the whole school community including educators, administrators, parents, and students without disabilities (SWoDs). In this study, I described the existing circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade in the United States with SWDs who are spending most of the school day in an inclusion or inclusion class. This placement is also known as Federal Instruction Setting 1 where SWDs spend less than 21% of the school day in the special education classrooms (Arc Guide to Least Restrictive Environment in Special Education and Federal Setting, 2019).

Several studies indicated that educators have interpreted and implemented inclusion in varying ways (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Umhoefer, Vargas, & Beyer, 2015). Variations include adapting different types of

inclusion models such as a collaboration or co-teaching classes with push-in, a resource class or pull out, or a combination of these models (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, & Born, 2015). The use of these different models indicates that SWDs receive different types of educational services. In addition, teachers' lack of clarity about special education in general contributes to such variation (Able, Sreckovic, Schultz, Garwood, & Sherman, 2015). Confusion and misconceptions could occur with respect to instructional support (Able et al., 2015; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014), teacher responsibilities, SWDs and their disabilities, the design and implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) (Able et al., 2015), and the extent of placement in the general classroom (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Despite a common public law about the provision of special education, school practices in the United States appear to be based on different interpretations of the mandate.

With lack of awareness and clarity among educators about the special educational mandate, difficulties in implementation arise in the classroom. Inclusive education is a system in which educators value diversity and individual differences (Callado Moreno, Jaén, Navío, & Callado Moreno, 2015). Educators should be providing differentiated instruction to meet the wide range of needs in a single classroom, which is now a challenge for teachers in inclusive classrooms (Cameron, 2014; Conderman & Hedlin, 2015). Such a claim could indicate that educators implementing inclusive services are not prepared to teach in inclusion classrooms (Conderman & Heidin, 2015; Schwab, Holzinger, Krammer, Gebhardt, & Hessels, 2015). The current study was important

because teachers are to provide inclusive services and there is not enough information on educators' current circumstances and the possible ways that inclusion can be provided.

The social implications of this study include raising awareness about the current implementation of inclusion in the U.S. classrooms. More insight about the varying interpretations of IDEIA 2004 and how they have materialized in current classrooms could result in lawmakers revising legislation and educators finding other ways to enhance services in inclusion classrooms. As more schools and districts adopt inclusive policies, the results of this study may provide the public with needed insights on the circumstances and ways to improve inclusive practices. IEP teams may be able to support SWDs in inclusion more effectively. If there is a substantial amount of current research about how educators in school systems are providing instructional support to SWDs, then legislators may take the necessary action when amending and finalizing new inclusive regulations. Communicating knowledge to educators and lawmakers about the current state of inclusion in public schools may also contribute to positive social change by allowing for improved pedagogical practices that affect all students and the community as a whole.

This chapter includes a brief summary of current peer-reviewed scholarly articles about inclusion in special education. This information helped to reinforce the description of insufficient knowledge about the materialization of inclusion in the classrooms, which supported the purpose of this study. I then state the research problem, which concerned the lack of consistency with implementing inclusion and its implications for SWDs in inclusion settings. Also, I introduce the theory of organizational learning by Argyris and

hwabhön (1978), which served as the conceptual framework for the study, and discuss how it related to the approach and research questions. The chapter also includes a brief summary of the qualitative nature of this study. In addition, I provide the definitions of key terms, assumptions in carrying out the investigation, and the scope and delimitations of this study. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations and significance of this study and a summary of key points.

Background

Several themes emerged in my review of current literature, which pertained to the inclusion of SWDs in the inclusive classrooms (Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2017; Fuchs et. al., 2015; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). Researchers discussed the definition of inclusion and the characteristics of effective implementation (Cameron, 2014; Fuchs et al. 2015, Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Lakkala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2016; McGillicuddy & O'Donell, 2014; St. John & Babo, 2015). In addition, researchers explored service delivery models and aligned systems for inclusive education (Choi et al., 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Lakkala et al., 2016). Several themes that emerged revealed the importance of providing different types of support for teachers and students. Teacher-related factors and needs include teacher beliefs, perception, ability, attitude, and efficacy (Cameron, 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014; Morgan, 2016, Paju, Räty, Pirttimaa, & Kontu, 2016). Instructional approaches, collaboration or co-teaching practices, professional development programs, and school climate are other inclusion-related themes that emerged from relevant studies (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015;

Fuchs et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2016; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Student needs and types of support included the following: instructional support such as evidence-based instruction (i.e., differentiation and explicit instruction), research-based instructional framework (i.e., universal design for learning and multitiered system of support or response to intervention) and social support (Fuchs et al., 2015; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Kozleski et al., 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Kurz et al., 2014). Researchers also addressed barriers to effective implementation of inclusion in current classrooms (Cameron, 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Lakkala et al., 2016; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014).

Based on my review of literature, there is insufficient information about the circumstances and conditions of inclusion in U.S. schools. Details that could be helpful in describing the teachers' circumstances that I addressed in this study included the daily schedule of special educators, the caseload size and severity of their SWDs' needs, the ratio of regularly performing peers to SWDs in the inclusive classroom, the tasks that SWDs complete, and details about how accommodations and modifications are planned and provided. Learning about these aspects could help educators and legislators discern the ways and circumstances in which inclusion unfolds in classrooms, which may affect the daily school tasks of educators and students. This study may help to provide an understanding of the current situation of SWDs and teachers in inclusion classrooms and enhance the provision of inclusive services in public elementary schools.

Problem Statement

Based on the literature reviewed, there is a problem with inconsistent implementation of inclusion throughout the United States. I did not find sufficient information regarding the circumstances and related experiences of regular and special education teachers for SWDs in Grades 3-6. The implementation of inclusion is such an intricate process that its ideology and practice has caused conflicting arguments (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Also, research is limited concerning how educators in schools implement inclusion (Cameron, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015; Schwab et al., 2015) and how teams of educators collaborate to address challenges related to inclusion (Cameron, 2014; Hartmann, 2016). Göransson and Nilholm (2014) asserted that there is a lack of evidence about SWDs' participation and learning in inclusive settings. For example, it is unclear how educators provide adaptations for SWDs to access the general curriculum (Kurth & Keegan, 2014). To understand the evidence of instruction and learning in inclusive settings, researchers should provide the building logistics and/or conditions that educators work in (Fuchs et al., 2015). There is a lack of detailed information related to the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classrooms. This research may be significant to the field of education because educators need evidence-based data to effectively provide inclusive services. Morningstar et al. (2015) asserted that educators continue to implement inclusion without intervention supported by research. As a result, educators continue to experience difficulties related to inclusion (Kurth & Keegan, 2014).

In this study, I provided information about the inclusive service delivery models being implemented to third to sixth grade SWDs in inclusion classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classes. Educators continue to carry out their daily responsibilities in compliance with the special education mandate. Kurz et al. (2014) argued that there needs to be current and evidence-based information about providing instructional support to SWDs in inclusion classes.

Research Questions

1. What classroom demographics do regular and special education teachers report who are providing services in inclusive classrooms?
2. How do regular and special education teachers provide instructional support for SWDs in inclusion classes?
3. What are regular and special education teachers' experiences in meeting the instructional needs of SWDs in varied inclusion classes?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was rooted in the theory of organizational learning (TOL) by Argyris and Schön (1978) who focused on the fundamental principle of recognizing learning and development as two interrelated processes. Argyris and Schön (1996) also emphasized that all institutions are subject to change and that learning is imperative to reach the desired goal. Given the sharing of the same physical space by students, the roles of regular and special education teachers are diverse (Kurth & Keegan,

2014; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016) and different compared to when regular and special education teachers taught in separate classrooms. Current educators' practices are also subject to change as they adapt and implement inclusive practices.

Organizational learning (OL) is the process in which members collaboratively examine the organization's current state for growth and improvement (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The learning process for teachers engaging in inclusive practices requires collaboration to positively impact students (St. John & Babo, 2015). Inclusion teachers begin the school year by looking at their caseloads, schedules, and instructional modifications. Additionally, teachers must gather baseline data to determine their SWDs' present levels of performance and the instructional support needed to achieve students' individual goals. Argyris and Schön (1978) argued that OL involves acquiring a set of skills (i.e., inclusive teaching and collaborative approaches) and a collective effort to work toward the common goal of the organization. Teachers' collaboration is ongoing as they plan and implement IEPs (Hartmann, 2016). However, educators experience circumstances such as human and nonhuman resources in schools that impact how instructional support to SWDs is provided.

There are two kinds of learning that impact an organization: single loop and double loop. Single-loop learning occurs when practitioners detect an error and can implement strategies for correction without modifying the underlying norms. Special education services are remedial in nature. Educators need to determine the SWDs' deficit areas to implement the necessary instructional support. When error detection involves norms modification, double-loop learning occurs (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Given the

circumstances that inclusion teachers face, the model of learning could also include the ways that they provide instructional support to SWDs and their experiences in doing so. Overall, educators' learning impacts the organization's learning model. These types of learning are further discussed in the next chapter.

There is a strong logical connection between the TOL and the research questions of this study. The circumstances or the details of implementing inclusive services, accommodations and modifications provided, and teacher experiences about how they are meeting the needs of all students can be aligned with educators' individual learning and the system's organizational model. Educators in the system need to adapt to the changing environment brought about by inclusion of all students in the school system.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I conducted interviews with inclusion teachers, both regular and special educators. I chose this method of data collection to gain rich and detailed information regarding the circumstances and experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms in different elementary schools in a south-central U.S. state. I used a basic qualitative design to explore the circumstances and experiences of teachers using data from the interviews. As I explored these factors, I gained an understanding of general and special education teachers' experiences in meeting their students' needs in inclusion classrooms.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are operationally defined as follows:

Accommodation: Any change in procedure, such as read aloud and extended time without changing the standards, applied to student work to allow students to learn within the framework of the standards (Fuchs et al., 2015).

Caseload: The number of student records assigned to a special education teacher (Special Education Waiver Process, 2018).

Collaboration class: Also referred to as an inclusion class, a class that includes a group of students with and without disabilities shared by a regular and a special education teacher (Collaborative Teaching Practices for Exceptional Children, 2011).

Co-teaching: An instructional approach in which a special education teacher works in full partnership with a regular education teacher to deliver instruction to a group of diverse learners (Collaborative Teaching Practices for Exceptional Children, 2011).

Differentiated instruction: An approach that incorporates the use of multiple and/or multileveled tasks, modulated pace, different materials, and learning expectations to engage all learners with varying needs (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015).

Inclusion: A system that provides all children with quality educational services and equal opportunities to learn (Schwab et al., 2015).

Inclusion support: A special education service provided in the inclusion classroom by special and/or regular education teachers for SWDs (Schwab et al., 2015).

Individualized education program (IEP): A written plan for a child with a diagnosed disability that describes the educational program, including special education and/or related services, to meet the child's unique needs (IDEA, 2007).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA): A revised and reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that President George Bush signed in December 3, 2004. (New York State Education Department, 2015).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): One of the five concepts of IDEIA 2004 that requires educators to educate SWDs with their typically performing peers to the maximum extent possible (Morgan, 2016).

Modification: Change to the program or material, such as changing the difficulty level, to reduce the cognitive demands of the work for the student (Morningstar et al., 2015).

Self-contained class: A special education class assigned to a special education teacher who has a smaller caseload compared to a resource teacher (Special Education Waiver Process, 2018).

Special education: A free educational program designed to meet the needs of SWDs (IDEA, n.d.).

Student with a disability (SWD): Any child evaluated in compliance with Sections 300.304-300.311 to have mental retardation, a hearing impairment, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, a serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic disturbance, autism, traumatic brain injury, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities who needs special education and related services (IDEA, 2017).

Assumptions

In this study, I made several assumptions related to the participants and data analysis. I assumed that even though the sample size was small, it was a good representation of the location where I was conducting this study. I also assumed that the participants would provide accurate and truthful data about the circumstances and their experiences with them.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included inclusion teachers in third to sixth grade. I chose this group of educators because of my special education background and previous inclusion experience in the elementary grades. In this study, I included only regular and special education teachers in the third to sixth grade who are involved with students participating in inclusion classes.

Limitations

The results of this study are not applicable to educators who are not teaching students in inclusion classes in third to sixth grades. It was possible that some participants may not have provided truthful information during the interview out of fear of admitting their inefficiency in the classroom. I recognized that I may have been biased when interviewing educators regarding implementation of inclusion support. I addressed this by carefully and thoroughly preparing for the interview process through the advanced qualitative research course. I used carefully planned interview questions, recorded the interviews, and revised the limitations after I conducted the study.

Significance

In exploring the circumstances and experiences of inclusion teachers, I contributed to the insufficient data on the implementation of inclusive services. Educators in all levels of the education system may learn about the current status of inclusion in schools. This awareness may bring ideas to educators, administrators, and legislators regarding how to support and improve inclusion services. As these services improve, inclusion teachers may better meet students' diverse learning needs in classrooms. Finally, students in inclusion classes may receive the instruction that is appropriate to their individual needs. As a result, high school graduation rates could increase, and more students could pursue vocational or college degrees in becoming contributing members of society.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the topic about exploring the circumstances and experiences of inclusion teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classrooms. I provided a summary of current literature regarding the problem of inconsistent implementation of inclusion and the lack of information on circumstances and experiences of inclusion teachers. I identified the TOL as the conceptual framework and described its connections to the research questions. I also described the qualitative methodology and basic qualitative design. Then, I provided definitions of key terms for this study. Furthermore, I explained the scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study before I provided a summary. In the next chapter, I examine and synthesize current literature supporting the implementation of special education inclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the circumstances and experiences of teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classes in a south-central U.S. state. The problem addressed in the study was the inconsistency of implementing inclusion services throughout the United States. In the review of current literature on special education inclusion, I did not find sufficient information about educators' experiences with implementation of inclusion. Six major themes emerged from my review of current literature on inclusion: (a) definition and components of effective inclusion; (b) inclusive service delivery models; (c) teacher knowledge of disabilities, accommodations, and modifications; (d) student needs and types of support; (e) teacher experiences; and (f) barriers in inclusion.

In this chapter, I describe the literature search strategy. I include a list of library databases, search engines, and key search terms used to find current and research-based literature on implementing inclusion. I also define the theory of organizational learning (TOL) by Argyris and Schön (1978) and its related seminal studies. I then describe the benefits of using this framework in describing the circumstances and experiences of inclusion teachers in third to sixth grade classes. Finally, I provide a synthesis of common themes that emerged from current literature on inclusion.

Literature Search and Strategy

To locate research articles related to the current implementation of inclusion, I conducted a computerized database search mainly through the Walden University library and Google Scholar. This search included peer-reviewed scholarly journals from

databases such as Academic Search Complete, EBSCO host, Education Source, ERIC system, ProQuest, and Social Sciences Citation Index. I entered the following key words: *accommodations*, *caseload*, *circumstances*, *collaboration*, *consult*, *co-teaching*, *differentiation*, *implementing inclusion*, *inclusion*, *inclusive education*, *modifications*, *response to intervention*, *special education*, *teachers*, *universal design for learning*, and *U.S.A.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was rooted in the theory of organizational learning (TOL). Argyris and Schön (1978) studied the process of learning and development for individuals who are part of a system. To improve task delivery in institutions, Argyris and Schön first defined the term *organization*. According to Argyris and Schön, organization is a collective term for individuals with assigned analyzed tasks and rules to comply with to achieve a common goal. A school system is an example of an organization: It consists of individuals with specific responsibilities that are necessary in helping students learn.

Individual practitioners play a key role in organizational learning. Patton (2015) noted that individuals make meaning of their understanding, which then result in their actions. On the same note, Argyris and Schön (1996) argued how the members' learning and actions determine the organization's growth and improvement. Regarding the rights of all children to inclusion, the landscape of general education has been changing (Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor, 2015); teachers in inclusive classrooms have learned to provide instructional support to SWDs. A multitiered system of support, co-teaching,

response to intervention, and other high-quality evidence-based practices require a lot of learning for educators. Brock, Biggs, Carter, Cattey, and Raley (2016) argued that educators also adopt ways to sustain inclusive efforts. The thinking process required of teachers in acquiring knowledge and carrying out the steps to sustain effective inclusive practices is crucial in providing instructional support to all students.

Argyris and Schön's (1978) work on the concept of error detection and correction is related to inclusive practices. Peeters and Robinson (2015) observed that practitioners learn to detect and correct mistakes by examining the reasons behind the choices they make, which Argyris and Schön identified as double-loop learning. The double-loop learning process for inclusion teachers includes critical thinking regarding the ways that they instructionally support SWDs. When working in a co-teaching environment, teachers define their goals and reshape their thinking and interactions. However, there are insufficient conditions for SWDs to receive equitable opportunities to learn in inclusive classrooms (Kurz et al., 2014). To sustain the provision of inclusive services to all students, regular and special education teachers examine beliefs, detect instructional problems, determine courses of action, and reflect on practices. Weiss, Pellegrino, Regan, and Mann (2015) concluded that without examination, deliberation, and reflection on the choices and the reasons behind decisions, teachers may not be addressing underlying reasons that impact the choices they make in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, effective error detection and correction are necessary in collaborative classrooms.

Literature Review of Related to Key Concepts

Inclusion in education is designed to meet the needs all students. There has been a big focus to increase the quality of education for all students regardless of differences (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Kozleski et al., 2015). I reviewed current and research-based studies to provide a description of what is known about the provision of special education in inclusive classrooms. Following is an analysis of current literature and the major themes that emerged related to circumstances and experiences of inclusion teachers in third to sixth grade classrooms.

Definition of Inclusion

There are several definitions of *inclusion*. Given the varying interpretations of inclusion in schools throughout the world (Kozleski et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015), it is imperative to clarify the definition of the term as it is used in current research-based literature. In the late 1980s, the definition of inclusion emerged because of the efforts to move away from segregating students with difficulties (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). For the purpose of this literature review, I used the following four definition categories as described by Nilholm and Göransson (2017): (a) placement definition (inclusion as the placement of students with disabilities [SWDs] in the physical space or the LRE with typically performing peers), (b) specified individualized definition (inclusion to meet the social and/or academic needs of SWDs), (c) general individualized definition (inclusion to meet the social and/or academic needs of all students), and (d) community definition (inclusion as created by a community in acceptance of individual differences). Nilholm and Göransson emphasized that each of

these definition categories subsumes the preceding one; this means that the second category includes the first category but with the addition of one or more components.

Placement definition. None of the researchers in the current literature referred to inclusion as a placement. According to Nilholm and Göransson (2017), the placement definition of inclusion is the placement of SWDs in the general education setting. The lack of current research using the term *inclusion* as a placement is explained by the concept of inclusion being the movement to abolish segregated classrooms and/or schools for SWDs (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). Although not all educators have embraced implementing inclusive changes (Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015), researchers in the field of education have been studying and promoting inclusion to improve the academic, behavioral, and social support for all students. All current studies on inclusion refer to the term inclusion being more than a placement for SWDs.

Specified individualized definition. Some researchers included a description of inclusion using the specified individualized definition. Shogren, McCart, et al. (2015) discussed the where, how, and what of inclusion pertaining to SWDs. The intent was to clarify the implementation practices related to inclusion: where students learn, how they are taught, and what they learn (Shogren, McCart et al., 2015). Umhoefer et al. (2015) added that inclusion provides support for SWDs while they are in the general education setting. Fuchs et al. (2015) described inclusion as characterized by a universal design for learning (UDL) that involves a strong collaboration between regular and special education teachers; Fuchs et al. also mentioned that SWDs gain access to the general curriculum alongside their typically performing peers. Although Fuchs et al. highlighted

the UDL and collaboration aspects of inclusion, their definition focused on SWDs and their exposure to the general curriculum, not inclusion for all students. These researchers supported a definition of inclusion that was specific to SWDs receiving access in the general curriculum.

General individualized definition. This definition includes the needs of students without disabilities. McGillicuddy and O'Donnell (2014) argued that inclusion is a value system that gives access to equal opportunity learning for all students. This understanding is crucial to giving consideration to students without disabilities who are also impacted by including SWDs in the general curriculum. Hence, inclusion is defined as education alongside regularly performing peers unless it interferes with the SWDs' best interest or that of others without disabilities (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). For example, some states offer guidelines on the cap size of SWDs in the general education classroom to be less than or equal to 33% depending on the severity of special education needs; doing so helps maintain the desirable aspects of the general education classroom (KDE, 2011). As the number of SWDs exceeds this cap size, the classroom dynamics such as pacing of instruction, whole and small group approaches, and positive peer exposure could negatively change. Therefore, inclusion is defined as individualized and appropriate education for the general population of students.

Community definition. Most researchers defined inclusion using the community definition, but with a different approach. Lakkala et al. (2016) and Meynert (2014) defined inclusion as related to a community with a goal to respect and value the differences of its members. Urton, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2014) defined inclusion as a

reform process with the same community definition, while Choi et al. (2017) and Meynert (2014) argued that it is a philosophy. Callado Moreno et al. (2015) and Cameron (2014) defined inclusion as "the people and society valuing diversity and overcoming barriers" (p. 264), and Shyman (2015) described it as an "application and practice of social justice" (p. 351), all of which pertained to a society that values diversity and promotes belongingness of all its members. Such definitions refer to inclusion as more than a placement and/or a service that addresses academic and/or behavioral needs of all students. Additionally, researchers' use of the community definition reflects an outlook on inclusion as a society embracing and valuing individual members' differences.

Clarifying the definition of inclusion could be beneficial in clarifying misconceptions about inclusive services. Göransson and Nilholm (2014) argued that educators' differences in defining inclusion reflect differences in beliefs about how inclusion can be implemented. Educators' definition of inclusion determines the quality of inclusive support and services and students receive (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). If a teacher's understanding of inclusion reflects the placement definition, a teacher could argue that spending time in the general education classroom is sufficient for SWDs as it is addressing socialization with SWoDs. The instructional and overall inclusive support provided to SWDs could be limited. Clarifying the definition of inclusion is paramount to support all students in inclusive settings as it affects the provision of inclusive services. Moreover, the lack of a clear definition of the term was related to the problem addressed in this study, which was the lack of consistency in implementing inclusive practices.

Inclusive Service Delivery Models

There are different ways that schools provide inclusive education in the United States (Algozzine et al., 2017). In recent years, 94.7% of students age 6 through 21 have been included in the regular classroom for some portion of the school day. However, 62.6% of these students have spent 80% or more of the school day in the regular classroom, 18.6% have spent 40% to 79%, 13.5% have spent less than 40%, and 5.3% have been in special education settings throughout the day (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These statistics are important because they support how there are variations in how inclusion is implemented in the United States. Also, there is variation in inclusive service delivery models that are provided for SWDs.

Full-time co-teaching model. In several states, co-teaching is an inclusive approach to educating SWDs in the general education classroom. In some schools and districts, co-teaching is also referred to as collaborative teaching, and these terms are used interchangeably (KDE, 2011; Umhoefer et al., 2015). *Co-teaching* is defined as an equal effort between a regular and special education teacher providing tiered instruction in the same classroom (Morningstar et al., 2015; St. John & Babo, 2015; Tremblay, 2015; Umhoefer et al., 2015); teachers also clarify expectations and continuously reshape their interactions to sustain inclusion (Weiss et al., 2015). Full-time co-teaching allows for the maximum co-planning and co-instructing possible between the two certified staff (Umhoefer et al., 2015). Additionally, Weiss et al. (2015) argued that teaming to address the same student goals helps teachers achieve the desired student outcomes. Co-teaching

is a form of support system for both educators and students in special and regular education.

Co-teaching is also beneficial in reducing the student-to-teacher ratio and in providing differentiated and individualized instruction. With two certified teachers in the classroom, co-teachers can provide timely and flexible support to more students (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016, p. 1072). Waitoller and Kozleski (2015) found in their study that one special education teacher was assigned as a full-time co-teacher so that students with mild disabilities can stay in the inclusion classroom all day. With two certified teachers, students can receive more adult supervision. While it takes time and resources, it is evident that having full-time co-teachers helps support the needs of both teachers and students in the inclusive classroom. In another study that Tremblay (2015) cited in his research, SWDs in full-time co-teaching classes scored higher in language, math, and science as compared to SWDs who were pulled out for resource services in the special education setting. According to this study, differentiated instruction provided in the regular education classroom is more beneficial for SWDs in comparison to instruction provided in the special education setting. Therefore, co-teaching, when implemented effectively, could promote addressing the wide variety of needs in inclusive classrooms.

Part-time co-teaching model. For some parts of the school day, special education teachers (SETs) go in the general education classroom to co-teach with regular education teachers (RETs). In their study, Morningstar et al. (2015) had four out of the six participating schools use the part-time co-teaching model; this is the case for SETs who serve more than one inclusion class. Depending on the caseload size of SETs, they

split their time in several inclusion classes. Consequently, SETs are co-teaching intermittently (Morningstar et al., 2015). In a part-time co-teaching model, RETs conduct most of instruction and the SETs focus more on keeping SWDs on-task; this indicates that SETs have more responsibilities outside of what is shared with the RET in that particular collaborative class. Depending on the number and severity of student needs in the SETs' caseloads, SETs split their time between two or more inclusion classes. In rural schools, some SETs provide instruction to students in several grade levels and subject areas (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). Therefore, due to school-specific implementation circumstances as such, co-teaching is not maximized to its full potential.

While some SWDs stay all day in inclusive classrooms, some are pulled out to receive resource services in the special education setting. SETs, then, provide small-group or one-on-one instruction in addition to co-teaching (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). In a comparative study between two inclusion models (co-teaching vs. solo-taught special education class), Tremblay (2015) found the participants in first grade co-taught classes to show significant growth on external evaluations in reading and writing compared to SWDs who received pull-out services. However, in a different study, Datchuk, Kubina, and Mason (2015) found that providing specialized writing instruction, to four elementary-aged students, in a resource room produced sentence writing fluency. However, Able et al. (2015) noted in their study, about determining the needs of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in fully inclusive settings, that pull-out services hinder the successful inclusion of students with ASD; the participants in this study preferred a push-in where SETs worked with the students in the regular education

classroom. When implemented with fidelity, several research-based findings support both co-teaching and pull out services to help SWDs make academic gains (Datchuk et al., 2015; McGillicuddy & O'Donell, 2014; Tremblay, 2015).

Inclusion without co-teaching. Some SETs pull-out SWDs without providing any co-teaching in the inclusion classrooms. SETs conduct only pull-out services to provide the intensive instruction in a small group setting for about 20% of the SWDs' school day (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). As stated by the SET participants in Berry and Gravelle's (2013) study on the benefits and challenges of SETs in rural areas, one of the challenging cases for SETs who serve students in multiple grade levels is not being able to go in co-teaching classrooms. To provide special education services to SWDs in different grade levels and multiple classrooms, some SETs do not have time in the school day to go in co-teaching classrooms. In Morningstar et al.'s (2015) study, they observed SETs who come in to inclusion classrooms on their scheduled time; these SETs primarily assisted SWDs. The presence of another certified teacher in the inclusion classroom is not maximized in this case.

Although there are no co-teaching practices present in some schools, other arrangements take place; additional special education support is provided either through consult with SETs or assignment of instructional assistants in inclusive classrooms. When special educators provide consult services with RETs, they do not provide direct services to students (Umhoefer et al., 2015). Umhoefer et al. (2015) noted that through consult services, which is provided more often as an inclusion model, school districts meet IDEA inclusive requirements at a low cost (p. 364). This means that inclusive services are

provided to students, but without the extra expense of hiring more SETs to co-teach in inclusive classrooms. Cameron (2014) and Lakkala et al. (2014) argued that, in circumstances where there is no co-teaching involved, collaboration (between RETs and consulting SETs) and small group instruction should be increased. For example, RETs and SETs could co-plan to prepare for differentiated instruction in small groups. Otherwise, it is difficult to address the individual needs of students and meet what is stated on the SWDs' individual education programs (IEPs) in inclusive classrooms.

Without co-teaching, other circumstances occur in inclusive classrooms. In several inclusion classes without SET co-teachers, most of class time is devoted to traditional whole group instruction (Cameron, 2014), which often results to teacher-centered classrooms. Some RETs, however, reported that while they provide mostly whole-class arrangements, they also provide periodic one-on-one support to SWDs (Cameron, 2014). However, the RETs experienced the dilemma of not being able to attend to majority of the students. Feeling overwhelmed about meeting the needs of all students is common among RETs who do not receive sufficient support from SETs (Able et al., 2015). Thus, there is a constant need to discuss and reflect on providing inclusion support in classrooms without co-teachers.

Knowledge of Disabilities, Accommodations, and Modifications

Researchers have studied and presented the relevance of teacher knowledge in effectively carrying out the responsibilities in inclusive classrooms. To cite, Hedges et al. (2014) argued that a lack of knowledge on ASD, for example, has created a barrier to the success of students with autism. Such a notion could be generalized to the lack of general

understanding of disabilities impeding the success of SWDs. Using a SWD's IEP could help address this issue; inclusion team members can determine the student-specific information about special education needs and/or related services by referring to students' IEPs (IDEIA, 2004). However, while these documents could be useful in providing guidelines for inclusion team members, Able et al. (2015) and Hedges et al. (2014) argued that IEPs, being lengthy, are not user-friendly to RETs. A condensed version of the IEPs, such as IEP-at-a-Glance sheets, could be more helpful for RETs to use as shorter reification documents (Able et al., 2015; Hedges et al., 2014). Hedges et al. suggested that this one- to two-page document could include the following: the child's goals, accommodations, modifications, and schedule. This way, RETs can access the information that they need about their SWDs in a quick and efficient manner.

While the IDEA mandates for educators to implement IEPs with fidelity, teacher experiences related to this special education document vary. In a 2014 study about writing in inclusion classes, Bray et al. (2014) discussed that none of the four teacher participants mentioned the IEP nor implemented any accommodations in their writing tasks. Paju et al. (2016) also noted in their study that only about 35% of RETs found IEP documents to be helpful, while Hosford and O'Sullivan (2016) found one out of 57 RETs used the IEP as a document of support. Such numbers imply that only a small number of teachers utilized or read their students' IEPs. On the contrary, An and Meaney (2015) found in their study that four out of four regular physical education (PE) teachers found the IEP documents to be helpful in designing and implementing their lessons in PE. These statistics are important because they support the different levels of teacher

knowledge about SWDs, their special needs, and specially designed instruction as stated on the IEPs. To go more in-depth about the knowledge required for educators to effectively participate in inclusive settings, I discuss in the following section knowledge-related themes that emerged from current literature.

Knowledge of students and disabilities. Knowledge about SWD is important in teaching them effectively (Able et al., 2015; An & Meaney, 2015; Monsen et al., 2014; Schwab et al., 2015; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). However, most RETs involved in inclusion are not prepared to teach SWDs (Bray et al., 2014; Schwab et al., 2015; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Umhoefer et al., 2015) and some RETs do not feel confident in teaching SWDs due to lack of knowledge about them (Bray et al., 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015). In their current study, Miranda et al. (2018) argued that RETs feel knowledgeable about their students and their learning disabilities, which is contradictory to research results more than a decade ago. Therefore, Miranda et al. concluded that services for SWDs are improving throughout the years. According to Schwab et al., teachers who know about their students and their disabilities are more sensitive to their needs in the classroom; they can also provide more inclusive pedagogic strategies and improved advocacy. In addition to having the ability to provide accommodations and modifications, Able et al. also found that RETs have improved communication with SETs and parents of SWDs. Thus, when educators engage themselves in learning about their students and their disabilities, they can engage SWDs more in learning and contribute to more effective inclusive practices overall.

Knowledge of pedagogy. In addition to learning more about SWDs and their specific needs and goals, researchers concluded that knowledge about special education pedagogy needs improvement to respond positively to learner diversity. Eliminating exclusionary practices is challenging, hence, educators need training to build their knowledge about special education (Able et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Schwab et al., 2015; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). Ainscow, Dyson, and Weiner (2013) argued that defining special education apart from regular education pedagogy creates a barrier to inclusion, since "good teaching is good teaching for all students" (Bray et al., 2014, p. 24). However, that there is a need to implement instructional approaches that are more supportive of the participation and learning of all children – including those students experiencing difficulties (Algozzine et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2017; Fuchs et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015; Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015). While all teachers need a basic understanding of inclusive approaches, Weiss et al. (2015) found in their study that collaborating teachers have different perspectives on inclusive instruction (i.e., inquiry-based approach versus direct instruction in history). Also, Blank and Smithson (2014) found in their analysis of opportunities to learn for SWDs that there is less time and emphasis on teaching SWDs higher-order thinking skills (i.e., writing, analyzing, building arguments, etc.) compared to what is given to SWoDs. Such claims imply that providing effective and appropriate differentiation strategies is not common knowledge to all teachers involved in inclusion. Therefore, shifting to inclusive reform practices requires educators to be more knowledgeable about accommodations and modifications for all students who needs them.

While there is an important difference between accommodations and modifications, these terms are used interchangeably by educators and parents (Howard County Autism Society, n.d.). Based on IDEA's definition, an alteration on the procedure, and not on the material, is an accommodation; a *modification* is any change to the task or material that changes the intended learning outcome and the knowledge learned (Pacer Center, 2015). In fact, Kurth and Keegan (2014) broadly used the term *adaptation* in place of both *accommodation* and *modification*. In Weis, Dean, and Osborne's (2016) study on determining accommodations that clinicians (disability specialists) typically recommend for college students with learning disabilities, the authors argued that some accommodations that clinicians recommended actually reflected modifications. These authors justified that the use of notes throughout the lecture, for example, are modifications because they could alter the students' learning experience (Weis et al., 2016, p. 493). Thus, there is confusion and lack of clarity on the utilization of the terms *accommodation* and *modification*. For the purpose of this paper, I referred to *accommodations* and *modifications* based on the IDEA definition as stated on the Pacer Center website. I analyze, in the following section, how these specific accommodations and modifications are aligned to the definitions based on IDEA.

Knowledge of accommodations. Teachers needing knowledge about special education accommodations is a common theme in several articles (Able et al., 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015). Providing accommodations for SWDs starts from the time that lessons are planned and implemented to when students are assessed. RETs want to know more about specific

academic accommodations that they can provide to SWDs (Able et al., 2015; Morgan, 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015). For example, Umhoefer et al. (2015) argued that PE teachers benefited from consult services from adaptive PE special education teachers who helped them create lesson plans and modeled how to implement such lessons using the accommodations. In Able et al.'s (2015) study, examples of specific accommodations that RETs mentioned include using cooperative learning, focusing on gross compliance (i.e., ignoring minor behaviors when the student is on-task), and keeping a consistent and structured schedule and routine for students with ASD. In Kurth and Keegan's (2014) study, although they used the term *instructional adaptation* in place of *accommodations*, they found that teachers used visuals, assistive technology, and shortening tasks to change the manner of teaching or to demonstrate learning. All of these above-mentioned practices are aligned with IDEA's definition of *accommodation* since the learning expectations were not altered. The Pacer Center's website provides more examples of accommodations that are aligned to IDEA's definition such as the following (see Pacer Center, 2015):

- Textbook and Curriculum Accommodations
    - Provide summaries of chapter
    - Use peer readers
    - Explore the use of assistive technology (reading software, calculator)
    - Provide vocabulary list
    - Provide fewer math problems on a worksheet
- Instruction and Assignments

    - Use both oral and printed directions
    - Highlight keywords on directions
    - Give directions in small steps using as few words as possible
    - Show a model of the end product
- Grading Accommodations
    - Use daily of frequent grading and average into a grade for the quarter
    - Weigh daily work higher than tests for a student who performs poorly on tests due to disability
    - Mark the correct answers rather than the incorrect answers

In addition to academic accommodations, RETs need to know more about accommodations for students' social and behavioral needs (Able et al., 2015; Schwab et al., 2015; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). Following IDEA's definition of accommodations, procedures that could support social needs include: reward positive behavior, pair student with students modeling good behavior for classwork, and use nonverbal cues to communicate inappropriate behavior among others (Pacer Center, 2015). Additionally, giving time or transition accommodations can help address social needs in the classroom (Able et al., 2015); alerting students several minutes before transition, providing a visual timer, increasing wait time for response, and allowing students to leave two-three minutes early to avoid crowded hallways are other examples of accommodations (Pacer Center, 2015). While these above-mentioned strategies could promote positive behavior and prevent escalation of unwanted behavior, Schwab et al. (2015) discussed how RETs expressed their need to participate in professional development (PD) programs on

managing difficult behavior. For example, a teacher noted some uncertainty on how much prompting can be given to a SWD without causing difficult behaviors to arise (Able et al., 2015). When teachers are uncertain, it is difficult to carry out a task confidently. Therefore, having the knowledge about SWDs' academic, social, and behavioral accommodations is crucial to teachers' self-efficacy on supporting all students in inclusion classrooms.

Knowledge of modifications. As I noted earlier about *accommodations* and *modifications* possibly being used interchangeably, this section includes studies where researchers referred to modifications as this term was defined in IDEA. Several teachers in current studies showed evidence of knowledge about special education modifications to be useful in regular education classrooms (An & Meaney, 2015; Clarke, Haydon, Bauer, & Epperly, 2016; Fuchs et al., 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Umhoefer et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015). For example, An and Meaney (2015) argued that PE teachers were able to provide modifications, such as changing the equipment or the task itself, with the help of the adaptive PE special education teachers. Together, the special and regular education teachers modified the PE curriculum to accommodate the students with more severe needs in the gym. Kurth and Keegan (2014) added that modified work is provided more for students with severe disabilities. Such evidence supports that teachers' knowledge about modifications is necessary for students with profound educational needs to participate in inclusive settings.

Since SWDs who have reading deficits have lower, if not significantly lower, reading ability level than their actual grade placement, some educators provide text modifications (Südkamp et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015). In Südkamp et al.'s (2015) study, the authors argued that state assessments' text levels could be modified to meet the SWDs' reading instructional levels; these authors concluded that doing so will provide a more accurate measure of SWDs' competence level in large-scale testing. Therefore, knowledge on modifying assessments and possibly creating a separate one for some SWDs could improve the accuracy of classroom assessments. In Wood et al.'s (2015) study on using self-questioning to promote reading comprehension on students with intellectual disability, they noted that teachers also modified the text level (i.e., lowered the text reading level) to work on SWDs' reading comprehension. However, in addition to this modification, educators also provided accommodations such as read aloud, prompting, rereading the paragraph, and segmenting the text (Wood et al., 2015). Paired with accommodations, modifications such as providing text within the student's independent reading level is one way that some educators know how to modify the curriculum for SWDs in inclusive settings. Thus, knowledge about possible modifications to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and grading could empower educators in providing appropriate education for all students in inclusive classrooms. The following are more examples of modifications that are aligned with the IDEA's definition (see Pacer Center, 2015):

- Textbook Modifications

    - Provide alternative books with similar concepts but within instructional ability level

- Instruction and Assessment Modifications
    - Focus on mastery of more functional math concepts
    - Use recognition tests (true-false, multiple choice, or matching) instead of essays
    - Grade spelling separately from content
- Grading Modifications
    - Provide partial grade based on individual progress or effort
    - Average grades out when assignments are reworked or grade on corrected work
    - Use a pass-fail or an alternate grading system

While learning about students, their disabilities, and providing accommodations and/or modifications are critical to the provision of inclusive services, such practices also promote differentiated educational experiences for all students. Teachers who are involved in inclusion should provide appropriate and individualized support based on students' needs (Kurz et al., 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Monsen et al., 2014; Morgan, 2016; Roiha, 2014). Hence, Kurz et al. (2014) concluded that there has to be equal opportunities to learn for all students. When educators learn more about inclusive instructional practices, they can positively respond to more than just the needs of the SWDs, but also to the diversity of the school community as a whole.

Student Needs and Types of Support

The very core of education is to meet the students' needs. In addition to public schooling and establishment of an educational system, the enactment of Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 has helped to initially include students with disabilities and their families in public school systems. While schools have been accommodating all children regardless of their differences and disabilities, the next step in education's undertaking is to improve the quality of instructional services for all students. From the synthesis of current literature on inclusion of all SWDs, several findings that pertain directly to student needs emerged.

State standards. In this era of accountability and tiered instruction, standards impact the academic support provided to students (Bray et al., 2014; Cramer & Gallo, 2017; Kurz et al., 2014). Even though accountability and provision of equitable opportunities are the main purposes of standards and assessments (Bray et al., 2014; Kurz et al., 2014), there is evidence that such purposes are not attained. First, Kurz et al. (2014) found in their study that access to state standards is neither equal nor equitable; teachers spent most of the school day teaching standard-related materials where SWDs received little to no differentiated instruction. Also, Bray et al. (2014) added that SWDs receive the same opportunities to learn in writing classes, which means that learning goals are standardized for all students. These research findings defy the core definition of special education; it means "specially designed instruction… to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" (IDEIA, 2004). In fact, Cramer and Gallo (2017) argued that SETs need extensive training on how to academically support SWDs considering the rigorous state

standards. Thus, sole participation in the inclusive classrooms is not always the least restrictive environment, nor it guarantees high-quality instruction for all SWDs.

Instructional support. While state standards and testing impact academic support, there are research-based instructional practices that are highly beneficial in supporting the academic needs of all students in inclusive classrooms (Clarke et al., 2016; Lalvani, 2013; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). The themes related to effective provision of academic support centered around the following: evidence-based instructional practices such as differentiation and explicit instruction (EI); and instructional frameworks such as universal design for learning (UDL), universal design for instruction (UDI), and multitiered system of support (MTSS) or response to intervention (RtI). In the following section, I discuss the findings and conclusions of current literature related to providing academic support to all students in inclusive classrooms.

Evidence-based instructional practices. Several authors emphasized that for inclusion to work, traditional classrooms should be restructured to effectively meet the diverse needs of the students (Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014). These authors argued that academic support for all students in every classroom should consider the child's instructional level when presenting the grade level standard. In current literature on inclusion, instructional practices that employ differentiation and EI provided all students higher-quality of opportunities to learn.

Differentiation. Several authors of current studies highlighted the use of differentiation in inclusive classrooms to provide appropriate academic support for all

students (An & Meaney, 2017; Meynert, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). Waitoller and Kozleski (2015) defined differentiation as creating multiple entry points for learning among students with varying abilities through modulated pace, a variety of materials, and differing expectations for learning outcomes. Students in a fourth-grade classroom, for example, no longer receive only fourth-grade level work. Some who are functioning above grade level can be challenged with text that has fifth or sixth grade level of difficulty. At the same time, students whose academic performance are below fourth-grade level can receive second to third-grade level of text or activities that are closer to their instructional ability levels. Essentially, differentiation occurs when the materials and the learning experiences are matched with the student's readiness level (Bray et al., 2014; Roberts & Inman, 2015). Another example could be, before releasing students who are struggling to complete work independently, teachers provide small group instruction and guided support to these students while others work on their own. From highly performing peers to students with intellectual disabilities, it follows that instruction in every inclusion classroom is differentiated so that every student, especially those with exceptional needs, receive an equitable opportunity to learn (Kurz et al., 2014). One style or procedure of instruction cannot meet all types of needs in a classroom.

Although current study supports the benefits of differentiated instruction, other researchers have documented the lack of differentiation in some inclusive classrooms (Bray et al., 2014; Cameron, 2014; Kurz et al., 2014). As mentioned above, Bray et al. (2014) found that the same activities, assignments, instructions, and support in writing

were provided to all eighth-grade students regardless of their abilities. This implies that SWDs did not receive any form of differentiated instruction. Instead of tiered and small group instruction, teacher-centered whole group approaches also dominate the form of instruction (Cameron, 2014). Additionally, SWDs do not receive differentiated instruction because of the bigger focus on grade-level standards (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Bray et al. 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; Kurz et al., 2014). High-stakes state testing has caused teachers to focus more on assessment rather than individualized learning. In fact, McKenna, Shin, and Ciullo (2015) argued that future research should focus on teacher use of evidence-base strategies in addressing state standards in inclusive classrooms. The lack of differentiation in these above-mentioned studies have negative implications on students' education; they are receiving standardized instruction impacted by grade-level standards and/or state assessments, and IEPs are not being implemented with fidelity.

Although differentiation is not evident in all schools, several researchers noted how educators who differentiated instruction saw many of its benefits (An & Meaney, 2015; Blank & Smithson, 2014; Clarke et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015). Research supports that in classrooms where educators provide differentiated instruction, students are more likely to complete work individually (Morningstar et al., 2015). This means that when lessons are planned to meet varying academic needs, there is less need for educators to provide individual support to students on the actual lesson implementation. For example, Clarke et al. (2016) found in their study that differentiating the process to show understanding is an effective means in including SWDs in inclusive classrooms. By using picture response cards, instead of hand raising, students with intellectual disabilities

showed improvement in engagement and on-task behavior in general education classrooms (Clarke et al., 2016). Similarly, An and Meaney (2015) noted that PE teachers incorporated the SWDs' goals as they created their lessons, felt more confident in teaching SWDs and communicating with their parents, and made contributions to the development of IEPs. Moreover, these differentiation strategies allowed for SWDs to have equitable opportunities to learn in the regular education classrooms with their typically-performing peers.

Explicit instruction (EI). Another effective evidence-based instructional practice that is common in current literature on inclusion is the use of EI. According to Fien et al. (2015), EI is an intensive and intentional approach to teaching specific skills that could be utilized in all three tiers of instruction. Through targeted accelerated learning, teachers deliver instruction that is responsive to the needs of all learners. Initially, all students receive Tier 1 or core/universal instruction in reading and math. In this tier, EI includes the following lesson components: (a) frontloading the daily learning target; (b) teacher modeling; (c) establishing the relevance of the lesson; (d) providing plenty of opportunity for student work time, both guided and independent practice; and (e) spiraling of lessons (Fien et al, 2015). This means that all students receive highly effective, evidence-based universal instruction of grade-level standards. Fien et al. also emphasized that EI is proven to not only remedy, but also prevent early reading difficulties.

While about 20% of students in class would benefit from more intensive support after Tier 1 instruction, EI in Tiers 2 and 3 involves the following: teacher modeling of expected learner outcome, several opportunities for students to practice the skill, teacher

providing immediate and corrective feedback, and brisk-paced lessons to keep student engagement (Fien et al., 2015). To be specific, the teacher conducts small group instruction while employing EI to the students who need more support; the other students continue to work independently. Given these lesson components and smaller teacher to student ratio, EI in Tiers 2 and 3 reading, writing and/or math is especially helpful to close the gaps for students whose ability levels are not on grade level. In fact, students in Tiers 2 and 3 (Fien et al., 2015) along with the SWDs in specialized intervention classes (Bray et al., 2014; Fien et al., 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; McGillicuddy & O'Donell, 2014; Morgan, 2016) benefit the most from EI. Sessions are ideally in daily small group settings to ensure lower teacher-to-student-ratio paired with regular intensive intervention. In writing, EI is required in planning, revising, and editing (Bray et al., 2014). Simple, direct, and explicit instruction is required for many students to learn a specific skill. Thus, EI could be utilized to address a wide range of students' academic needs.

In addition to the use of EI in academics, it is also beneficial in addressing social skill deficits. This is especially critical for students with ASD (Able et al., 2015; Hedges et al., 2014; McGillicuddy & O'Donell, 2014). For example, Hedges et al. (2014) identified EI for teaching cognitive self-regulation strategy where the student identifies the problem, explains the reason for the problem, and suggests a solution. Doing so helps the student to think through the process of determining the appropriate response to certain social situations. Also, Able et al. (2015) noted that students with ASD also need EI to establish positive peer relationships. Initiating conversations, taking turns talking, asking

about peer's interests, and working collaboratively in groups are examples of opportunities for students with ASD to foster and maintain friendship (Able et al., 2015). McGillicuddy and O'Donell (2014) added that EI also helps students who experience anxiety around their regularly performing peers. While participation in inclusive settings allow for many inclusive opportunities, it also presents challenges for students with ASD due to their social skill deficits (Able et al., 2015). Educators could use EI to help students in transitioning to the next task or to a new schedule, adjusting to unforeseen circumstances or changes in the routine and structure at school. Thus, providing EI has its academic and social benefits in providing inclusive support to SWDs.

Research-based instructional framework. There are several evidence-based instructional practices that are proven to be highly-effective in current inclusive classrooms. Based on current literature, the principles and practices of the universal design for learning (UDL) and the MTSS or RtI are implemented to effectively and consistently support the diverse learning needs of all students in inclusive classrooms.

UDL. Choi et al. (2017), Fuchs et al. (2015), and Shogren, McCart et al. (2015) argued that educators need support to implement UDL practices. UDL is a set of principles that incorporate instructional planning, implementation, and assessment that accommodates the varying needs in the classrooms. The National Center on Universal Design for Learning website provided a list that included teacher-guidelines under each of the three principles (see National Center for UDL, 2013).

- Provide Multiple Means of Representation
    - Provide options for perception

    - Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols
    - Provide options for comprehension
- Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression
    - Provide options for physical action
    - Provide options for expression and communication
    - Provide options for executive functions
- Provide Multiple Means of Engagement
    - Provide options for recruiting interest
    - Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence
    - Provide options for self-regulation

It is evident that using the UDL framework in planning, instruction, and assessment creates multiple entry points for students: regardless of ability. In Choi et al.'s (2017) study on investigating the Schoolwide Application Model to possibly increase effective inclusive practices, part of their three-year implementation was including UDL in their annual professional learning institutes for administrators, coaches, and teachers. Morningstar et al. (2015) added that with the use of UDL practices, less specialized adaptations are needed for SWDs. Such intervention procedure supports that transforming instruction to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn is an iterative and critical process.

Multitiered system of support (MTSS). Formerly known as RtI, MTSS is a regular education initiative (RtI, 2014). MTSS is beneficial in addressing diverse needs in inclusive classrooms (Algozzine et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2017; Morningstar et al., 2015;

Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015). Following this framework, RETs are to document student progress with the interventions (academic or behavioral) provided in the general education setting (Avant, 2016). Doing so helps ensure that all students and those who are at-risk (academically or behaviorally) are receiving the necessary research-based interventions. Schools are to use a universal screener, or an assessment, to determine students' instructional levels. Then, based on these scores, educators are to design and implement appropriate and tiered instruction.

The different tiers allow for the differentiated instructional approaches for varying student needs, as teaching should be tailored to the students' individual needs (Weiss et al., 2015). Tier 1 includes "highly-effective, culturally-responsive, evidence-based core or universal instruction provided to all students in the general education classroom" (KDE, 2012). The principles and guidelines of UDL match the highly-effective strategies described in Tier 1. According to the MTSS framework, about 80% of students are estimated to succeed from receiving only Tier 1 instruction. The remaining 20% of students, who are not meeting the grade-level benchmark after Tier 1 instruction, then, receive Tier 2 or targeted instruction. Tier 2 instruction is conducted in smaller groups with additional intervention and progress monitoring; about 15% of these students will benefit from Tier 2 instruction. The remaining 1-5% of students, then receive more intensive, explicit, and individualized instruction with more frequent progress monitoring (KDE, 2012); these students in Tier 3 are currently not receiving special education services. Tier 3 instruction occurs during intervention time: in addition to the Tier 1 and 2 instruction. Altogether, students who score in the top 5% are also to receive an intensive

intervention for enrichment. Thus, MTSS practices are designed for RETs to meet the diverse learning needs of all students in inclusive classrooms.

Social support. In addition to academic inclusion, the need for social inclusion is one of the priorities in educational inclusion programs (Brock et al., 2016; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2017; Lakkala et al., 2016; Meynert, 2014; Shuster et al., 2017). In fact, evidence supports that children's social functioning is directly correlated to their academic success (Brock et al., 2016; Stichter, Herzog, Kilgus, & Schoemann, 2018). Stichter et al. (2018) suggested that exhibiting social deficits is common for students with behavioral problems, although their cognitive abilities are comparable to those of their peers. Also, the researchers' claims above indicate that when educators can support social functioning, students can be more academically productive. Before content learning could begin, all students need to be socially valued as members of the community (Able et al., 2015; Toson et al., 2013). Hence, meeting the social needs of SWDs is critical to students' affiliation and learning in current inclusive settings.

There are different aspects of social skills that also require varied types of support. In the study that Able et al. (2015) conducted, social relationships, social academics, self-advocacy, transitioning, and peer-related needs are examples of students' social skills support. Although researchers conducted the study for students with an ASD, I would argue that such needs are the same for all students. The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS, n.d.) was initiated to help SWDs but is now being utilized to support all students' social, emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs (Choi et al., 2017; Shuster et al., 2017). Providing educational experiences and

opportunities to meet students' wide variety of social needs is paramount to reaching their academic goals. In the following sections, I discuss the themes that emerged under the broad construct of social needs support, as noted by Able et al. along with the findings of several relevant studies.

Social relationships. Social relationships are critical in students' school life. According to Able et al. (2015), such relationships are involved in engaging peers, joining peer play, understanding social rules, engaging in small talks, and forming friendships. Stichter et al. (2018) added skills like interpreting others' feelings and effectively communicating their feelings. Essentially, social relationships encompass skills involved in social interaction with both peers and adults.

Establishing and maintaining positive social relationships can be complicated tasks for students with social deficits. Brock et al. (2016) identified three factors that contribute to the lack of interaction with regularly performing peers: (a) physical distance in the classrooms, (b) peers lacking knowledge of how to interact with SWDs, and (c) instructional assistants providing support to SWDs. As a result, Able et al. (2015) argued how students with autism syndrome disorder (ASD) are noted to have fewer friendships at school. Negative interactions and experiences have elicited feelings of exclusion, isolation, and rejection. Challenges with cooperation, self-control, hyperactivity, and internalizing behavior in early grades have caused such isolation from other students. Able et al. (2015) added that friendship gets even harder as children mature. Towards middle and high school, students tend to form more exclusive groups with peers of the

same interests. Hence, social relationships are critical to SWDs' successful participation in inclusive settings.

Social academics. While social relationships impact academics, social academics pertains to behavior directly related to academic tasks (Able et al., 2015). Able et al. (2015) cited examples such as difficulty with collaborative work and obsession with rules often cause students with ASD to misunderstand other students not following the rules of classwork. Stichter et al. (2018) added that students with emotional/behavioral disorders also struggle with academic tasks that involve collaborative work. Other academic behavior skills include inabilities to pay attention to teacher instructions, follow multistep directions, work in small groups, or complete assigned seatwork/tasks individually (Brock et al., 2016). In their study, Brock et al. (2016) found that with teacher delivered training, paraprofessionals can facilitate peer interaction to improve SWDs' social and academic outcomes. By developing a peer support plan, inviting and orienting peers to their roles, and providing ongoing facilitation, even students with severe disabilities can improve their social/academic skills (Brock et al., 2016). This means that a comprehensive intervention plan needs to be in place to focus on SWDs' deficits in academic behavior. Hence, deficits in social academics impact SWDs' overall participation in inclusive settings.

Self-advocacy. Self-advocacy relates to appropriately expressing thoughts, feelings, and needs (Able et al., 2015). S students must have the ability to regulate emotions and feelings to communicate their needs in the classroom. Stichter et al. (2018) argued that these abilities are critical in responding to social and academic situations at

school. For example, when tasks are too hard, some students get frustrated. When students cannot regulate such frustration and communicate the need for help, the situation can escalate to challenging behavior (Oldfield, Hebron, & Humphrey, 2016). At the same time, when these students receive behavioral or social support, they recognize their emotions and determine the appropriate response. Then, they improve their ability to advocate for themselves at school. Hence, one of the guiding principles in schools with an equity-based culture is to also support students' social development and behavior (Choi et al., 2017; Oldfield et al., 2016). While students with self-advocacy needs benefit, peers and adults who work with them also have improved social interaction with them. Therefore, having the ability to express themselves and advocate for their needs are critical social behaviors.

Transitioning needs. Transitioning at school is a process of changing from one setting to another (Able et al., 2015; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). Some students exhibit unwanted behavior because of their inability to regulate emotions when transitioning occurs. Able et al. (2015) emphasized that the lack of structure or pre-warning to changes cause stress to students with ASD due to their rule-bound nature. The Pacer Center (2015) includes a transitioning strategy such as alerting the student several minutes before a transition from one activity to another. Such transition prevention strategy is similar to the evidence-based classroom strategy developing and teaching predictable classroom routines (OSEP, 2015) and making the problem behavior irrelevant with anticipation and reminders (OSEP, 2015). To be specific, the teacher establishes and maintains classroom routines. The teacher frontloads the expectations about the

upcoming task before ending the current or preferred activity. Providing transition strategies could also include enlisting the student, who is struggling with transition, to help with passing out papers, erasing the board, and lining other students to leave the room, among others (Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017, p. 230). These are examples of strategies that could help support students with transitioning difficulties.

Peer-related needs. To further support the participation of SWDs in inclusive settings, it is also crucial that accommodations are provided for typically-performing students (Able et al., 2015; Brock et al., 2016). Learning more about SWDs helps to better understand their differences and disabilities (Able et al., 2015; Toson et al., 2013). Such knowledge should help improve the quality of interactions in the school community. For example, when peers are aware that a classmate does not interact much with other students, they could initiate the conversation and accommodate them in collaborative work or play. When some students have interests that are not age-appropriate (Able et al., 2015), peers could be more tolerant and patient of such behavior during their conversation. Otherwise, typically-performing students either ignore or do not seek out SWDs to join activities (Brock et al., 2016). Acceptance of SWDs becomes superficial, and no relationship or friendship is established inside and outside of the classrooms. Moreover, Brock et al. (2016) found in their study that peer-supported interventions, with teacher facilitation and training, can help improve SWDs' learning outcomes. In essence, a school culture that embraces and respects individual differences supports students' social needs, including also those of students without disabilities.

Overall, supporting all students' social needs at school is a critical factor in effective implementation of inclusion. Many educators commit to fully supporting SWDs so that they remain successful in the general education setting (Umhoefer et al., 2015, p. 362). These educators provide varied and abundant opportunities for SWDs to participate with their peers fully. The community definition of inclusion, Definition 4 above, highlights such support from the school community members (i.e., faculty, staff, students) to value and respect individuals' differences. "It is very important to remember that a child's self-concept – as well as an adult's, too – is modified in daily social interactions, the adults and peers being reflectors of the child's self" (Lakkala et al., 2016, p. 53). Human interaction impacts learning. Kallemeyn (2014) also argued that every human encounter in school systems shapes the knowledge of the individuals and the organizations itself. The theory of organizational learning by Argyris and Schön (1978), which conceptually frames this study, also supports the significance of social interaction in any form of human knowledge. Thus, providing support to students' social needs impact the success of implementing inclusive practices.

Teacher Needs and Experiences

In the current literature on inclusion, there is an extensive amount of research that focuses on teacher-related factors and needs. After all, the role that teachers play is the most crucial factor in inclusion (Schwab et al., 2015); they are the stakeholders directly implementing inclusive practices with the students. Thus, it is critical to learn about educators' experiences to get an accurate understanding of the circumstances in schools.

Several components are necessary to support educators in implementing inclusive services effectively.

Positive attitude toward inclusion. The characteristics of educators play a vital role in inclusive classrooms. Cameron (2014) and Choi et al. (2017) asserted that in order to implement inclusion effectively, teachers need to have an equity-based outlook on education. This means that educators need to have a positive attitude about inclusion to support all students more effectively (Brock et al., 2016; Lakkala et al., 2016; Monsen et al., 2014; Paju et al., 2016). Such perspective is indicative of teachers having a community definition of inclusion as discussed earlier in Definition 4: the school community adjusts to students' individual needs instead of students keeping up with the rigid curriculum and previously established norms.

Although some educators do not initially have a positive attitude about inclusion, their perceptions may change depending on their experiences (Paju et al., 2016). Based on the level of support teachers receive, some who experiences success in supporting SWDs start to have a more positive attitude about inclusion. Meynert (2014) added that educators need a change of mentality to improve classroom practices. With such a social justice perspective and a growth mindset, educators can create more opportunities for all students to learn. Teachers can also help resolve issues that arise, which I discuss further in the following section on barriers in inclusion. Morgan (2016) added that to sustain collaborative efforts, teachers need their "soft skills"; that is the individual's personal traits that allow them to interact harmoniously with one another. Individuals with "soft skills" can communicate and collaborate with others more effectively. I have seen this

hold in many schools as administrators and teachers resolve issues concerning collaboration. Therefore, individual members carry out the process for organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996). While other factors help both RETs and SETs do their jobs well, having a positive outlook about inclusion leads to more effective instruction.

Shared vision. Just like in any other organization, a shared vision or a unified commitment is necessary to attain any organizational goal. Setting a common goal or a vision can help achieve stakeholders' buy-in and follow through with the essential steps of implementation (Kozleski et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Urton et al., 2014; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). Kozleski et al. (2015) demonstrated that a shared vision of providing inclusive education could create a trusting school climate. The stakeholders (i.e., administrators, educators, parents, students, and community members) can resolve the challenges that could arise in the process of implementing inclusion. Such a process is similar to Argyris and Schön's (1978) concept of error detection. With the conceptual framework of this study rooted in the theory of organizational learning, Argyris and Schön's work on the idea of error detection and correction is paramount to implementing and sustaining inclusive practices. When all the stakeholders agree to the same vision, they can resolve conflict despite their differences in attitude and practice (Hartman, 2016). Furthermore, Brock et al. (2016) concluded in their study that co-teachers resolve inclusive difficulties when they agree on a shared vision at the beginning of the collaboration. Therefore, with the school's shared vision as the end goal, the school staff can collaborate on instructional decisions that need to be changed and sustained.

Administrative support. With a positive outlook and a shared vision on inclusion, there also has to be a robust administrative body to support inclusive practices. District- and school-level support should be in pursuit of increasingly inclusive learning spaces and communities (Algozzine et al., 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015; Schwab et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015). Such support can be in many forms and can impact various aspects of the implementation phase of inclusion. Districts or school administrators organize PDs and professional collaboration in schools. PD programs could help disseminate information on effective inclusive practices and current policies in special education. Such initiatives promote staff knowledge and expertise: both of which contribute to effective inclusive practices (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015). Quality and relevant PD programs could be conducted before and throughout the school year so that there is structured support for educators. As a result, the administrative staff is promoting capacity building–another critical factor of inclusion (Kozleski et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Paju et al., 2016).

Also, superintendents, special education directors, and/or school administrators could support inclusion in terms of allocating equitable distribution of resources (Algozzine, et al., 2017; Meynert, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Weiss et al., 2015). Current research supports the need for allocating funds for resources required to implement inclusion. First, some reorganization of building resources such as providing a collaborative SET, an instructional assistant, and specially-designed materials among others, are needed to support RETs in their inclusive roles (Meynert, 2014). RETs cannot

be simply expected to effectively deliver the changes brought about by inclusion without any support. Also, since configuration of instructional staffing could dictate the inclusion service model implemented in a school (Morningstar et al., 2015), there has to be funding to hire extra personnel. While full-time co-teaching is the most effective model to provide inclusive support (Brock et al., 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015), the most common staffing model was an instructional assistant providing inclusion support in the general education classrooms (Morningstar et al., 2015). Effective administrators in both district- and building-levels are mindful of their roles to advocate for the required staff (i.e., both certified and classified), training programs, materials, and other types of resources required to promote appropriate education for all students. Thus, an effective support system is critical to the implementation and sustainment of inclusion and in any educational initiative.

Co-teaching. As previously suggested, one common form of effective professional collaboration in inclusion is full-time co-teaching. St. John and Babo (2015) defined co-teaching as two certified educators, a regular and a special education teacher, sharing the same physical space and assuming equal responsibilities to reach all students. Such a practice entails several responsibilities: co-planning, differentiating, co-teaching, handling discipline, and collaborative problem-solving, among others. Likewise, Lakkala et al. (2016) argued that there are several key features of co-teaching, but also noted the impact of sharing authority and common planning. Morgan (2016) added that co-teachers need to communicate, share power and control, and be flexible. This means that full-time collaboration is necessary for effective co-teaching. During the instruction phase,

however, co-teaching takes different forms: One-teach-one-assist is the most common form (Shogren, McCart, et al. 2015), station teaching, team-teaching, parallel teaching, and alternate teaching (St. John & Babo, 2015). The form of co-teaching taking place could be determined by different factors, such as issues of control, teacher preference, personality, resources, and/or classroom dynamics could impact collaboration (Morgan, 2016). Such factors could explain the form of co-teaching that occurs and the type of service delivery model that educators provide; consequently, the provision of inclusion varies throughout the nation. Thus, there are several factors that impact co-teaching and professional collaborative practices.

Professional collaboration. Educators need to engage in professional collaboration to improve inclusive services for all students (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Brock et al., 2016; Lakkala et al., 2016; Meynert 2014; Morgan, 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Schwab et al., 2015). From the time that inclusion teams are established, the administrative team any need to initiate collaboration among educators (Morgan, 2016). Educators are overwhelmed with tasks that require immediate attention (i.e., scheduling, teaching, lesson planning, etc.) that they do not always prioritize pre-planning with their collaborative teachers. Even if teachers attempt to do so, some educators who are new to inclusive collaboration revert to working independently (Hartman, 2016). It is also critical for collaborative practitioners to agree on a shared vision and to conduct team-reflection throughout this process (Brock et al., 2016). Professional collaboration requires a strong start and ongoing efforts to sustain it; hence, it is a challenging task. Flannery and Hellemn (2015)

and Paju et al. (2016) concluded that district and school administrators should provide PD programs for more effective cooperation between RETs and SETs. There is a constant need to offer PD programs for educators involved in inclusive professional collaboration.

Collaboration takes place before an IEP is created (Südkamp, Pohl, & Weinert, 2015) and goes further after IEP meetings are conducted (Hartman, 2016). Collaborative teams plan and IEPs together. RETs are also responsible for implementing the accommodations and modifications as stated on the IEPs (Department of Education, Federal Register, 2006). Provision of accommodations and modifications is a team effort that requires interdisciplinary collaboration or shared expertise (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Clarke et al., 2016; Conderman & Heidin, 2015; Lakkala et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014). RETs (the content experts) benefit from the support and expertise of SETs (the intervention experts) and vice versa. Paju et al. (2016) pointed out that SETs are trusted as experts, by their fellow educators, when it comes to implementing IEPs and differentiating content. In several schools of my employment, I have experienced and witnessed fellow SETs consult RETs for content-related questions and concerns. Thus, RET and SETs are valuable resources to one another, and professional collaboration is an essential factor in including all students.

Barriers in Inclusion

While several studies highlight the components of effective inclusion, there has not been a wide-scale focus on improving inclusive practices (Blank & Smithson, 2014). Perhaps, other than high-risk state assessments, the varying implementation phases of inclusion (across classrooms, schools, districts, and states) determine the necessary steps

for the next level of inclusive work. Current literature on inclusive services provides evidence on several barriers that impede the growth of inclusion (Brock et al., 2016; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015;Meynert, 2014; Monsen et al., 2014; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Morgan, 2016; Morningstar et al, 205; Paju et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014). The lack of consideration for student and teacher needs impedes the effective implementation of inclusion. Therefore, I synthesize below the common themes on barriers in inclusion.

Negative mind-set. An organizational member's mindset can determine the success or failure of any task (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Previous studies supported that some educators and administrators have a negative attitude about inclusion (Monsen et al., 2014; Morgan, 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014). According to Roiha (2014), such mindsets were determined by the overwhelming changes and fear of the inability to provide quality inclusive services (Roiha, 2014). However, in other cases, some teachers have a negative attitude about inclusion because of some underlying beliefs.

One of the most difficult and unexplored areas in teaching is teachers' awareness of their own social, moral, and ethical beliefs. Educators need to examine their beliefs as they impact their attempts to support inclusion of SWDs (Kozleski et al., 2015; Lalvani, 2015; Naraian & Oyler, 2015; Waitoller et al., 2016). Unintentionally, these beliefs can carry over to how educators perform their daily job responsibilities (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Peeters & Robinson, 2015). For example, when some educators say that SWDs need to be transferred to a more restrictive special education placement due to students' inability to keep up with the standards, they imply that "inclusion is not for everyone" (Lalvani, 2015). Such a belief also implies that there has to be a qualifying ability level to

be included with their regularly performing peers. Educators have underlying beliefs and reasons that impact their negative mind-set about inclusive practices.

Overall, every stakeholder must have a positive mind-set about inclusion (Monsen et al., 2014). Otherwise, educators will not abandon traditional teaching practices that impede the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Moreno et al., 2015). Roiha (2014) found that teacher perception correlated with their teaching methods, but also noted that a negative attitude could hinder collaborative practices. Hence, Morgan (2016) and Schwab et al. (2015) argued that teachers are the most important factor in inclusion; their attitude determine their actions in managing and sustaining inclusive environments. Thus, a negative mind-set about inclusion can negatively impact the success of all students and even other teachers' progress in inclusive settings.

Lack of shared vision. While I discussed earlier that having a shared vision or a common goal among stakeholders promotes inclusive efforts, the lack thereof significantly impede inclusion (Weiss et al., 2015). The idea of having "one school for all*,"* which supports the community definition of inclusion, started the whole concept of inclusion (Meynert, 2014). Regardless of student ability or differences, this vision promoted the mind-set that all students belong in the same school, and the educators can make the necessary changes to educate all children. However, this vision has to be agreed upon and communicated. With the confusion surrounding inclusion (Able, et al., 2015; Göransson, 2014), the lack of an expressed common goal, or shared vision could explain such inconsistencies. As Argyris and Schön (1978) argued, one of the significant commonalities that organizational members share is a common goal. A school system

without a shared vision on the social justice perspective of inclusion can lead to educators making conflicting decisions that impact all students.

Lack of organizational support. With the changes that inclusion brings forth to pedagogical practices, the lack of organizational support is a barrier to implementing inclusive practices (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Bray et al., 2014; Monsen et al., 2014). I refer to organizational support as any type of structure that administrators put in place to help educators fulfill their job responsibilities.

Structured time for collaboration. Currently, many educators are facing the challenge of not having the time for collaboration built-in during the school day (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Lakkala et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). Having such an opportunity provides general and special educators the structure to co-plan, exchange information, problem-solve, and discuss any topic related to delivering instruction for all students in inclusive settings (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Morgan, 2016). Dedicating time promotes stronger collaborative practices among educators. However, administrators may need to structure such meeting times to set a clear agenda and for teachers to have focused conversations. Structured and on-going meetings are critical for RETs and SETs to negotiate collaborative relationships as they learn to work with one another (Morgan, 2016). Collaborating teachers' schedules do not always allow for daily common planning times, hence the problem of not having time exists. Therefore, administrators could restructure time, as a resource, to help address such an issue (Lakkala et al., 2016; Mulholland & O'Connor 2016; Morgan 2016). Examples that I have seen administrators implement

include: (a) providing time for teachers to co-plan during more flexible days when students are not in school, (b) getting substitutes for teachers to plan together, and (c) creating a modified schedule on a Friday. Without administrative support, it is more difficult for educators to structure time for collaboration.

PD training. Several studies support that educators need more pieces of PD training to assist students in inclusive settings (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Bray et al., 2014; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Moreno et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Shuster et al., 2017). In Bray et al.'s (2014) study, a former SET noted how her special education training and background helped her in accommodating SWDs in her general education classroom. However, at the time of the study, such training was offered for special education teachers only. Likewise, Blank and Smithson (2014) argued for the need to improve the availability of research-based PD training programs, but also noted the participation of school district administrators in such PD programs. Moreno et al. (2015) added that when teachers receive on-going and relative PD sessions, they develop a positive attitude towards inclusion. When teachers receive quality training programs to teach in inclusive classrooms, teacher efficacy also increases (Paju et al., 2016). Thus, the provision of initial and on-going PD training is imperative in transitioning schools to become fully inclusive settings.

Personnel support. With the increasing focus on providing the least restrictive environment for SWDs, it is a challenge when there are not enough personnel to support teachers and SWDs (Lakkala et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). In their study on using behavior modification strategies to support

students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Su-Je and Kwang-Sun (2017) argued that the lack specialized support from SETs contributed to RETs' inability to provide behavior intervention effectively. Such circumstance indicates that educators need more guidance and support as they initially learn to shift utilizing more inclusive practices. Additionally, Roiha (2014) pointed out that not having enough SETs result in less opportunity to practice co-teaching and differentiation. Without enough SETs, it is challenging to plan and implement co-teaching and opportunities to differentiate instruction since such tasks require strong collaboration among educators. Thus, the lack of personnel support has caused many challenges in inclusion.

Oversized caseloads. As a result of not having enough personnel, educators nowadays experience difficulties related to oversized caseloads (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014; Umhoefer et al., 2014). Teachers having a sizeable number of SWDs is one major factor that contributes to teacher burnout and high attrition rates (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014). Given the varying needs of students, not to mention the wide gap of such demands, it is challenging for educators to have a significant number of SWDs in the same caseload. As Kurth and Keegan (2014) argued, the SETs' responsibilities outside of teaching include the following: (a) creating IEPs, (b) scheduling and conducting IEP meetings, (c) supervising paraprofessionals, (d) planning and implementing accommodations and modifications, (e) progress monitoring, (f) communicating with RETs and parents, and (g) many other responsibilities required for collaboration. A large caseload means more IEPs to write and meetings to conduct, more students to plan for and accommodate, and more of

everything that SETs have to do outside of the actual instruction in classrooms. With such big caseloads, some SETs provide consultation services only (Umhoefer et al., 2015) despite the evidence supporting full-time collaboration to be the most effective (Cameron, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016). As a result, researchers argued for administrators to examine all the responsibilities mentioned above and the overall school structure to aid SETs in performing their duties efficiently (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Roiha, 2014).

While SETs can be overwhelmed with a sizeable caseload, RETs also experience having a significant number of SWDs in their classrooms. Lakkala et al. (2016) pointed out that RETs are left by themselves in inclusion classrooms with several SWDs without any support from a SET or a paraprofessional. Such a circumstance is a challenge, especially if the RET had no prior training or experience on how to accommodate SWDs; I further discuss the lack of training in the following section. Additionally, Bray et al. (2014) found that one out of the four teacher participants in their study had 90% of her class to be SWDs. According to the Collaborative Teaching Practices for Exceptional Children (2011), the suggested cap on the number of SWDs in inclusion classes is no more than 33%. However, the percentage may have to be lowered depending on the severity of the students' needs. In fact, in this same document, it stated that:

> if too many students with disabilities are clustered together in one setting, this positive peer exposure is reduced and the desired features of the general education setting (e.g., pace of instruction, cooperative group work, flexible small groups, and peer-tutoring) are greatly compromised. (p. 7)"

Hence, when the cap size exceeds the number of SWDs in the same inclusion class, it hinders the growth of every student in that class: including those without special needs. Therefore, putting too many SWDs under one regular or special education teacher's caseload, without the necessary support, can impede the implementation and growth of effective inclusive practices.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I synthesized the writings of Argyris and Schön on the Theory of Organizational Learning (1978, 1996). I also described the theory's related concepts and how they apply to the problem I am addressing in this study, which is the lack of consistency in implementing inclusive practices. Additionally, I reviewed the relevant contemporary literature on implementing inclusive practices. In the synthesis of the critical concepts related to inclusion, the themes included: several definitions of inclusion; different types of inclusive service delivery models; varying knowledge of disabilities, accommodations, and modifications; student needs and types of support they require; teacher needs and their experiences; and several barriers in inclusion.

Inclusion in special education is an intricate process that requires a paradigm shift for all stakeholders. Without a commonly agreed-upon definition of the term inclusion, the disparity in the provision of services will remain. The variation in definition of the term *inclusion* included: (a) inclusion being a physical placement for SWDs, (b) an educational service provided to SWDs only, (c) an educational service that considers the needs of those students without disabilities yet impacted by inclusion, and (d) a community definition that values respect and acceptance of individual differences. Such

descriptions reflect varying interpretations of the mandate. Consequently, inclusive service delivery models in school systems also differ throughout the United States.

Inclusion is currently being implemented in the United States using different types of inclusive service delivery models. Studies suggested that the full-time co-teaching model yields beneficial results for both teachers and students (see Brock et al., 2016; Tremblay, 2015; Umhoefer et al., 2015; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). Educators both in regular and special education are most able to provide adequate inclusive practices to all students when they have a full-time collaborating teacher; they can share their expertise and resources required to meet the diverse needs of all the students. However, due to lack of resources, two types of service delivery models occur the most: part-time co-teaching (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Morningstar, 2015) and inclusion without co-teaching (Umhoefer et al., 2015). The different types of inclusive service delivery models impact teachers' abilities to support students. Hence, meeting the diverse needs is a challenge in inclusive classrooms, and evidence supports that the inclusive service delivery model that schools provide impacts such problems.

While several inclusive delivery models exist, teachers' knowledge of disabilities, accommodations, and modifications also vary. The following continue to be areas of weaknesses for most RETs involved in inclusion: (a) lack of knowledge on SWDs (see Bray et al., 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015), (b) the pedagogy of addressing exceptional needs (see Able et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Schwab et al., 2015; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015), and (c) knowledge on providing accommodations (see Able et al., 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Paju et

al., 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015) and modifications (see An & Meaney, 2015; Clarke et al., 2016; Fuchs et al., 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Umhoefer et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015). The lack of teacher knowledge supports that further efforts are required to improve education services. I provided examples of accommodations and modifications that are aligned with the IDEA's definition. Overall, educators need more knowledge about their students and their disabilities to provide accommodations and modifications appropriately. Such teacher circumstances are present while they also attempt to address the needs of the other students without disabilities.

State standards and assessments play a critical role in today's instruction in school systems. The rigor and pacing of such standards are designed to promote a consistent curriculum across the nation that prepares all students for success after high school (Cramer & Gallo, 2017; Common Core, 2019). However, evidence supports that instruction, as a result of such standards, leaves little room for differentiation and individualization for students in special education (Bray et al., 2014; Cramer & Gallo, 2017; Kurz et al., 2014). Placement alone does not mean access to the general curriculum, nor a mere exposure to grade-level standards; instead, "all this argues for a definition of access to the general curriculum that is based on empirical evidence of adequate learning" (Fuchs et al., 2015, p. 154). Such a claim means that students' learning outcomes can provide more accurate measures of access to their least restrictive environments. Thus, Cramer and Gallo (2017) argued for more educator training on instruction that aligns standards and IEP academic goals more efficiently.

While standards and state testing offer challenges to educators in inclusive classrooms, researchers documented evidence-based instructional practices and frameworks that could help with the effective implementation of inclusion. Differentiation, as opposed to the one-size-fits-all type of instruction, is useful in addressing the full range of student needs in inclusive classrooms (An & Meaney, 2017; Meynert, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). Also, current studies support explicit instruction to promote learning for SWDs (Bray et al., 2014; Fien et al., 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; McGillicuddy & O'Donell, 2014; Morgan, 2016). Along with these instructional practices are instructional frameworks that are responsive to the diverse needs of students in the same classroom: the universal design for learning or UDL (Choi et al., 2017; Fuchs et al., 2015; Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015), and the multitiered system of support or MTSS (Algozzine et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2017; Morningstar et al., 2015; Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015) also known as RtI or response to intervention. These are the research-based practices that, when aligned with students' individual needs, could enhance current education services. All these instructional practices and framework mentioned above conclude the section on student academic needs in inclusive classrooms.

Although the area of academics is a priority in school systems, multiple studies indicate an active link between academic learning and social interaction. SWDs, especially, could benefit from social inclusion in the school environment (Able et al., 2015; Brock et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Lakkala et al., 2016; Meynert, 2014; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Shuster et al., 2017). Able et al. reported results for social needs

support to include: (a) social relationships, (b) social academics, (c)self-advocacy, (d) transitioning, and (e) peer-related needs, which are consistent with other relevant contemporary literature mentioned above. Likewise, the theory of organizational learning by Argyris and Schön (1978) support the significance of social interaction in any form of human learning. About student success, research points to the impact of social interaction on students' academic achievement in inclusive environments.

In addition to students needing support, research suggested that educators involved in inclusion also have a wide variety of experiences and needs that require assistance. Factors such having as a shared vision within the school system (Kozleski et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Urton et al., 2014; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015), administrative support (Algozzine et al., 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015; Schwab et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015), available co-teaching resources (Lakkala et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Shogren, McCart, et al. 2015; St. John & Babo, 2015), and professional collaboration (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Brock et al., 2016; Lakkala et al., 2016; Meynert 2014; Morgan, 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Schwab et al., 2015; Weiss et al., 2015) directly impact educators' involvement in inclusion. However, teachers' positive attitude towards inclusion is the single most instrumental factor in implementing effective inclusive practices (Brock et al., 2016; Lakkala et al., 2016; Monsen et al., 2014; Paju et al., 2016). Morgan (2016) and Schwab et al. (2015) concluded the same about teacher attitude, but also noted that teachers are the most critical element in inclusion. Thus, the factors (determined by circumstances at schools or districts)

mentioned above, paired with teacher attitude impact the experiences and needs of teachers involved in inclusion.

Although teacher-related factors and other circumstances at schools impact the implementation of inclusion, researchers who have focused on special education presented several barriers to inclusion. As previously suggested, a negative mindset causes for any organization's task to fail (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Educators' negative mindset about inclusion impedes the implementation of effective inclusive practices (Monsen et al., 2014; Morgan, 2016; Paju et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014). At the same time, the lack of a shared vision within the school makes it difficult to make changes or sustain inclusive efforts (Kozleski et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Urton et al., 2014; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015; Weiss et al., 2015). Thus, contrary to what teachers could be aware of, one of the factors that impede the effective implementation of inclusion is the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. Collectively, the organizational members' lack of shared vision also hinders the changes required for inclusion.

Outside teacher beliefs and traits, the lack of organization support manifests in several ways. Educators throughout the nation receive varied types of organizational support, and the lack thereof negatively impacts the quality of inclusive service delivery models (Bray et al., 2014; Monsen et al., 2014). Several researchers suggested that time for collaboration within the school day could be structured for teachers (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Lakkala et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). Doing so would allow for a built-in time for

inclusion teams to collaborate and provide support to one another. Additionally, there is a lack of organizational support to provide PD training programs (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Bray et al., 2014; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Shuster et al., 2017). There is also a lack of required personnel to deliver inclusive practices (Lakkala et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). As a result, educators in both regular and special education struggle with oversized student caseloads (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014; Umhoefer et al., 2014). The wide variety of student needs, the lack of organizational support, and the sizeable student-to-teacher ratio pose challenges for educators who lack the training and support to teach in inclusive classrooms.

When research suggests that educators have varying interpretations, definitions, knowledge, and application of inclusion, there is a lack of consistency in providing inclusive services to SWDs in the United States. Such inconsistency can lead to misconceptions and confusion that negatively impact, not only the SWDs but all the members of the school community. There are afflictive areas of student and teacher needs in inclusion that need to be addressed. Learning about detailed information (i.e., the type of inclusion model used, accommodations and modifications on classwork and who is providing them, size of caseloads, amount of time students spent on grade level and instructional level tasks, types of intervention materials, etc.) on the current circumstances and teacher-related experiences in inclusive classrooms is a piece that needs further inquiry. It is critical to determine the current state of inclusion in classrooms for growth and improvement; Argyris and Schön (1978) supports such a

process in organizational learning. Therefore, the purpose of inquiring about the details of inclusion's status in schools leads to the methodology design in the following chapter.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology on gathering qualitative data through semistructured interviews of general and special education teachers in inclusive grades 3-6 classrooms. This chapter comprises of the following sections: (a) research design and rationale, (b) role of the researcher, (c) methodology, (d) issues of trustworthiness, and (e) summary of the chapter.

Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in Grades 3-6 inclusion classrooms. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale for choosing a basic qualitative study to gather information on the circumstances and experiences of teachers related to implementing inclusion. I also provide a description of my role as the researcher. Then, I describe the methodology of conducting semistructured interviews with regular and special educators involved in inclusion classes. I also describe strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures in the study. Finally, I provide a summary of this chapter and introduce the next chapter.

I used the following research questions to guide the study:

1. What classroom demographics do regular and special education teachers report who are providing services in inclusive classrooms?
2. How do regular and special education teachers provide instructional support for SWDs in inclusion classes?
3. What are inclusion teachers' experiences in meeting the instructional needs of SWDs in varied inclusion classes?

Research Design and Rationale

According to Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018), a quantitative design lends itself to number-driven inquiries to achieve more generalizable results. Also, a quantitative design requires hypothesis development, which is an educated guess of the result, relationships, or outcomes related to the research question (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Researchers

who use a quantitative design collect data through questionnaires or experiments to draw conclusions (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) added that quantitative researchers examine the relationships between dependent and independent variables after they have been operationalized.

Instead of using numerical data, qualitative researchers examine lived experiences and human perceptions (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). As Patton (2015) explained, qualitative researchers aim for holistic and contextual exploration of stories of phenomena or individuals from which meaning is interpreted. Qualitative methodology may involve multiple data collection processes such as interviews, observations, and document analyses to investigate the problem. Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) added that an in-depth qualitative approach allows for rich and telling narratives of the participants. The approach involves real-world inquiry of participants to make meaning of the collected data in a natural setting (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

For the current study, a basic qualitative design was appropriate in describing and interpreting educators' responses that reflected their experiences in inclusive classrooms. According to Merriam (2002), the researcher using a basic descriptive and interpretive qualitative design is concerned with understanding how participants make meaning of the situation. This means that the researcher captures and explores human experience and makes meaning of it. With in-depth interviewing as the inquiry approach, I entered real-world setting by interacting with the regular and special education teachers in their place of work to learn about their circumstances and experiences in teaching inclusion classes (see Patton, 2015). Capturing the array of factors that make up the circumstances in

inclusive classrooms may improve the understanding of general and special education teachers' experiences.

The purpose of basic qualitative research is to discover the truth and treat knowledge as the end itself (Patton, 2015). I described the practical knowledge that can be learned about inclusion through the conditions under which the implementation of inclusion and teacher experiences varies. Through basic qualitative inquiry, the researcher gains rich and detailed information by gathering and analyzing important themes during content analysis (Patton, 2015). Merriam (2002) added that researchers present and discuss the descriptive findings with reference to the literature that initially framed the project, which for the current study were the TOL framework and current research-based studies on how inclusion is implemented in classrooms.

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher, I conducted the interviews with the seven regular and five special education teachers involved in inclusion. I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. To maintain objective and impartial data collection during the interview process, I did not interview teachers from my school. Although I interviewed two teachers in my school district, they did not work under my supervision or have a prior relationship with me. I did not have any supervisory or instructor relationships with the participants.

After several years of work in urban and rural schools, my experience in a smaller school system in a rural area is different. A lot of the differences stem from fewer resources available for teachers and students. Given this experience, I needed to watch

for my bias about teachers in larger urban districts having better circumstances than those from smaller rural districts. To mitigate this bias, I followed the exploratory protocol of my follow-up questions in the semistructured interviews with teachers.

Methodology

This section includes details about participant selection; the researcher-developed instrument; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and the data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

To conduct this study, I recruited participants from a population of general and special education teachers from school districts of varying demographics. Participants can provide in-depth information about specific circumstances central to the research purpose (Patton, 2015). All participants were involved with students in inclusion classes in Grades 3, 4, 5, or 6 and had at least 3 years of professional experience in their current school. I used purposeful sampling by asking school administrators, who had agreed to allow me to interview in their schools, about the number of educators in inclusion classrooms and whether I could approach these teachers. This sampling approach ensured representativeness in choosing educators who met the selection criteria.

I used purposeful sampling to select information-rich cases within the region of a south-central U.S. state. Several studies that I reviewed provided a tentative explanation regarding educational resources to improve teaching experiences with inclusion (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Bray et al., 2014; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Lakkala et al., 2016; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Roiha 2014;

Shuster et al., 2017; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). To identify the schools in a south-central state that could allow me to describe the varying circumstances and experiences of teachers in inclusion, I needed a diverse group of school districts to get a more rounded picture of different situations that educators deal with in inclusive settings. I sought diversity in size of school district, location (rural, urban), and nature of community (racial, ethnic, and economic mix). This helped me ensure broad representation from participants because teachers in one location alone may share ideas more freely with each other.

The number of participants to be interviewed in a qualitative study depends on the purpose of the study, the validity within the educational community, and the availability of time and resources (Baker & Edwards, 2012). I interviewed five special education teachers and seven regular education teachers to gather responses to answer the research questions. In a similar study about the responsibilities of general and special education teachers teaching students with learning disabilities, Kittrell (2017) obtained data saturation with five general educators and four special educators. Although I wanted an equal number of participants from general and special education, there are significantly more general education teachers in every building. Interviewing seven regular education and five special education teachers enabled me to obtain data saturation for this study.

Instrumentation

Using a basic qualitative approach, I conducted interviews as the main source of data to provide a rich and in-depth description of participants' experiences (see Harling,

2012) to make meaning (see Patton, 2015). I used an interview protocol, transcriptions, and notes that I took during the interview process.

Interview Protocol

Interview protocols include a preplanned set of questions and follow-up questions to guide the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I created an interview protocol (see Appendix B) with questions that addressed the study's research questions. Maxwell (2009) argued that interview questions should generate the data needed to answer the research questions. Similar to Kittrell's (2017) study, I developed questions based on themes that emerged in the literature review. There were three domains in this protocol that were based on the review of current academic literature on inclusion and several years of experience in the field of special education: planning, lesson implementation, and assessment or student evaluation. Using these domains, I developed interview questions that were exploratory in nature. Although these were planned questions, the protocol was open for revision prior to and/or during the interview. This protocol also included follow-up questions. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted, this is one way to reach data saturation; with the research questions framing the study's purpose, researchers dig deeper through probes and follow-up questions until there is a complete understanding of the responses. During the interview process, I crossed out the questions that participants already addressed in previous questions. Protocols can be modified to fit the flow of the interview and the responses from participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The procedure involved in identifying participants included submitting the Walden institutional review board (IRB) application for research ethics review. Upon approval from Walden's IRB (12-20-18-0406925) to conduct research, I contacted the school districts to seek for their IRB approval. However, there was none needed. Then, I sent an e-mail to special education directors and building administrators from three different school districts to request permission to interview regular and special education teachers. In this e-mail, I explained that teachers' and schools' names would be kept confidential and that a one- to two-page summary of the research results would be shared through e-mail once the study was completed. Then, I asked for the names of all the teachers involved in teaching inclusion in third through sixth grade who had at least 3 years of experience in their current school. Once the administrators agreed, I asked them to submit the letter of cooperation to Walden's IRB and, in a separate e-mail, send me the names of all their teachers. Asking for all the teachers who met the criteria was beneficial; I could ensure representativeness of teacher participants and, if some did not volunteer, I had at least 12 participants.

After getting approval from Walden's IRB, I sent e-mails to the teachers. I included information about their voluntary participation and attached the consent form indicating that their names and schools would be kept confidential and they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also described the study's problem and purpose and the approximate length of the interview (30-45 minutes). In addition, I explained that their schools would be the interview location for the agreed upon date and time, and that

a one- to two-page summary of the results would be e-mailed to them once the study was completed. After I received responses noting their agreement, I sent the pre-interview Google form and the interview protocol. In the Google form, I explained the importance of the interviewer knowing some background information about the interviewees, and the interview protocol gave participants a chance to learn about what the interview was about.

On the day of the scheduled interview, I met with the participants in their schools and conducted the interviews. I expressed my gratitude for their willingness to participate in this study. In the initial part of this interview meeting, I asked for the participant's permission to audio record the interview using my phone (with the application AVPro), and I explained how it could help with the accuracy of data collection. Then, I discussed how I would e-mail them a transcript of the interview as soon as I reviewed the transcript so they could review it for accuracy. I also discussed how I would delete names in the transcript, including descriptors and other details that might be mentioned. Once I started the recording, I told the participants that I would use codenames for them. Then, I discussed how participants would exit the study after they had reviewed the interview transcript. Once the participants were ready, I started the recording with my phone.

In addition to the recording, I asked for a copy of the teachers' schedule. In the beginning of the interview, I used the schedule to ask questions that helped describe and clarify their daily activities. Also, I took notes during the interview. Initially, I planned on jotting down a gist of the participants' responses. However, I also found myself jotting down follow-up questions that I wanted to ask to either clarify the response or to ask for

more details. Doing so helped me remember the follow-up questions that I needed to ask. Once the interview was over, I stopped the recording and I reiterated that the participant would receive an email with the transcription. Once again, I expressed my gratitude.

To get the audio recorded data from my phone, I initially planned on using NVivo to transcribe the interview. However, I ended up uploading the audio recording to www.temi.com. This website provided a transcription of the audio recording in a matter of seconds and charged a small amount based on the length of the recording. In this website, I listened to the audio while reviewing and editing the transcription. Then, I downloaded the edited transcript and e-mailed them to the participants. Two teachers responded about minor corrections while the rest stated that the transcript was accurate.

Data Analysis Plan

For this study, I conducted interviews as the primary source of data. I used the steps that Rubin and Rubin (2012) presented in analyzing responsive interviews. To ensure accuracy, I reviewed and edited the transcripts while listening to the audio on www.temi.com; I also referred to my annotations on the schedule that the participants provided. After making the necessary changes that my participants pointed out in their e-mail, I uploaded the transcript to NVivo (a QDA software). On my second review of the transcript, I used open coding to look for meaningful units. Then, I sorted the codes into categories based on the specific research questions. Across the interviews, I found the excerpts with the same code and grouped them for a summary of that file. I identified themes, patterns, and discrepant examples from the interviews. Then, I wrote a descriptive and multidimensional preliminary framework for data analysis to ensure

credibility.

Issues of Trustworthiness

here are many ways to ensure credibility of data gathered through qualitative interviews. First, I established a positive relationship with each of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I sent an e-mail to introduce myself and briefly discussed my study. After a day or two, I made a follow-up phone to schedule interviews and answer questions the participants had. Then, I the Google Form and the interview protocol through e-mail. When we finally met, I conducted a pre-brief, or a warm-up, before the interview formally started. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized that starting informally with some basic information can lead to a smooth start to the meeting itself. I succinctly shared the purpose of the study and reminded them of the following: their ability to withdraw at any time and to discuss ideas that they are comfortable sharing. During the interview, listened attentively. Afterward, I expressed my gratitude once again for their willingness to share their time and knowledge. Lastly, I reiterated that I would provide them the interview transcript before it is analyzed and published as data, and that a one- to two-page summary of the research results will be e-mailed to them once it is completed.

For this qualitative study, I followed steps to address issues of trustworthiness. To ensure credibility in the data analysis stage, I engaged in "systematic and conscientious search for alternative themes" (Patton, 2015, p. 653). Apart from the themes that emerged in the literature review, I was open to other themes that may emerge as I analyzed the interview data. I looked at other ways of organizing data; Patton (2015) referred to this

process as inductive data analysis. Additionally, I used a logical analytic design by looking for a rival theme which can be supported by the collected data. Patton concluded that when finalizing the study's findings, it is critical to keep track of and document the alternative system that the researcher used in analyzing themes.

To establish transferability, I included a variety of description and variation of the environment and circumstances in inclusion classrooms. To get a more rounded picture of the conditions, I gathered data on the circumstances, district and building conditions, and other variables that educators work with to teach in inclusive classrooms. Providing details on the class or caseload size, teachers' daily schedules, different types of available support (i.e., paraprofessionals, instructional coaches, time for collaboration) and types of training, for example, could help readers understand the context that shapes the participants' experiences.

To establish dependability, I used data triangulation and audit trails. In addition to the notes that I took during the interview, I transcribed the audio recording. Transcribing the interview helped in clarifying the interview notes I took in a more objective and unbiased manner. Patton (2015) argued that keeping an audit trail helps facilitate objectivity and rigor of the collected data. Therefore, I determined and documented themes that emerged: including those that were unexpected outcomes or contradictory to the findings from the literature review. Keeping an audit trail helped me trace the evolution of ideas or themes. Then, I wrote a summary of each interview, in which Rubin and Rubin emphasized, to highlight the main points that each interviewee shared. Patton stressed the importance of quoting the participants' responses so that the readers would

be able to differentiate between empirical findings (i.e., the participants' actual responses) and the researcher's analysis. I presented the study's results and made it when I am transitioning to my interpretation of the findings.

I used strategies to of reflexivity to ensure confirmability. Patton (2015) defined reflexivity as an in-depth, systematic, and analytic reflection in research. As I documented all themes that emerged, I was open to providing valid interpretations to the unexpected or contradictory outcomes, and I supported them with evidence. Such a process entails making meaning of interpretations (Patton, 2015), which is a metacognitive approach that could challenge the researcher's pre-determined beliefs. Therefore, I kept track of the evolution of themes based on the literature review and those that emerged from the actual interview. Doing so helped me explain the possible shift or confirmation of ideas related to the focus of this study. In the discussion of the findings, I discussed the changes in my thinking brought about by the process of this qualitative inquiry.

Ethical Procedures

There are ethical procedures that a researcher must follow to ensure the protection of human subjects. Patton (2015) argued that basic qualitative research is concerned with the truth, rather than action. I explained the following agreements to gain access to participants. To request for preliminary approval from the district or school leaders, I noted that district, school, and teacher names will be kept confidential, and student names will not be shared with me. I also included that I will furnish the administrators a one- to two-page summary of the research results once the dissertation is published. Once I found

out about teacher names, I communicated the same information with the teacher participants. To further ensure trust and confidentiality from the teachers, I made it clear that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time. I discussed that teacher and school names will be concealed; the only detail that could be indirectly disclosed is the size of the district to provide some demographic descriptor.

In addition to confidentiality, the researcher has other ethical responsibilities to the interviewees. I indicated on the IRB application the measures that I took to protect the teacher participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) argued that the interviewer needs to show respect and honor promises. I asked for the participants' informed consent to audio record the interview. Additionally, the researcher must not pressure the interviewees for answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). If the participants feel reluctant to participate in the study or answer a question during the interview, they should not be forced to do so. After learning more details about the study, a few teachers expressed regrets of not being able to participate in the study. I communicated that I respect their decisions, and I found other willing participants. Lastly, researchers should not do anything that could cause harm to the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers should not make any judgments or comments that could make the participants feel embarrassed or sorry for having shared the information during the interview. During the interview, I discussed how specific information would be kept anonymous. For instances that particular names were mentioned, I explained that I would delete those in the transcript. To further maintain data confidentiality, I stored interview data and participant demographics in a password-

protected electronic folder. During the interview, I listened respectfully and responsibly. I followed the steps to ensure that ethical procedures are in place throughout this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I restated the study's purpose, which was to determine the circumstances and experiences of teachers in Grades 3-6 inclusion classrooms, and the research questions as described in the first chapter. I discussed basic qualitative as the research design for this study and the rationale behind it. As the sole researcher, I was the interviewer for at least 12 participants that agree to participate in this research. To conclude this section, I stated my biases and my role as the researcher.

In the methodology section, I identified the population to be third-sixth grade general and special education teachers within the region of a south-central state. To gather rich data about the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers involved in inclusion, I used purposive sampling to interview 12 participants. With the sampling size and saturation considered, all participants should have at least three years of inclusion experience in their current schools. I also discussed that the procedure for contacting the participants would be to start with preliminary approval from the district and school leaders. Afterward, I initiated contact with the teachers (who meet the criteria) through e-mail while introducing myself, the study and its purpose, and the procedure involved.

Following the section on participant selection, I discussed the instrumentation details of this study. Through semistructured interviews, I gathered data using an interview protocol I created (see Appendix B) and an audio recorder as permitted by the

participants. With the instrument being researcher-developed, I discussed that the themes that emerged from the review of current literature on inclusion and my experience in special education would inform such interview protocol. Also, I explained how having a minimum of 12 teacher participants and conducting the second interview, as a follow-up procedure if necessary, will help establish content validity and sufficiency of data.

Since I collected the data, I also discussed the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I conducted prebrief and debrief processes during the interview to ensure that participants clearly understand when and how they exit the study. With voluntary participation, the teachers can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview, which should last between 30-45 minutes, would be at a time that both the participant and I agreed upon, and the location is at the participant's school. I asked for the participants' permission to audio record the interview with the assurance that I will delete any names or other descriptors in the transcription. Lastly, I emailed the transcription for the participants to review before treating and publishing any information as data. Once I received each participant's confirmation that the transcription is accurate, then I communicated that they had exited the study.

The data analysis plan included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility and dependability, I included an explanation on how I conducted the following: using data triangulation and my notes alongside the transcription of the interview, determining ideas and summarizing each interview data, comparing all the themes that will emerge, and keeping a record of all topics including those that are contradictory or unexpected. For transferability, I also discussed that I

would provide a description and variation in participant selection. This way, readers could determine which circumstances are most similar to theirs; this addresses the problem on the lack of implementation details on inclusion (Lakkala et al., 2016). Finally, I discussed the strategy of reflexivity to establish confirmability. I would be flexible to the themes that would emerge, especially those that were unexpected or contradictory to my preliminary findings based on the literature review.

In the last section, I discussed measures for ethical procedures. I explained the agreements that I would communicate with the district and school administrators to gain access to the teacher participants; this includes ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. I also discussed the steps that I took to ensure that the teachers feel respected and that they did not feel pressured nor harmed for participating in the study. To conclude, I discussed the summary of this chapter.

In the following chapter, I discuss the study's setting, participant demographics, the process of data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study. Then, I conclude with a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers of students in Grades 3-6 inclusion classrooms. The research questions addressed the classroom demographics of regular and special education teachers providing services to students in inclusive classrooms, how they provide instructional support for students with disabilities (SWDs) included in the general education setting for most of the day, and their experiences in meeting the instructional needs of these SWDs. In this chapter, I present the participant demographics, the data collection process, and data analysis of the 12 interviews I conducted. Lastly, I discuss the evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

This study was conducted in three public school districts in a south-central U.S. state. One district serves about 16,000 students; 13% receive special education services, and 57% receive free and reduced lunch. The two other school districts' demographics are similar. Enrollment is about 3,000; 14% are SWDs and 64% receive free and reduced lunch. In this study, I purposefully sampled regular and special education teachers from Grades 3-6 from three different school districts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), about 67,000 of the population are under the age of 18, and about 41,000 of the students in this region are in public schools; 6,300 have IEPs (about 16% of the total student population). To capture a range of information-rich cases, I determined that interviewing a dozen participants form three districts of varying sizes would capture a representative sample of the region (see Patton, 2015). I interviewed

teachers from six different schools in three counties to capture the diversity of participant circumstances.

Demographics

The participants in the study were general and special education teachers in public schools of Grades 3-6 in a region of a south-central U.S. state. All educator participants had at least 3 years of teaching experience in their current school, and their professional experiences range from 5 to 30 years of teaching. I purposefully sampled the teacher participants from three different school districts; two of these districts are in rural communities, and one is a larger district located in an urban community. Five of the teacher participants are from the smaller school districts. Two of these five are special education teachers (SETs), and three are regular education teachers (RETs). Seven are from the bigger school district, three of whom are SETs and four are RETs.

Special Education Teacher Participants

Participant 1. Participant 1 is a SET whose experience is in the 16- to 20-year range. She is currently serving 14-16 SWDs, all of whom are in one grade level. Her daily schedule involves teaching reading, writing, and math in both general education (inclusion) and special education (pullout) settings. Although the students in her caseload are placed in different homerooms, she pulls them all in one class for reading and math to provide collaboration. She stays for both hour-long reading and math blocks. During these collaboration services in the general education classrooms, 52% of the students have IEPs. She mainly assists in the collaborative rooms, but she also team-teaches with the RET as needed. In addition to these 2 hours, she also provides inclusion support for

writing in several classes. For pullout services, she provides small group reading and math in the resource room. She shares the same planning time as the regular education teachers whom she collaborates with.

Participant 2. Participant 2 is in the 26- to 30-year range of teaching experience. She is currently serving a total of 14-16 SWDs in two different grade levels. For most of the day, she pulls students out to have small group instruction in the resource setting. She goes in a couple of the general education classrooms to provide 30 minutes of inclusion support where up to 15% of the total students are SWDs. Part of her planning overlaps with one of the grade levels where she serves students.

Participant 3. Participant 3's teaching experience is in the 11- to 15-year range. She currently has 14-16 SWDs from Grades 3-6 in her caseload. Due to her caseload's multiple grade levels, she is not able to go into the general education classrooms for collaboration. Instead, her instructional assistant goes into the inclusion classrooms to provide assistance to the SWDs. In reading and math general education classes, there are up to 8% SWDs and up to 15% in other subject areas. All day long, Participant 3 sees students in her resource room for pull-out services and provides consult as needed with the RETs in her building. This participant has a 25-min lunch and planning combined in the middle of the school day.

Participant 4. Participant 4's teaching experience is in the 5- to 10-year range. In her caseload, she has 11-13 SWDs from two grade levels. Her services are in the areas of reading, writing, math, and social skills. The special education services that she provides are a combination of pullout, collaboration, and consult. She collaborates in inclusion

classes that have up to 25% of SWDs where she also co-teaches as much as she can. Her planning coincides with one of the grade-level teams that she collaborates with.

Participant 5. Participant 5 has been teaching between 11 and 15 years. She serves 14-16 SWDs, all of whom are in multiple grade levels. Although she spends most of the school day pulling students into the resource room for reading, writing, math, and direct social skills instruction, she collaborates in sixth grade classrooms for reading and math; these inclusion classrooms have up to 13% of SWDs. Her lunch and planning are also combined in a 25-minute period in the middle of the school day.

Regular Education Teacher Participants

Participant 6. This participant has 21-25 years of experience in the general education classroom and teaches reading twice a day to two different third grade homerooms. These classes have about 23-25 students, one of which has up to 72% SWDs. In this inclusion class, Participant 6 has the special education teacher as her collaborator for the entire period. They mainly use the 1-teach-1-assist model of co-teaching. In addition to teaching reading, Participant 6 conducts small group for both reading and math during RtI time.

Participant 7. Participant 7 has been in the general education classroom for 21-25 years. She teaches science three times to fourth grade classes with sizes of 27-29 students. One of these classes has up to 15% SWDs where she receives part-time support from a paraprofessional. She consults with her special education teacher as needed.

Participant 8. This participant's years of teaching experience are in the 11- to 15-year range. She teaches a self-contained fourth grade class with 24-26 students, four of

whom have IEPs (about 17% of the class) and one who is in referral. In addition to all four content areas that she teaches, she also pulls small groups for reading and math RtI. Her SWDs are pulled out for 30 minutes of reading and 30 minutes of math resource time by the SET. Participant 8 does not have other adults, certified or classified, who come in her room for inclusion support. However, she does informal consultation with her SET on a daily basis.

Participant 9. Participant 9 has been teaching for 5-10 years. She has 21-23 students in her self-contained classroom, about 17% of whom have IEPs. During science, a SET comes in to assist while she teaches. Her SET also pulls her SWDs out for reading, math, and writing in the resource room for 30 minutes each. In addition to this collaboration time, Participant 9 also consults with the SET as needed. For the rest of the time, Participant 9 provides the accommodations to her SWDs.

Participant 10. This participant has been teaching in the general education classroom for 11-15 years. She teaches social studies to three different classes: two of which are fifth grade classes while one is a split fourth/fifth grade class. Her class size ranges from 27-30 students. In one of the fifth grade classes, she has one SWD who makes up 3% of the total class. She does not have an SET or instructional assistant who comes to her room. She consults with her SET as needed.

Participant 11. Participant 11 has been in education for 5-10 years. She teaches math three times a day to three different classes with 27-29 sixth grade students. Two of these classes have SWDs. For both blocks that she has these inclusion classes, she has two different SETs who come in and spend the whole block with her. Participant 11 does

most of the teaching, and her SETs assist during math class. There are 7% SWDs in one class and 10% in the other; these SWDs spend most of math time in the inclusion setting and are pulled out by the SETs only as needed for either testing or re-teaching in small group.

Participant 12. Participant 12 has been teaching for 16-20 years. She is currently teaching the nontested subjects in sixth grade. There are three homeroom classes that she teaches each day, two of which have 16% and 4% SWDs. There is no collaboration in any of the classes she teaches, and she consults with the SET only as needed. Although there is a 1-on-1 aid who goes with one of the SWDs, she works only with the specific student that she comes in with. Table 1 includes the SET participants' information. Table 2 includes the RET participants' information.

Table 1

Demographics of Special Education Teachers' Caseload

Teacher/ Years of experience	Grade/ Subject	Caseload Size	Inclusion Model	# students & Length of pullout;	%Time daily pullout	# SWDs:SWoDs (% SWDs in Collab) Length of collab;	%Time daily collab
Participant 1 16-20	3rd gr/, rdg, wri, & math	14-16	Part-time collab & pullout	5 in 40 min rdg, 8 in 25-min math 5 in 50-min math	27%	13:25 (52%) 1-hr rdg 13:25 (52%) 1-hr math 4:25 (16%) 40-min wri w/in 3 classes;	38%
Participant 2 26-30	1st & 4th rdg, wri, & math	14-16	Part-time collab & pullout	1 4th gr 45 min math 1 4th gr 50 min rdg 4 4th gr 35 min rdg 3 1st gr 30 min rdg 5 1st gr 25 min rdg 2 1st gr 30 min math 4 4th gr 35-min rdg/wri	60%	4:20(17%)30min 4th sci 30 min 1st gr math;	14%
Participant 3 11-15	3rd-6th rdg, wri, & math	14-16	Pullout only, aid support	3 30 of check-in 3 3rd/4th gr 45 min rdg 2 3rd gr in 30 min 3 4th gr 60 min math 7 4th/3rd 30 min math 4 6th gr 20 min rdg 3 6th gr 30 min rdg 2 5th/6th 25 min rdg 7 3rd/4th 30 min math 3 30 min rdg 1 5th gr 20 min math 10 30-min Math RTI;	90%	NA	0%
Participant 4 5-10	5th-6th rdg, wri, math, soc sk	11-13	Part-time collab & pullout	1-2 6th gr 20-min wri 3 6th gr 30-min math 5 6th gr 25-min rdg 5 6th gr 30-min rdg 3 6th gr 65-min gr rdg	40%	3:27(10%)6th rdg 1 hr 1:26(4%)5th wri 15min 1:27(4%)6th mth35min 5:25 (17%) 5th rdg 35min	35%
Participant 5 11-15	3rd-6th rdg, wri, & math, social skills	14-16	Part-time collab & pullout	15-min soc skills 3 (3/4 gr)1hr basic rdg 4 (4/5 gr)1hr rdg comp 3/4 gr 75-min math 6th gr in 30-min rdg 3-6 gr soc skills 15min	61%	4 6th gr rdg in 30 min 6th gr math in 65-min	23%

Note. The percentage of daily pullout and collaboration time is out of 420 minutes, the maximum daily minutes in students' school days per the Kentucky Department of Education (see https://education.ky.gov/districts/enrol/Pages/School-Calendar.aspx).

Table 2

Demographics of Regular Education Teachers' Inclusion Classes

Teacher/ Years of experience	Grade level; Class size; Content	Inclusion Model	% of SWDs in inclusion class (IC)	Collaboration w/ SET	Pullout for SWDs
Participant 6 21-25	3rd; 2 classes 22-25 students; rdg	Collab in rdg & math, & Pull-out	1 class – 0 % IC – 72%	1 hr reading	30-min small group rdg 30-min math, 55-min RTI math
Participant 7 21-25	4th; 3 classes 26-29 students; sci & soc stu	no collab w/ ins aid, all pull-out	2 classes – 0% IC – 15%	NA, part-time ins'l asst.	30-min math RtI 30-min rdg RtI 1-hr math in resource 30-min rdg
Participant 8 11-15	4th; 1 class 22-25 students; rdg, math, sci, soc stu	push in w/o collab & pull-out	IC – 17%	NA	30-min rdg, 30-min math, 30-min writing
Participant 9 5-10	4th; 1 class 22-25 students; rdg, math, sci, soc stu	push in w/o collab & pull-out	IC – 17%	NA	30-min rdg, 30-min math, 30-min writing
Participant 10 11-15	4th/5th; 3 classes 27-29 students; math, soc stu, & wri	push in w/o collab & pull-out for testing	2 classes – 0% IC – 3%	NA	25-min rdg
Participant 11 5-10	6th; 3 classes 21-31 students; math, soc stu, & wri	part-time collab in math & push in w/o collab in social studies	IC #1 – 7% IC #2 – 10% 1 class – 0%	1hr w/ SET in IC #1 1hr w/ SET in IC #2	as needed only: for reteaching &/or testing
Participant 12 16-20	6th; 3 classes 22-25 students; sci, soc stu, & wri	no collab, push in w/o extra personnel support	IC #1 – 16% IC #2 – 4% 1 class – 0%	NA in IC #1 NA in IC #2 but with an ins'l asst.	30-min math, 65-min rdg, 20-min wri, 30-min rdg RTI

Data Collection

I interviewed 12 teacher participants involved in inclusion in Grades 3-6 who have been in their current building for at least 3 years. Instead of talking with six general and six special education teachers, I interviewed seven general education teachers and five special education teachers who agreed to participate in the study. To obtain preliminary information about the participants, I sent out pre-interview Google forms. Eight of the 12 participants filled out this form prior to the interview and provided basic

information about their caseload and schedule. Four of the participants uploaded their schedules on the Google Form while the rest submitted a printed copy of their schedule on the interview day.

I conducted the interviews. All interviews except for one were conducted in the teachers' classrooms; one was in a vacant classroom across the hall from the participant's classroom. I conducted a one-time interview with each participant, which lasted between 25 and 48 minutes. In the interview that lasted 25 minutes, the teacher had her responses typed up and printed on the interview protocol I e-mailed prior to our meeting time. Although I asked follow-up and probing questions, having her answers in front of her sped up the interview.

In the beginning of each interview, I asked for each participant's permission to audio record the conversation. After hearing how the audio recording would help with the speed and accuracy of the interview, everyone agreed. In addition to the recording with the aid of an application on my cellular device, I had a printed copy of the interview protocol for each participant. As presented in the plan in Chapter 3, I jotted down key words from participants' responses. However, I also took notes of follow-up questions that I needed to ask based on the participants' responses. Doing so helped me probe for deeper information to get a better understanding of the responses.

Once I conducted the interviews, I uploaded the audio recording from my cellular device to an online application that transcribed the files. I listened to the audio recording while reviewing the transcription to edit the mistakes or typographical errors. From the transcription website, I downloaded the interview transcripts into Word documents and

saved them in a password-encrypted folder in my computer. Afterwards, I emailed the transcription to the interviewees. Two of the participants noted some minor corrections; I edited such changes in my files. The rest of the participants responded that they have reviewed the transcription and that it was accurate. Then, I sent a final email expressing my gratitude and noted that they have formally exited the study.

After all the participants had confirmed that the data from the transcription was accurate, I created an electronic document. I started an audit trail to facilitate objectivity and rigor of the collected data (see Patton, 2015). I also recorded my daily activities and the evolution of my thinking as I interacted with the collected data. Additionally, I created a summary of each interview to consolidate the ideas I captured from each participant. To further help with data organization, I created an electronic demographics sheet that served as a central location of descriptive data; this contained the specific details for each participant such as years of experience, caseload size, district size, amount of pull-out and collaboration, and inclusion service delivery model.

Data Analysis

After I made the corrections that the participants noted, I started the process of analyzing data. To track my activities and progress during this stage of data analysis, I created an electronic log entitled Thesis Journal. Patton (2015) referred to this same document as an audit trail that helps keep with the fidelity of data analysis. Therefore, I recorded the date, time, and details of what I completed in every opportunity that I explored the data. I took notes on what I accomplished in each data analysis session, jotted down where I need to pick up for the next block of time, and I typed down new

ideas that emerged. Keeping a thesis journal helped me hold my thinking, kept my thoughts organized, and allowed for a smoother transition in between blocks of work time on data analysis.

I uploaded the transcriptions to NVivo to start data analysis. In this same software, I uploaded the participants' schedules. The schedules contained my notes on the follow-up questions that I asked the participants. Such annotations included the number of students at specific blocks of time, the ratio of SWDs to the SWoDs, the range of students' needs, and if in special education, the content or specific IEP goals they are working on (i.e., reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing, math, social skills, etc.). Another type of file that I uploaded was a PDF file of the responses from the pre-interview Google Form. Having a file folder on NVivo for each of the three mentioned files helped in keeping all the data in a centralized location for data analysis.

On NVivo, I created nodes or files based on the themes that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2. The specific codes include definition of inclusion and service delivery models such as full-time collaboration, part-time co-teaching, and inclusion without co-teaching. There are also codes for teachers' knowledge on the following: disabilities, accommodations, and modifications. For student needs and types of support, there were several subtopics (i.e., state standards, differentiation, explicit instruction, UDL, MTSS or RtI, and social support). For teacher needs and experiences, the codes are teacher attitude, shared vision, administrative support, co-teaching, and professional collaboration. Lastly, I created codes for barriers in inclusion namely negative mindset; lack of a shared vision; lack of organizational support such as not

having structured time for collaboration, minimal personnel support, and oversized caseload; and lack of PD trainings.

I started to code units from each interview file into the created nodes mentioned above. Across the interviews, I manually coded excerpts that were grouped together under the same theme or node on NVivo. Under each node, I created some subtopics or subnodes as I reviewed the contents or excerpts from each node folder. As I closely examined the excerpts grouped together, I created new nodes and subnodes; I also rearranged the nodes. I had to go back and refer to the actual interview transcripts several times to determine the context of some responses. Then, I identified the themes based on the patterns from the interviews and created a summary for each pattern under memos on NVivo. In memos, I also created notes, which served a dual purpose: to record new ideas that emerged and to capture the evolution in my thinking. There were ideas that did not occur to me in the beginning of the study.

Specific Codes

From the interview data, several codes that emerged were related to the research questions. In relation to the first research question about the teacher-reported classroom demographics, there is a category named demographics with the grade level, subject area, caseload size, ratio of SWDs to SWoDs, students' disabilities, and range of student ability levels. As I organized the data under each of these subcategories for demographics, I noted some details about the SETs' caseloads (i.e. the number of SWDs they had in small groups and the ratios of SWDs: SWoDs in inclusion settings, details about the grade levels they serve, and the subjects they taught). With regards to students'

disabilities, the range of students' abilities within inclusive classrooms also emerged. Such detail is critical when exploring inclusive classrooms because it describes the range of student abilities. The highest and lowest ability levels in the group contribute to the wide range of student needs in inclusive classrooms.

For SETs' daily schedule, I noted the times that SETs spend pulling SWDs in the special education room versus the time they spend in the collaboration classroom. For RETs' schedule, I noted the ratio of SWDs: SWoDs for each inclusion class that they taught and the inclusion support that they received, if any. One of the themes pertains to the different service delivery models; under this category are specific codes such as part-time collaboration and pull-out, consult only, pull-out only and consult as needed.

More themes that emerged were directly related to the second research question about how RETs and SETs provide instructional support to SWDs. Given the above-mentioned circumstances, the following codes were categorized under preparation, lesson implementation, and assessment. For the theme teacher preparation, codes include special education courses and degrees, school/district/regional PD trainings, professional experience, and planning throughout the school year. In the actual lesson implementation, differentiation was one of the themes that emerged and there were several ways that it is offered in inclusion classrooms. I categorized the varying forms of differentiation into subnodes such as RtI, differentiation through process, differentiation through content, small group instruction, hands-on activities, peer-tutoring, and offering choice. After instruction takes place, teachers administer varied forms of assessment that are critical in tracking progress and in grading. Under assessments, the participants' responses revealed

practices related to IEP testing accommodations, test modifications, and systems in place for grading SWDs.

Finally, there were several themes that emerged pertaining to teachers' experiences when providing support to students in inclusive classrooms: the topic of the third research question. The themes include experiences with administrative support, parent support, professional collaboration, and collaborative setting. Themes also emerged for teacher qualities such as attitudes and personalities that impact teacher experiences in the classrooms. For resources that teachers need, themes emerged for material (i.e. reading/math programs, teacher-created units, RETs' lesson plans, and/or IEP snapshots) and human resources (i.e., special education consultants, paraprofessionals, and/or colleagues). Several factors impact teachers' experiences when providing educational services to students in inclusive settings.

Discrepant Cases

Describing qualities of discrepant cases, according to Patton (2015), is an effective way to check for consistency. Patton discussed that finding inconsistent or conflicting patterns could bring light to the study. All data that I collected is to provide a detailed description of the circumstances and experiences of RETs and SETs involved in inclusion. I included all the results: the similar ones that revealed themes and the discrepant cases that were exceptions. Therefore, I discuss the nonconforming data in the presentation of results in the following section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As described in Chapter 3, I implemented strategies to ensure credibility. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the importance of establishing a positive relationship with each participant. I sent the initial e-mail to each teacher participant and as noted on the attached consent form, I followed through with a phone call or another email (if the teacher responded through email) the next day. Upon agreement, I immediately sent another email with the link to the pre-interview Google form and the interview protocol. I made an adjustment of sending a reminder email the day prior to the meeting time. To establish a positive relationship, I used a warm and friendly tone in the e-mail I sent. On the interview itself, I shook hands with each teacher, introduced myself again, and expressed my gratitude. As planned, I started the conversation with informal topics to help my participants feel at ease: an interviewing style preference (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The informal topics of conversation ranged from the location of their school, their building or classroom, and sometimes information about the participants that I learned based on the pre-interview forms or prior e-mail correspondence. Then, I started the pre-brief about the following: the purpose of audio recording, the participant's ability to withdraw at any time, and their choice to share information they are comfortable sharing. I made an adjustment by letting the participants know that if a name was mentioned, I would delete it in the transcription. Therefore, anonymity will be maintained. Some participants did not provide me their schedule prior to the meeting, so, I gently reminded them for a copy before the interview started. I asked if there were questions prior to starting the recording. Once the recording was over, I wrapped up the interview by

reminding the participants that I would email them a copy of the transcription so that they can check it for accuracy and that I will also send them a two-page summary of the results once I complete the research.

For credibility, I followed a "systematic and conscientious search for alternative themes" (Patton, 2015, p. 653) as planned in the data analysis stage. As I previously mentioned, I initially created nodes or themes on NVivo based on the literature review results prior to coding data from the interview transcripts. Then, I coded the interviews. As I reviewed the excerpts under each theme, I redesigned the nodes: I rearranged, merged, deleted some, and created new ones for the themes that emerged from the excerpts of the initial coding. I looked for other ways of organizing data, which Patton described as inductive data analysis; from the specific excerpts, I determined broader patterns that were emerging from the interview data.

For transferability strategies, I included a variety of description without revealing too much data. I gathered information on teachers' caseloads, schedule, and resources available to the participants to help the readers understand the context of the participants' experiences. In addition to the narrative about the participants, I presented in two separate tables the class/caseload details of RETs and SETs; this is an adjustment I made to transferability strategies I stated in Chapter 3. The readers could be aware of the circumstances that are similar to theirs and possibly find improved ways of implementing inclusion to support both teachers and students.

For dependability, I employed triangulation and audit trails as stated in Chapter 3. In addition to the audio recording, I took notes during the interview as planned. As an

adjustment, the teacher schedules that my participants provided also became a data source. I used these notes, the daily schedules, and the transcriptions as I typed up interview summaries for each participant. I also created all the files electronically and uploaded them on NVivo to have a central location for all my data. I referred back to the audio recording on Temi.com as needed. Occasionally, I listened again to the participants' intonation and expression to capture the meaning of some of the excerpts. I wanted to capture the participants' stories as accurately as I can. As back up, I have the electronic documents in a password-protected folder in my computer. For audit trail, I created an electronic document called thesis journal; doing so helped to keep objectivity and rigor of the data analysis process (see Patton, 2015). I noted new ideas that I was learning from data analysis. I also recorded changes in my thinking, daily logs of activities, and where I need to pick up to continue the data analysis process.

To establish confirmability, I used in-depth, systematic, and analytic reflection strategies. In my thesis journal, I recorded notes for newly learned ideas and questions derived from constantly re-examining the data. Within these notes, I jotted down links that pertain to the NVivo code. I also made adjustments to further help with confirmability. I created a mind map on NVivo based on the initial themes from the literature review. I compared the newer map to the initial mind map I created in the early stages of the proposal (more like a rough sketch), and noticed some evolution of ideas already. I also created memos on NVivo to capture not only the emerging themes but also the supporting details from the codes: the empirical findings (i.e., the participants' actual responses). Doing so helped me discuss the synthesis in the discussion of findings.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classes. The results of this study may provide the public with the needed insights on the circumstances and possible ways to improve inclusive practices. Consequently, IEP teams may learn other ways to support SWDs in inclusion more effectively. The collected data from one-on-one interviews, using the interview protocol (Appendix B), provided evidence to address each research question. In the following section, I offer themes organized by the following research questions:

1. What classroom demographics do regular and special education teachers report who are providing services in inclusive classrooms?
2. How do regular and special education teachers provide instructional support for SWDs in inclusion classes?
3. What are regular and special education teachers' experiences in meeting the instructional needs of SWDs in varied inclusion classes?

I explored the details pertaining to teachers' circumstances and experiences in providing inclusive services to students in Grades 3-6. To conclude the interviews, I asked for the participants' input about the advantages, disadvantages, and suggestions for improvement of inclusion. In the analysis of the interview data, the following themes related to each research question emerged.

Research Question 1

With regards to the first question, the following themes emerged through the analysis of data for the caseload or class demographics. Two categories of themes emerged: one for SETs and another one for RETs.

Special education teachers' caseloads. The SETs' caseload demographics are presented in Table 1. The number of students in each SET's caseload range from 12-16 SWDs who receive reading, writing, math, and/or social skills instruction. While all the SETs provided social skills support, only Participant 5 provides direct social skills instruction. Additionally, majority of the SETs serve students in multiple elementary grade levels and they provide a combination of primarily pullout and some collaborative services. To be specific, only one SET is assigned to a specific grade level. Participant 1 has 14-16 SWDs in third grade. She pulls all her students who receive reading services in one inclusion class where she collaborates for the whole period; she does the same for math. Doing so makes 52% of the class to have IEPs. Of all the SET participants, she spends the most time in the collaborative classroom, about 38% of the school day. The rest of the SETs spend 0-35% of the school day.

On the contrary, one of the five SETs do not provide any inclusion support in the inclusion classrooms due to the range of grade level (i.e., Grades 3-6) and the amount of special education hours that her SWDs require. Participant 3 described how long she has some students for reading, "Some of them I have for two hours a day. Some of them I have for an hour and a half." As a result, she spends 90% of the school day pulling students in her resource room. The rest of the SETs, however, spend 27-61% of the

school day pulling students in their resource rooms. The resource rooms' sizes vary. Both Participant 1 and Participant 5 have their own classrooms that are smaller than a regular-sized classroom. Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4 share a regular classroom with another SET in the building. I further discuss the different disabilities and range of students needs in these SETs' caseloads in the following sections.

Regular education teachers' classes. The themes revealed that majority of the Grades three to six RET participants teach inclusive classrooms by themselves. Granted that three of the seven RETs teach nontested areas (see Table 2), one of the four other RETs who teach reading and math do not have a SET that comes in her room. This implies that the most common service delivery model within the participants' schools is inclusion with pull-out, and the support from the SETs is mainly pullout for small group instruction in the resource room.

Only two of the RETs (Participant 6 and Participant 11) have a SET on a consistent basis during the whole period. However, the ratio of SWDS to SWoDs in Participant 6's class is 18:7. Participant 6 noted that, "Right now (pauses), there are 18, I think, with either regular IEPs or speech. And then we have one that is being tested or being referred," when I asked how many of her 25 third graders have IEPs. This means that during this reading block, 72% of the class are SWDs; the 28% of the SWoDs have academic levels that are also not on grade level. Participant 11, who has two different SETs that come in with two different inclusion classes, has 7% and 10% of SWDs in two of her sixth-grade math classes. The rest of the RETs' classes without collaboration time with a SET also have significantly lower number of SWDs; 3-17% of the classroom

population in the inclusion classes have IEPs (see Table 2). This percentage is within the suggested cap on the number of SWDs, which is 33%, in inclusive classrooms (KDE, 2012). Overall, the number and range of student needs in the inclusion classes of the RET participants vary accordingly.

Also, all the RETs are content teachers of more than one subject. As mentioned above, four teach tested areas (i.e., reading and/or math). Majority of the RETs teach at least three different subjects a day to at least two different homeroom classes. Two RETs, Participant 8 and Participant 9, teach all five content areas to their homeroom and do not switch classes at all. Every RET, but one, teaches one grade level. A discrepant case is that of Participant 10; while she teaches three content areas to three different classes, one of those is a fourth/fifth grade class. Without enough number of fourth and fifth grade students to complete a whole class size, they combined these two overflowing numbers into a split class. When determining the students to go in the split classroom, she explained, "Those children are usually more of independent workers, and maybe not the highest of the group, but some that are able to work independently when I'm working with the other grade level."

Students' disabilities. Across all the inclusion classrooms, a common theme revealed that there are different types of diagnosed disabilities in every classroom. The disabilities (with their specific codes in parenthesis) range from autism (AUT), developmental delay (DD), emotional-behavioral disability (EBD), other health impairment (OHI) for either attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mild mental disability (MMD), orthopedic impairment, specific

learning disability (SLD) in reading, writing, and/or math, speech or language impairment, and traumatic brain injury (TBI). All five SETs have to address not only academic, but behavior and socio-emotional needs; some behavior needs more severe than others. Every SET has a student with autism who needs social support in inclusive classrooms. Also, a SET and a RET from two different schools have students in third and fourth grade who are medically fragile and requires assistance from the nurse. The only exception to RETs having a wide range of needs is Participant 10 who has one SWD; the student has a SLD in reading only. Therefore, there is not a wide range of disabilities. Overall, there is a wide variety of student needs brought about by varying disabilities in almost every inclusion classroom.

Range of student needs. For all teachers' caseloads, a common theme emerged about the range of students' abilities. In the same inclusion class, there are SWDs whose academic ability levels are at least two years below grade level and SWoDs who are either on or above grade level. For example, all the SETs (whose students are all in the third to sixth grade) have students reading in the pre-primer level or have basic decoding reading skills. There would still be a wide range of needs when SETs pull students out for small group instruction. As Participant 4 explained,

> In math, I have a student with autism, has no math goals, doesn't need math goals, but I got to get my hands on him for like a little bit of social time and that is his lowest score. So, I'll pull him, and we go over, make sure he's understanding, the process of everything he's got in class. Then, I also have two students that can't

> subtract double digits: not so good. That is difficult and that's supposed to be me teaching them core, but yet… So, it's interesting.

While three of the five SETs have discussed a wide range of needs in the small group that they pull out, two SETs group their students closer in ability levels. One minimizes the range of needs by pulling students out based on ability levels, and not by grade level. Participant 5 explained, "Like this reading third/fourth group, I have one third grader and two fourth graders. We do basic reading, like starting from the beginning." So, even if her students are from two different grade levels, she can focus on their common basic reading needs.

RETs also have a wide range of student needs to address. RETs have SWoDs who are reading at least three years below their actual grade level. For example, Participant 8 explained, "I have three students who are on a first grade reading level and I have one, like (on) a pre-primer level, and several on second grade level." At the same time, RETs also have students reading three years or more above grade level. In particular, two sixth grade RETs have students who are reading in the high school level. This illustrates that students in these sixth grade inclusion classes have reading abilities ranging from second all the way to ninth grade; a range of student needs that spans across seven grade reading levels in one classroom.

Research Question 2

The second research question explores the ways that RETs and SETs provide instructional support to SWDs in inclusion classes. I categorized the following themes for provision of instructional support under preparation, implementation, and assessment.

Preparation. For preparation in becoming a teacher involved in inclusion, there were several themes that emerged including educational background (both in undergraduate or graduate degrees), professional training, field experience, and professional planning.

Educational background. A common theme revealed that most RETs had only one special education class in their undergraduate courses. Despite the years of experience ranging from 5-23 years. This means that in the last 18 years, education students (except for those pursuing a special education degree) took zero or one special education class in their education preparation program. Participant 9 mentioned, "…it (the special education class) was like an intro class and to be honest I didn't feel prepared when I left college for helping special education students the best way that I could." Participant 2 agreed because her RETs have expressed their concerns with her. She noted,

> They (RETs) feel like they are not prepared, especially, with just their regular education degrees, don't prepare them for having SWDs, especially those that are more severely involved or those with autism. I think they feel overwhelmed. They just don't feel prepared to meet the needs of that student and their 25 other students that they might have.

Participant 2 reported that her RETs come to her feeling like they are not meeting the needs of their students with autism. However, they approach her to get ideas for things that they can try.

This experience with special education courses in institutions, however, are different for SETs. All the SETs have undergraduate and graduate degrees, certifications, or emergency certification in special education. Nevertheless, as Participant 4 explained,

> It's (special education master's degree) all very cerebral and it's a lot of terms, and it's a utopia the way they teach it. But in reality, you just have to do your best to what you have, and you have to be self-motivated. You need to know those things. I think you need to know them because it gives you something to pull from.

Therefore, the institutional preparations to teach students in inclusive settings between RETs and SETs greatly vary.

PD training. In addition to educational background, a theme on professional trainings also emerged. Such PD opportunities were either school-, district-, or regional-based trainings. One SET, on the contrary, used to participate yearly in special education conferences facilitated by the Kentucky Council for Exceptional Children in Louisville: a state-facilitated special education training. Meanwhile, five of the twelve participants, four of which are SETs, participated in regional-based training at the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC): a regional-based educational cooperative that serves 42 school districts in the state of Kentucky. Two participants, a SET and a RET, from two different school districts also mentioned district-based PD opportunities. In addition, three SETs and two RETs noted that school-based PD sessions related to providing inclusive services have been available.

Three of the seven RETs reported that they have attended little or no training to help them teach inclusion classes. One SET and one RET, who have both been teaching for at least 15 years, have discussed being able to choose the PD trainings to attend. Altogether, there is a variety of teacher experiences with PD trainings that are related to providing inclusive services.

Field experience. While discussing the teacher preparations regarding inclusion, all the participants discussed their experiences in the classrooms. For example, Participant 8 explained,

> When I graduated (college), we had zero special education courses. So, I felt like in that area, I think it just took real classroom experience. I've had PDs on differentiation and RtI, but as far as just individual needs, I feel like, in college, I didn't have much experience since then. Like I said, we've had PDs and trainings that have helped, but mostly I feel like it's the experience.

In the same accord, SET Participant 4 recalled "…as far as preparing me for the actual rubber meets the road, you just have to get in there and get your hands dirty." The more time that teachers spent providing inclusive services, the more prepared they felt about addressing the needs of all students in inclusive settings. Such a notion alludes to the importance of the following theme.

Planning. Planning for educators comes in many forms. Other than organizational and procedural preparations, all SETs and RETs who teach reading, math, science, social studies, and/or writing plan for content throughout the year. One theme regarded the RETs as the content planners and primarily the main providers of whole group instruction

in inclusive classrooms. Even for the reading and math classes where there is a SET for the whole block, the RETs plan the content on their own. RETs are considered the content experts. As Participant 4 explained, “Our special ed director has definitely said that we don’t have to be the curriculum experts, but we have to be the modification, behavior, and strategy experts.” Participant 1 agreed that, “They (RETs) are the experts to teach reading. They’re the experts to teach math, so I’ll let them choose what (literature pieces or math approaches) we’re going to use.” Consequently, SETs mainly assist (when they are in the collaborative classrooms) and provide majority of the accommodations, which I discussed further in the following section. In the same way, all five SETs independently plan their small group instruction in the resource room. Hence, the RETs are considered the content experts while the SETs are the intervention experts.

While there is no formal collaborative content planning for regular and special education teachers involved in inclusion, a theme on consultation emerged. All of the participants, both in regular and special education, engage in some form of consultation with each other: some more regular than others. As Participant 9 discussed,

> We don’t have a common planning, but, she’s (SET) in and out of my room. She always comes to pick up the students, delivers the students back when they’re out, and we can spend that time talking about the student or we also have common lunch together. We can discuss things over lunch here, but in the mornings, we talk.

For most participants, that is nine out of the 12, informal yet regular consultation occurs to plan for the lessons and/or assessments of SWDs that they share. At the same time,

three of the RETs who teach nontested subjects (i.e., fifth-sixth grade science; third-sixth grade social studies; and fourth and sixth grade writing) engage in consultation only as needed. Participant 12 explained,

> For bigger projects, I asked for her (SET) assistance because she does collab with the reading teacher. She collabs with the math teacher but not so much with me since I'm a nontested area. I do ask her questions, on occasion, on ways that I can modify and she has a pretty large caseload so I try to do it myself, but if I'm kind of at a wit's end or very unsure, I'll send her an email or we'll catch up in the hall or, or during our planning time.

All three RETs who teach nontested areas have relied on their experience to provide instructional support for their SWDs; they have been teaching somewhere between 15-21 years. Needless to say, there is a lack of common planning time for SETs and RETs, which leads to some educators devising ways to plan efficiently.

Some of the teachers in regular and special education engage in beginning of the year planning. Early in the school year, six of the twelve participants discussed meeting with their collaborating teachers to go over the accommodations of their SWDs. In these meetings, SETs created IEP-@-Glance documents: a snapshot of the IEPs with information that are particularly helpful to the RETs. To illustrate, Participant 4 explained how she initiates planning with her SETs.

> Mostly, it in the beginning of the year, good thing with Google drive, we do an initial system with the kid's initials. But I'll do a fifth-grade sheet and I share it with all. I have a folder called fifth grade special education. So, I print it and I

> share it with them. On that, I type the (part of the) IEP, and I give them service time, and I give them accommodations. That's it.

Participant 6 from a different school also emphasized, "I can just pull it out and look into their accommodations if I ever need (to), you know, if I ever have questions and she's (the SET) not with me, then I can just pull that out." Accordingly, IEPs-@-a-Glance documents that SETs prepare provide the RETs relevant information necessary in implementing inclusive services. Therefore, beginning of the year planning, with accompanying IEPs-@-a-Glance documents, have helped these particular SETs and RETs to feel prepared in providing inclusive services.

Lesson implementation. Implementing the planned lessons for RETs take place in the inclusion classrooms while SETs' planned lessons are taught in the resource rooms. As noted in the planning section above, all RETs plan for all the content areas that they teach (i.e., reading, math, writing, science, and/or social studies) since there is no formal content planning between SETs and RETs. As a result, RETs lead the whole group instruction in the collaborative classrooms while SETs mainly assist: one-teach one-assist co-teaching model.

Collaborative setting. Teachers experiences in the collaborative or inclusion setting vary. For SETs, two of the four who provide collaborative services participate more actively in a co-teaching role. While the alternate teaching that unfolds is not formally planned, these two SETs take part in whole group instruction wherever they see fit. For example, Participant 4 shared,

> I have a good relationship (with the RETs) and I've been doing this a long time and that's probably where I shine - is in collaboration. So, I hope I add a lot to the class. So, I hope that if the teacher's talking and I'll see students aren't tracking with them, or I can think of a different way to say it, the teachers are totally good with me stepping in and then saying something. I participate. I don't want to go in there and do nothing. So, I enjoy participating. I think the teachers feel like I bring energy to the group that wouldn't be there if I wasn't there.

The two other RETs mainly assist when they are in the collaborative setting and help with either ontask behavior, organizational, or social needs of the SWDs. As Participant 2 explained,

> Normally, I'll just provide assistance with my students just to keep them on task and engaged. I have a student with autism who, one of his goals is to interact with his peers, especially during group work and they do a lot of group work during science. So, sometimes I would prompt him or cue him to interact with his group or engage. Otherwise, he will just isolate himself and just sit and do his thing while the other group members do the work.

Participant 2's role is similar to that of Participant 5 who also mainly assist in the collaborative setting.

For RETs, three out of the seven experience having a SET in their inclusion classrooms. All three of them indicated that their SETs mainly assist as they carry out the whole group instruction. Their SETs could either be involved with progress monitoring, students' off-task behavior, or providing modifications to the task at hand. Participant 6

noted that when the class is broken into smaller groups, her SET takes a group while she does the same. Altogether, the RETs' experiences with having a collaborative teacher in the inclusion settings also vary.

Special education setting. All five SET participants pull small groups in their resource room. The SETs reported such pullout time to be either for intervention (in reading, writing, math, and/or behavior), providing testing accommodations, o progress monitoring IEP goals. Four of the five SETs pull their students by grade level based on their general education schedule. The discrepant case is that of Participant 5 who pulls small groups of students based on ability and not by grade level. For two separate reading blocks of one hour each, Participant 5 has a third/fourth grade class for basic reading and a fourth/fifth grade class for reading comprehension and writing. Being the only SET in the building who serves three grade levels, she takes a huge part in deciding which homerooms to assign her SWDs for scheduling reasons. Therefore, her small groups are closer in ability levels.

Meanwhile, with or without a collaborating teacher in the classroom, the following patterns revealed that in carrying out daily instruction, educators both in regular and special education provide varying forms of differentiation. Based on the interview data, there are several ways that educators provide differentiated instruction.

Response to intervention (RtI). Eleven of the 12 participants discussed RtI time being structured daily into their school day. All six RETs, except for Participant 10 who teaches social studies three times a day, have RtI time in their class schedule. Three RETs pull small groups of students in Tiers 2 and 3 during their schools' set RtI period. For

example, Participant 8 described how her RtI block look like.

> So, typically what I try to do is everybody works on their own level. They're either reading a book on their level. We also have Study Island and it's leveled, and then I tried to pull the kids that are in tiers two and three and work on, usually it's phonics, decoding, figuring out what words mean. We do math separately. We do that for ESS (extended school services). So, we try to pull those kids during that time.

While all five SETs have small group scheduled during their school-wide RtI time, three SETs discussed how they provide small group instruction in the resource room. Participant 4 elaborated,

> Because it is our school wide response to intervention time where they take the kids who however the team has decided based on their scores and data for tier one, tier two, or tier three and we all agree to move them through the tiers. That is a time where those students can receive their intervention. So, students in tier one gets core instruction or even pushed, you know like get some enrichment. And kids in tier two and three get smaller groups and then, like even smaller groups. Then, I'll take my students and work on their IEP goals. That's the only time I had to work on their IEP goals if I'm doing collaboration, so I have to do my progress monitoring that during that time and make sure, because most of my coverage goals are on their independent reading level, are they able to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency in order to answer comprehension questions? And

> so, I have to be able to monitor that in my classroom because that's not sixth grade work.

The above-mentioned RETs and SETs provide reading and math instruction focusing specifically on basic reading skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and/or math fact fluency: interventions designed to meet students on their instructional level.

Differentiation through process. Three RETs mentioned differentiating for their SWDs through process. Roberts and Inman (2015) described *process* as what students are expected to do cognitively. As Participant 6 clarified, "Actually they (all students) usually have the same (worksheet), but certain students are limited on what they have to do. So, one student might have to do more than another one because of the disability." Students performing on or above grade level can engage in higher order thinking skills that make their work different from those of SWDs, as explained further by Participant 6. Thus, all students in the inclusion classroom may receive the same task, but the cognitive process involved for the students vary.

Differentiation through content. Majority of the RETs, four out of the seven, discussed how they vary content or "what students must know, understand, and/or be able to do" (Roberts & Inman, 2015, p. 72). Some RETs use leveled passages from ReadWorks.org, others use Study Island (a software for standards-based e-learning program), and Participant 10 mentioned using lower levels of Mountain Math for daily warm-up activities. Therefore, some teachers differentiate by using leveled reading passages and/or math problems in their inclusion classrooms during content instruction time.

Small group instruction. Four of the seven RETs discussed pulling small groups to provide more intensive support to their SWDs. For instance, Participant 8 and Participant 9 often conduct small group rotations in their math and reading periods. As Participant 9 explained,

> I think that every student needs that small group instruction. I think that's more beneficial to keep them on task because a lot of students are not on task, and I don't want them to be just compliant. I want to engage them, but I feel like that's easier in a smaller group setting.

Similarly, Participant 12 provides small group instruction to break down the task into simpler steps for scaffolding; she also modifies the task for her SWDs when they are in her science or social studies class. When RETs read the tests aloud to their SWDs, they pull a small group and add more instructions to help students complete the task. Hence, differentiation occurs when RETs provide small group instruction during lesson implementation and assessment.

A discrepant case is that of Participant 10 who does not provide small group instruction. Instead, she provides one-on-one support as she only has one SWD. She mentioned,

> There's going over, repetition, of what we're reading in class, asking more specific questions if he's not understanding what we're discussing. He does go back and reread a lot of what we have done in class I think with his special education teacher. So, again, a lot of repetition with him.

Participant 10 often checks on her one student with a disability. Overall, majority of the RET participants spend time pulling their SWDs in a small group to provide additional support instruction in the inclusion classrooms.

Hands-on activities/task-based activities. A theme on providing hands-on and/or project-based activities also emerged. Five out of twelve participants (one SET and four RETs) explained that, in subjects like science and/or social studies, they observe more engagement when students have to complete projects, participate in role-playing, conduct experiments, or build structures: classroom tasks that require less reading and writing. Participant 7 discussed,

> They do pretty good (in science). Like I said, a lot of it is task-based. Sometimes, not even kidding you, some of them do better than the other kids. I mean they really liked the science, like they get really upset if they don't come in here at that time.

Participant 9 added, "I think sometimes they have ideas and think outside the box where they really good at things sometimes that other students aren't. Like science, they shine because they can do things sometimes that nobody else can." In summary, when RETs conduct hands-on activities, they see more active participation from SWDs.

Peer-tutoring. Two SETs and two RETs discussed peer-tutoring or peer-mentoring to be an effective way to provide SWDs some inclusive support. Participant 7 explained,

> There are times that my students with disabilities don't need my help (in the inclusion classroom). And so, I try to let them have the natural support of working

> with a peer. If that still is not helping, then I will come and help. So… they don't feel tied to me essentially.

Having a peer as a mentor allows for more guided or collaborative practice; it becomes an additional instructional support in the inclusion classrooms other than what the teachers provide.

Offering choice. For two RETs, choice is sometimes offered to students in their classrooms. Participant 11 noted how "

> "We don't have any preplanned differentiated tasks. A lot of the differentiated tasks come just within working in groups, so we use a lot of Kagan structures. So, with the mixed ability grouping that I have, um, there's a lot of differentiation just within that. They're allowed to use whatever strategies they would like to use. Um, they're able to talk about different things. Sometimes they have choice in the assignments that they do.

Although both Participant 10 and Participant 11 mentioned offering choice to be occasional, they indicated that doing so allowed for differentiation based on students' preference.

Assessment. All teacher participants, both in regular and special education, are responsible for pieces of student assessment. Although students in third grade do not receive letter grades yet, all students in Grades 3-6 receive some type of report that measures student performance or progress. Several practices regarding assessment emerged.

Providing accommodations. The accommodations that participants discussed for assessments are similar across the board. The participants' SWDs receive a reader or read aloud, scribe, calculator, extended time, paraphrasing, reinforcement and behavior modification strategies, among others: all of which are in alignment with the state's Inclusion of Special Populations in State-Required Assessment and Accountability Programs (KDE, 2016). The variation is found on testing locations and the provider of such accommodations. For all four RETs who teach reading and/or math, their SWDs are pulled out by their SETs in the resource room to receive such accommodations for reading and math tests. RETs who teach nontested subjects provide the testing accommodations in their inclusion classrooms. RETs read aloud to their SWDs during science or social studies testing while the rest of their SWoDs are taking the test in the same room. Therefore, SETS provide most IEP testing accommodations for reading and math, and most RETs provide testing accommodations for nontested content areas.

Test modifications. Four participants reported that they modify the tests for their SWDs. As stated in Chapter 1, any change to the material to change the level of difficulty is a modification. Participant 4 discussed how she would modify centers' work for her RET and change it to multiple choice. At the same time, two RETs eliminate choices from multiple choice assessments. Participant 10 mentioned,

> He (SWD) gets, for instance, a multiple choice test and there are four choices, then I narrow those down to two or three choices for him to choose from. If it's an extended response piece and it has multiple steps to it, then I narrow it down to

> maybe just one step or two steps. So, he's not overwhelmed with the entire content.

Participant 6 explained that while they do not eliminate choices in multiple choice-type tests, they accept responses (in open-ended question) that give the basic responses. This implies that a response to an extended response question could look like a response to a short answer-type of question for her SWDs. The rest of the participants, however, mentioned keeping the tests the same, but they provide the IEP test accommodations.

Grading systems. There are several ways that teachers approach grading for SWDs. Two SETs agreed that if their students are failing, they need to reassess if accommodations are provided with fidelity. In exact words, Participant 5 pointed out,

> If we are getting a failing grade, the first thing I tend to do is look at our expectations and if we're giving the correct modifications and supports that they need. I do think that the kids are (held) to a level that they should be able to accomplish, at least average work, right? Then, I give them opportunities to make corrections or to retest and to just keep at it until they do better. And then sometimes you do just have kids who are just not motivated. That's when it's more of a behavioral thing and we try to work in, what would you like to earn or how can I help you, and some of those sorts of things. But, by enlarge as, as an entire school district, we don't have kids anymore who are just failing and not getting the support they need to come back from that.

Participant 4 in agreement also added that if it is the lack of effort, she also gets the parents involved. On the same note, RET Participant 9 recalled,

> Spelling specifically comes to mind. At the beginning of the year we had had two students who had 20 words on their spelling list, and they were failing. After the first quarter, it was obvious, this needs to be changed. So, during our IEP meetings, we shortened their spelling list from 20 to 10. Our special ed teacher also added in some sight words, that they were having trouble with, into the spelling list because she thought that would help them also with their sight words… (after that) they have been performing much better in spelling.

For instances that SWDs receive a failing grade, four out of the five SETs mentioned that they reteach and reassess.

A discrepant case would include Participant 12's experience in the past when she did not provide a lot of grade modifications. She recalled,

> I had taught primary for so long and we didn't give letter grades. So, then my first quarter teaching sixth grade, I gave one of our special education kids a D and mother wasn't very happy because apparently was the first D he had received ever.

Although Participant 12 noted that she wants the grades to be a good representation of her students' abilities, she has been modifying the rubric she uses for projects later on. She added that, although her SWDs still attempt to do the work, she exempts them being graded on warm-up activities that are overwhelming for them. This way, her SWDs' inability to complete grade-level work will not negatively impact their grades. Overall, the participants have varied systems in place for grading the work of SWDs in inclusion settings.

Research Question 3

The third research question is about teachers' experiences in providing instructional support to students who participate in inclusion classrooms for most of the day. In describing the experiences in providing instructional support to students in inclusive classrooms, the following themes emerged: experience with administrative support, parent support, professional collaboration, availability of resources (both material and human resources), and experience with providing individualized support.

Administrative support. There are several ways that the teacher participants discussed administrative support; this type of support can be from either the building administrators and/or special education directors. Three of the seven RETs stressed the importance of having their principals available to answer their questions and concerns. As Participant 9 pointed out, "Our principal taught special education for a few years and he's been a great resource to go too also." At the same time, two of the four SETs noted that they have their principal's support in carrying out their responsibilities at school to meet their SWDs' needs. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that,

> Our principal has talked about, with us, based on the district's needs after last year, (that) if there is a time that I need to pull that child out or another child and work one on one with them rather than staying in the co-teaching (class) the entire hour, that is okay.

Participant 5, a SET, values the support of her principal with scheduling. She mentioned how her principal gives her the school's master schedule so that she can figure out homeroom placements for her SWDs in the beginning of the year. Moreover, the special

education directors, according to four SETs from three different districts, also provide ongoing support for the teachers. Through PD trainings, all three special education directors help in providing the knowledge that SETs need. They are also accessible for when the teachers have questions and concerns.

Professional collaboration. There are also many ways that teachers positively experience professional collaboration among their colleagues. All 12 participants have mentioned, in several parts of the interview, how they rely on each other to carry out their responsibilities in the classrooms. In a previous section, I have discussed ways that several collaborating teachers formally plan in the beginning of the year. Other teachers regularly consult with each other throughout the year. Consultation topics also include addressing behavior, socio-emotional, pre-vocational needs, and/or scheduling. Participant 7 explained,

> We don't have planning time together or such, but if I needed to call her then we've got it down. We do have to work on scheduling quite a bit and she's the most flexible person I've met in my entire life... like we don't necessarily work together. We just, we just talked to her, and she usually is like, "It's fine!" (She's) so flexible!

Moreover, a common theme on sharing of resources emerged. For instance, when I asked Participant 8 where she gets her resources for intervention, she replied, "We dig... (laughs) wherever we can. I mean the special education teacher is great. She has her plethora of word lists and different things." Another RET, Participant 9, agreed that she can ask her SET about strategies and interventions. Several RETs mentioned consulting

other RETs to discuss a student's performance in the past year, to brainstorm ideas, or to ask for resources. All the participants discussed how they work with their colleagues to help them perform their duties at school.

Resources. There are two types of resources that emerged from the interview data: material (i.e., reading/math programs, teacher-created units, RETs' lesson plans, and/or IEP snapshots) and human resources (i.e., special education consultants, paraprofessionals, and colleagues).

Material resources. Resources or programs for RETs and SETs are different. For SETs, several reading and math programs were used by all five teachers. They include Being a Reader, Reading A-Z, Lexia, MobyMax, Spell-Read-Write, Reading Mastery I, II, III, Journeys Tool Kit, SRA, LiPS Program, and Visualizing Vocabulary for reading. For math, there is envision Mathematics, Origo Math, Go Math, Do the Math, Picture Math, and Making Math.

Three SETs, who were all from the same district, noted having several resources. When asked what resources she uses in her resource room, Participant 3 replied,

> In reading, we use Reading mastery for our RtI, and then we also use the Scott Foresman just in general, a regular reading. In math, we use both The Coach and the workbooks, The Ladders, and then some Go Math. We also have a Connections Reading that helps with fluency.

Participant 5 pointed out about having several resources. She noted,

> It really is based on what the needs of my students are. We could probably meet for an hour and I could tell you all the different curriculum and resources that I

> use as far as what materials and things like that. There are specific reading programs that are made as intervention programs for kids who have disabilities. And so that is largely what I use.

Participant 4 added that she also has several resources to pull from.

> There are programs I have. I have Decoding, I have, you know, reading mastery one, two, three. I have journeys tool kit. I have my SRA, I have many resources. It is matchmaking to find the one that I can use. So, say the kids have decoding issues, I use a decoding program I might have. I'm gonna have to pull the sixth grade at the same time so I have six kids in here, I might have some kids in Decoding 1-A and then I had kids in Decoding B-2 or, and I have one girl that doesn't even have reading services for fluency or accuracy or basic reading skills: only comprehension.

Some RETs like Participant 5 have more programs than the others. However, Participant 1's and Participant 2's circumstances are different from the others. As Participant 2 answered when asked what resources she uses, she noted,

> Nothing really specific: we kind of just use whatever they're doing in the classroom. My students, especially my fourth graders, are very high functioning. So, they're capable of doing the classroom work and they just need some modifications and some supports. So, typically not with fourth grade is there a separate curriculum.

Participant 2 works with standards-based lesson, as planned by her RETs, when she pulls her small group in her resource room. Similarly, Participant 1, a SET from another

district added, “As a third-grade whole group, we have the unit planned. We all met as reading (and) as math, and we have the actual lesson, the bones of the lesson planned.” She uses standards-based lessons planned by her RETs also and supplements with reading materials from the website Reading A-Z and/or from general education reading curriculum.

For RETs, five out of seven participants have programs that are purchased by either their school or their district. On the contrary, two of the participants do not have purchased resources to teach their curriculum. Participant 6 who teach reading uses a teacher-created unit aligned with the English/Language Arts Common Core Standards. Participant 6 noted, “As a reading committee, several sources were combined to create a custom reading curriculum for third grade.” Analogous to this circumstance, Participant 7, a science teacher from a different district, uses the district-created curriculum aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). For purchased resources in social studies, Participant 10 use History Alive. She added,

> We also use an interactive student notebook that also comes along with that series that we use to help with taking notes and organizing our thoughts, and has activities in there that just go along with what we’re doing in class and making actual real-life connections to history in that kind of sense.

The other RETs mentioned, Journeys Reading and the Houghton-Mifflin Series as their reading curriculum with ReadWorks and Study Island as supplementary reading resources. Participant 11 noted that she uses Illustrative Math. Two science and social studies teachers, Participant 10 and Participant 12, added that they also get materials from

www.teacherspayteachers.com to supplement materials for their lessons. In fact, Participant 12 explained,

> So, I create my own units going along with the standards and our timeline: like we're kicking off with scientific method. That's our county thing. So, I'm finding my own materials to teach scientific method and then we'll go into chemical and physical changes, and I'll have my own materials through teacherspayteachers website that I've created my plans for, but our textbooks are so outdated.

Overall, majority of the RETs and SETs have programs that were provided for them by either their school or district. The ones that do not have curriculum programs either create their own or purchase materials from teacherspayteachers.com using their own money.

Human resources. When asked for ongoing support that they receive, participants' responses vary between receiving such support from personnel within the building and/or district. In-house support includes certified staff within the building or school. On the contrary, external support providers are district employees but are not based in specific buildings.

In-house support. In their own buildings, several participants mentioned having the support of their administrators (i.e., principals, assistant principals or dean of students, and guidance counselors), interventionists for reading, math, or behavior, elementary curriculum coordinators (ECCs), and lead teachers. The different types of support occur in structured meetings such as regular professional learning communities (PLCs) and in less formal settings like consultation on a need basis. For example, Participant 7 had questions that she addressed while enlisting the support of her

administrators or ECC. The participants from the biggest district also reported having a behavior, reading, and math interventionists in addition to ECCs in their buildings. The teacher participants noted the importance of having another professional in the building whose expertise is focused on a specific area such as reading, math, behavior, and/or curriculum.

Special education consultants. Participant 4, Participant 3, and Participant 5 mentioned the value of having a special education consultant. These SETs consider their consultants to be experts in special education. Since not all districts have special education consultants, I asked the SETs to further discuss this. As Participant 3 explained,

> They (special education consultants) really just come when you need help. So, if I call and I say I need some kind of material or I need some ideas, or just come and look at this kid for me and help me make a plan. The school district provides behavior consultants and reading and math consultants that I can access as easily as a gen ed teacher would, so, that's helpful and supportive. If I'm stuck trying to teach them (SWDs) something and I just can't get it through to them, I can always reach out and say, give me some ideas. Somebody help me with this.

Participant 4 agreed that even though they share the consultant with other schools,

> It's (having a special education consultant) still really good support. Anytime I need anything, I would call a lady (consultant) who's an expert on law. The GRREC, she goes there, she's the one that's kind of a liaison between us and the Special Ed Director and also us and all the kinds of things that are coming out

> from KDE (Ky Dept. of Education) and GRREC. And so, we have these meetings once a month that are (with) the district and one staff member will go or they'll do them on video, or we'll get emails. I can't complain about the communication.

Although the consultants serve multiple elementary schools, all three SETs from the same district agreed that they can easily reach their consultants as needed. These same SETs expressed how they value the consultants' expertise in keeping them informed, giving them ideas, and answering questions or concerns.

Parent support. Out of the 12 participants, two SETs and one RET expressed their positive experience with parent support. Participant 7 and Participant 10 have mentioned receiving the support at home when student effort is a concern. Participant 7, a RET, noted that she has received academic support at home also. In agreement, SET Participant 4 explained,

> if I did let a kid fail, it's because I have modified the work and they are just refusing to work. That doesn't happen very often because I'll get parents involved, I'll push until they don't want to be like that. But it's happened.

All three of these teachers agreed that they maintain positive relationships with their students' parents and doing so helped them in providing academic support to their SWDs.

Providing individualized support. As mentioned above, there are several systems in place to meet the varying needs of all students in inclusion classrooms. The difficulty lies on several circumstances. All the SET participants pull students in their resource rooms to provide more individualized instruction that cannot be provided in the inclusion classrooms. During this pullout time, four of the five SETs reported their experiences.

For instance, as Participant 4 stated,

> It's hard because even I'm pulling kids, I might have kids in that time that are the ones that I pulled for core. So, they could be first grade reading level. And then I'm going to pull kids that are fourth grade reading level and can (be in) collab class and have a high IQ. They're just having some reading difficulties and then not have dyslexia, so to be able to work on all those things at the same time in 30 minutes is not feasible. What I try to do is a kind of grouping within that 30 minutes.

Participant 3, the SET who does not go in regular education classrooms and pulls small groups all day, added that,

> It gets crowded sometimes. So, we have three work stations. We'll have the computers, the IPADS. Then, I usually have a group. Then, the aide will have a group if she's in here. A lot of times, if they're doing independent work and they're behaviorally able to handle it, then they'll get on the beanbags and work. We have clipboards. So, if they're not having good behavior, they don't get to do that. You know, so we make it work.

Participant 1, due to scheduling, has the same circumstances in one of her small groups. She mentioned,

> It gets hard because out of the five, whenever I pull them, I have to work around when they go to speech, when their therapist is coming, when they go to anger management, when they go to social skills group. So, I might have a child in my group that doesn't really fit in that group, but that's the only time I can see them.

> And so, it's really difficult at that point, you know, just to try to work with that kid one on one to give them what they need.

From a RET's perspective, Participant 6 compared her two classes, one of which is an inclusion class with 72% of SWDs while the other third grade class is not zero SWDs.

> (I can do) a lot more questioning with the other group (non-inclusion class) than the first group (inclusion class). They (students in the inclusion class) don't really understand the depth of the questions and things like that, where you have to keep it basic and then, the second group you can dig in deeper with them.

The foregoing statements suggest that some teachers involved in inclusion have difficulties with their circumstances while trying to tailor instruction to meet students' individual needs.

On the contrary, Participant 2 and Participant 5 do not have as wide of a gap when it comes to student needs in their small groups. As noted above, Participant 2 reported to have a group of fourth-graders who are high functioning; she was able to pull one fourth-grader with more severe needs at a separate time. As discussed earlier, Participant 5 is the SET who has third/fourth grade basic reading group and a fourth/fifth reading comprehension and writing group. This implies that SETs have different experiences in pulling small groups of students in their resource rooms.

With respect to teachers' circumstances and experiences in providing support to students in inclusion settings, I concluded the interview by asking questions about the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, and suggestions for improvement. A list of

SETs' responses on these final questions is presented in Table 3, and the RETs' responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 3

SETs' Statements on the Final Questions About Inclusion

Participant	Advantages of Inclusion	Disadvantages	Suggestions for Improvement
Participant 1	Students learn to work with each other.	(Not) to be able to spend, I guess more time with the very low functioning students.	An extra person… if we could have an extra person that could sit or pull that child and work 1-on-1, that would be awesome.
Participant 2	Students who were atypical. I'm gaining social skills, um, from students, from students who were, who are neurotypical, it teaches neurotypical students (about) acceptance.	Sometimes they (SWDs) feel why they are not as smart as their peers. Sometimes I think it's hard when you have to go in and collaborate with just different teaching styles, different personalities, and there are times when I feel more like I'm a guest in the classroom than a co-teacher.	I would like for RETs to have some training or something to help them understand disabilities more. Having a common planning would really help, be on the same schedule as the teachers of the students that you provide services to. If our caseloads weren't so large and there were more SETs, I think we could provide more collaboration, more inclusion.
Participant 3	They (SWDs) enjoy being there (in the inclusion classroom). The majority of them are doing well. They may have to be excused from the class to come in here (resource room) where it's quiet to have their tests read or to read their test or for their accommodations.	Just having so many different groups and having to coordinate all that and makes sure all the standards are met, every grade level, multiple standards, and individual needs. That's not easy.	Before, we had more SETs. So, we would only have two grade levels and that's when we did a lot of co-teaching. We only had two grade level, 8 students, and we were able to really know those students and to get out (in the collaborative setting) and to help more. I would love to have a bigger room and normally I do, but this year we got so many kids and so they had to combine classrooms.
Participant 4	Inclusion is so important in the younger grade levels because kids don't learn to be scared of people who are different. For our SWDs too, they get the social skills instruction, they get exposed to the content.	(In the resource room where student needs vary) It's hard to push that one kid (with behavior problems) while also letting these other kids move on (academically).	Less teacher to student to ratio probably because it's a scheduling problem. I think, just in general, scheduling is a problem, which we can match make more across grade levels too as far as reading.
Participant 5	Children get the opportunity to learn from each other. There's always another student in the general ed classroom that looks accessible to a SWD.	I feel sometimes inadequate in as much as, there's just not enough time in the day to make up for the deficits they experienced because of their disabilities.	It would be to have more staff, more human warm bodies to be assigned to each grade level or at least two grade levels as opposed to four. We can make a lot more collaboration happen.

Table 4

RETs' Responses to the Final Questions About Inclusion

Participant	Advantages of Inclusion	Disadvantages	Suggestions for Improvement
Participant 6	It gives SWDs more social interaction. It teaches them (SWoDs) to be role models and leaders and to be good citizens as far as helping others.	My first block (inclusion class with 72% SWDs) takes more energy. It takes a lot more energy, and I have to help a lot more students and monitor their work a lot closer.	Having another SET would reduce our numbers. That would make eight or nine kids in each room that would have IEPs, that would cut it in half and make it much easier to bring those kids to a higher level.
Participant 7	They (SWDs) get to feel included and maybe learn from the other kids.	My particular class, the disadvantage, it's a large class so they may not get all the attention that they need.	Maybe if the schedule was more consistent where I always had the help (from the instructional asst.) that I needed.
Participant 8	It makes everybody feel included and nobody feels left out like they're different. They can learn from each other, the students who struggle from the students who don't, and then vice versa too.	I think it limits the time that you work individually. Even in a small group, sometimes, like even if I have three kids, I mean if they have ADD, it's not small enough. They need somebody.	My dream wish (is) that we had either an instructional assistant or an interventionist that could come in and just really work with those kids.
Participant 9	Students need to feel included; they need an example to see, other students independently doing their work and see that as maybe a goal. I have some that are just getting it and I feel like they could teach it.	I'm doing them a disservice because especially last year, it comes to mind, (teared up) sorry, I want to give them what they need and that's really hard when you have other students out here that you have to help them too.	I would love for there to be other resources like a person, not a computer, not a program, but an actual person who could work with him more often.
Participant 10	He gets to still be in a classroom with his classmates and still be involved in what they're doing and not singled out all of the time. He can still form those friendships and do the activities that everybody else is doing and feel like he's still part of the, the class.	He might get lost a little bit or overwhelmed with the amount of instruction that's given during our 55-minute time period.	(Nothing) I think whenever I needed assistance with one of those students or I need resources, everybody here just seems to be very helpful and we just accommodate to the best that we can and again, we work together to make sure that our children are successful.
Participant 11	No one is left out. I think that that is something that, that we are teaching our kids is that nobody's left out. I'm thankful that they have the opportunity to be in this classroom.	It's just that, I can't be at that level. If they are on a 2nd grade level, I can't teach 2nd grade standards to just them. I still have to teach my 6th-grade (standards) to everybody.	It would be more education for teachers and the community because I know that when we have some pushback from students and they're not born with this prejudice. So, just education for everybody about inclusion for all people.
Participant 12	I feel like the advantages would be to help more socialization.	I don't really feel like their needs are being met in the large classroom like that and I realize we can't have a lot of SETs, but I feel like if they're, getting extra help in math and reading, they should be able to receive help in science and social studies.	I definitely (would) have an aide, at least, even if I couldn't collab with a special education teacher, have an aide in here to maybe break down the directions a little more because it's, it is difficult when you have those three and you're trying to help them, but then you still have your other 21.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion

classes. I interviewed 12 participants in regular and special education from three different school districts and six different schools. In addition to the participants' responses on their circumstances and experiences in their buildings, I concluded the interviews by asking for their insights on the advantages, disadvantages, and ways to further improve inclusive services. I present and summarize the results for each research question below.

RQ1: What classroom demographics do regular and special education teachers report that are providing services in inclusive classrooms?

I presented the SETs' caseload demographics in Table 1. All SETs in Grades 3-6 have 12-16 SWDs in their caseloads. All SETs provide direct instruction in reading, writing, and math in the special education setting. Four of the five SETs serve multiple, if not two, grade levels. Only one SET is assigned to a specific grade and 52% of the class have IEPs as she pulls all her SWDs in the same inclusion class for collaborative support. One SET, on the contrary, do not provide any services in the inclusion classroom; she pulls SWDs out from grades 3-6 in her resource room all day.

All the SETs' caseloads have a wide variety of student needs ranging from mild to severe disabilities in different areas of reading, writing, and math. In addition to academic deficits, other SWDs have autism spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injury, medically fragile diagnosis, and/or exhibiting difficult behavior or socio-emotional needs. This implies that within the 12-16 student-caseload, the varying disabilities require a wide range of support: from students requiring little to those with extremely high demands. With the varying levels of support that SWDs need, the involvement of SETs in the collaborative setting also differ.

The demographics of the RETs' inclusion classes are presented in Table 2. Majority of the RETs' students with disabilities go to the resource room—making the service delivery model to be inclusion with pullout. Only two of the seven RETs have a SET for a whole reading or math period. In both cases, the co-teaching model implemented is the one-teach-one-assist approach: with the RET assuming the responsibility of the whole group instruction.

The percentage of SWDs in the RETs' inclusion classrooms range from 4%-72%. Majority of the inclusion classrooms do not exceed the 33% suggested cap of SWDs per the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE, 2012). The discrepant case is that of one RET with 72% and one SET with 52% SWDs; both participants co-teach with their collaborating teachers during the whole reading or math period. The SWoDs in these inclusion classes have academic abilities below grade level. The RETs also have a wide variety of student needs ranging students with more severe disabilities to those without disabilities who are functioning on or well above grade level. The only discrepant case is that of one RET who has only one SWD in her inclusion class, all the others have at least two SWDs. The following themes related to the second research question provides more details on the daily activities of teachers (in both regular and special education) and students alike.

RQ2: How do regular and special education teachers provide instructional support for SWDs in inclusion classes?

Several themes emerged from teacher responses regarding the ways that participants provide inclusion in their schools. I categorized the themes under

preparation, lesson implementation, and assessment. Themes under preparation include educational background, professional training, field experience, and planning times at work. One RET did not have any special education classes in college, while the six other RETs had one. The SETs have either an undergraduate or master's degrees in addition to their teaching or alternative certification in special education. Training programs that RETs have attended varied from not having any at all to attending some trainings related to inclusion. For SETs, the training ranged from having attended some district or regional based sessions to serving on the board for the Special Education State Council. While the educational background and professional learning experiences vary, all educators attribute their readiness to teach students in inclusion to their years of actual teaching in the classrooms.

All the participants engage in different types of planning within their buildings to help them prepare for the daily tasks. Different forms of planning that emerged include weekly content planning, regular informal consultations, and beginning of the year planning between SETs and RETs that includes having an IEP-@-a-Glance documents. All the above-mentioned types of preparation contribute to the actual lesson implementation for students involved in inclusive classrooms.

Under the category lesson implementation, the following themes include instruction in the inclusion setting, instruction in the special education setting, and the different ways that differentiation is provided— through RtI, differentiation through process and/or content, small group instruction, hands-on or task-based activities, peer-tutoring, and offering choice. During core instruction in the inclusion classrooms, RETs

conduct the whole group instruction while the SETs typically assist students. In the absence of a SET, the RETs provide the accommodations that SWDs need. In the special education setting, SETs pull small groups to provide instruction within the SWDs' instructional levels. However, majority of the SETs have students in their small groups whose needs also vary. Two of the SETs, on the contrary were able to pull students by ability levels.

The final category on how educators provide support for student in inclusion is assessment. To do so, RETs and SETs provide accommodations, modify tests, and use different grading systems. SETs primarily give the test accommodations per students' IEPs. RETs who either teach nontested areas or do not have a SET in the inclusion classroom provide the test accommodations themselves. Most tests, however, are not modified. Only three of the 12 participants discussed either eliminating choices, changing a (fill in the blank or word bank) task to a multiple choice, or using short answer instead of extended response questions. The same process occurs with grading systems. Most SWDs are graded differently compared to their peers. RETs and SETs who are responsible for content grading (i.e., giving a math, reading, language arts grades, etc.) primarily measure the performance in relation to the students' abilities, not on grade level standards. In the case that SWDs are still failing, two SETs pointed out that they either review accommodations or determine if it is a student effort issue. Overall, most RETs and SETs noted that grades should be reflective of the students' performance.

RQ #3: What are regular and special education teachers' experiences in meeting the instructional needs of SWDs in varied inclusion classes?

The teacher participants' experiences with inclusion revealed themes such as administrative support, professional collaboration, material resources, human resources (in-house support and special education consultants) parent support, and experiences with providing individualized support. The participants receive some type of administrative support either from their principal or special education director. Professional collaboration with peers, on the contrary, is a common theme for all 12 educators' responses; they either share resources, answer each other's questions or concerns, brainstorm ideas, and/or consult with each other.

All the participants have different types of resources (materials and human resources) available to them in their schools or districts. Materials useful to implementing lessons varied from teacher created units and lesson plans to several purchased curriculum programs for reading or math. Human resources, on the contrary, are additional certified staff other than administrators. While principals, assistant principals, dean of students, and/or guidance counselors offer support to their teachers, one school has interventionists for reading, math, and behavior in their building. Additionally, several SETs from the same school district have special education consultants. Furthermore, three participants noted in their responses the critical role of parent support in inclusion. Lastly, a theme about difficulties with providing individualized support emerged.

Majority of the SETs, despite their efforts to provide small group individualized instruction in their resource rooms, face the challenges of addressing each of the student's needs effectively. The wide range of abilities and disabilities, the number of students in

their caseloads, schedule, and the severity of student needs impact all the participants' experiences with inclusion. Hence, I asked three questions to gather information on the advantages, disadvantages, and suggestions for improvement of inclusion in their buildings.

See Tables 3 and 4 for a tabular presentation of teacher responses in both special and regular education. In summary, SET respondents revealed the advantages of inclusion for all students to include the following: SWDs learning to work with others, socializing and/or forming friendship with their peers, feeling included, and having exposure to desirable behaviors; SWoDs learning to be accepting of others' differences, having leadership opportunities, and being role models. Responses in relation to disadvantages of inclusion consist of (a) teachers not spending enough time with students who have much lower academic functioning, (b) realizing that they (SWDs) are not up to par with their peers, (c) SETs having difficulties sharing the inclusion space to co-teach with another teacher, (d) scheduling, (e) having multiple grade levels (for SETs), and (f) RETs and SETs failing to meet all of their students' individual needs and their grade level standards at the same time.

Finally, I asked for each of the participant's input on ways to improve the provision of inclusion support to all students involved. The responses are the following: (a) have an extra person to provide intensive intervention daily; (b) give RETs (and other stakeholders) trainings to better understand disabilities and/or special education; (c) structure collaborative planning time between SETs and RETs who share the same SWDs; (d) hire more staff so that SETs could have smaller caseload size, focus on one or

two grade levels, and provide more collaboration support; (e) provide bigger resource rooms to accommodate the number of SWDs; (f) give SETs an opportunity or flexibility to create their schedule based on the school's master schedule; and (g) assign instructional assistants to science and social studies inclusion classes. Altogether, these make up the responses of all twelve participants in regular and special education.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings previously discussed with the findings from the literature review described in Chapter 2. I also analyze the context of the conceptual framework as appropriate, and then, I describe the limitations of the study. I provide recommendations for further research. In addition, I describe the potential impact for positive social change at the appropriate levels. I conclude by providing a strong "take home" message that captures the key essence of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe the circumstances and experiences of regular and special education teachers in third to sixth grade inclusion classes. In this basic qualitative study, I conducted interviews with teachers involved with students in Grades 3-6 inclusion settings to gain rich and detailed information. As I explored the circumstances in inclusion classrooms, I gained an understanding of general and special education teachers' experiences in meeting their students' needs.

A common theme was that RETs and SETs experience a variety of difficulties in their efforts to meet the instructional needs of SWDs and SWoDs in the same inclusion classroom. The participants value the importance of organizational support (e.g., administrative support, professional collaboration) in delivering the best inclusion service they can provide given the resources they have. Despite the challenges that educators face, almost all of the participants indicated that they are providing the best possible support to students in inclusion classrooms.

Interpretation of the Findings

In comparison to the key variables from the peer-reviewed literature in Chapter 2, the findings of this basic qualitative research study confirmed and extended knowledge in the discipline of special education. First, the participants' responses regarding the advantages of inclusion confirmed findings from other studies that inclusion is interpreted in different ways (see Kozleski et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Umhoefer et al., 2015). The findings in the current study also confirmed the relevance of teacher knowledge in serving SWDs participating in inclusion classrooms. Most RETs

are uncertain about how to meet the needs of students who have more severe disabilities or those with autism (Able et al., 2015).

Regarding students' needs, the results of the current study validated literature review findings about challenges related to state standards. Current study findings confirmed Kurz et al.'s (2014) findings about most of the school day being allotted to grade-level standards. Despite these circumstances in most inclusion classrooms, findings also confirmed that educators implement various forms of differentiation to address needs in inclusive classrooms (see An & Meaney, 2017; Meynert, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015) with RtI being the most commonly and consistently implemented form of differentiation across the participants' schools. Although multiple studies supported the advantages of using universal design for learning (UDL) practices as a research-based instructional framework in inclusive classrooms (Choi et al., 2017; Fuchs et al., 2015; Morningstar, 2015; Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015), only one participant mentioned using UDL practices. Finally, several participants supported the use of steps in explicit instruction during small group and one-on-one instruction, including teacher modeling, guided and independent practice, and opportunity for student work time.

Teachers' responses reflected different types of social support discussed in Chapter 2. According to several studies, students need social inclusion as much as they need academic inclusion (Brock et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Lakkala et al., 2016; Meynert, 2014; Callado Moreno et al., 2015; Shuster et al., 2017). Findings from the current study revealed that social support from peers, also known as social relationship

(see Able et al., 2015), is the most common and apparent advantage of inclusion. Another type of social support that findings of this study justified is the need for SWDs' social academics—the behavior required to complete academic tasks. Furthermore, SET participants reported that they address self-advocacy skills in the same way that they teach academic skills: with explicit direct instruction for students with social or behavioral needs.

Moreover, the findings from the current study indicated that building and district administrators provide invaluable support to regular and special education teachers involved in inclusion (see Algozzine et al., 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015; Schwab et al., 2015; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015). The types of support included having relevant PD sessions, being present in meetings or in formal/informal consults, reallocating time and budget for material and human resources, and/or giving teachers permission to do what is necessary for their students. However, due to lack of personnel support, oversize caseloads, and/or scheduling conflicts, the findings of this study indicated that RETs and SETs do not engage in common content planning. SETs mainly assist, and the one-teach-one-assist model is the most common form of co-teaching (see Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015).

Argyris and Schön's (1996) theory of organizational learning references the members' learning and actions to determine the system's growth and improvement. The findings of the current study confirmed that teachers have adopted ways to improve their current practices as evidenced by RETs' and SETs' beginning-of-the-year planning. SETs create IEP-@-a-Glance documents and RETs provide accommodations and/or

modifications on their own. Although there are no set times for common content planning, RETs informally consult with their SETs and vice versa. All these practices are changing the context of general education to better serve SWDs participating in inclusive settings. Argyris and Schön's notion of organizational learning is evident in teachers' efforts to sustain and improve inclusive services for all students.

Findings from recent studies and the current study indicated that common barriers in inclusion include (a) lack of structured time for collaboration, (b) lack of personnel support, (c) oversized caseloads, and (d) lack of PD trainings. Current study findings confirmed that none of the participants have formal content planning time with their collaborating teachers (i.e., SETs and RETs). Hence, there is no structured regular time for collaboration during the school day (see Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Lakkala et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Roiha, 2014; Su-Je & Kwang-Sun, 2017). Moreover, most of the current participants' responses confirmed recent study findings regarding the lack of PD training, lack of personnel support, and oversized caseloads. Several participants confirmed the need for PD training related to a wide-range of needs in the same class. As Paju et al. (2016) emphasized, RETs feel more confident when including SWDs when they have received training on how to support students who have more severe disabilities and/or those with autism. Also, when asked about suggestions to improve inclusive services, 10 of the 12 current study participants discussed needing more staff to address the wide variety of needs in inclusive classrooms and/or the severity of needs in special education caseloads.

Limitations of the Study

The main source of data for this study was teacher reported information gathered through interviews. Some teachers may have felt uncomfortable sharing undesirable experiences or circumstances at their place of employment. It is possible that some participants provided responses to reflect a positive view of their school and/or practices in their building. Additionally, some participants may not have felt comfortable sharing information out of fear of admitting inefficiencies in themselves or other employees. The trustworthiness of data from this study depended solely on the level of honesty with which teachers felt comfortable sharing.

Another limitation was that although I tried to interview participants from 10 different schools with varying size and demographics, I did not reach a level of saturation to cover the varying circumstances in inclusion classrooms. There are 10 counties in the south-central U.S. state sample in this study, and the participants were from three of these counties. Circumstances in one school may be different from those in another school in the same district. In my place of employment, which is in the same county as one of the schools in this study, there are a lot of differences in circumstances and teacher experiences. It is likely that there are more details regarding inclusion implementation than I was able to cover. The current study included a limited sample of participants compared to the total number of educators in this region of the state; this impacts the transferability of the findings of this study.

Recommendations

As noted in recent literature, most of the circumstances described in the current study reflect persistent concerns from regular and special education teachers regarding meeting the needs of all students participating in inclusive classrooms (see Cameron, 2014; Conderman & Hedlin, 2015), especially students with autism and/or significant academic and/or behavioral gaps. In the preparation phase of teaching, all of the RET participants (whose experiences varied from 5 to 25 years) had either zero or only one special education course in their undergraduate degrees. There has not been much effort integrating special education courses in the curriculum of regular education degrees. More research is needed to identify ways to improve teacher preparation courses that could support RETs' knowledge in teaching inclusion classes, and in what ways they can learn more about the varying disabilities, ways to accommodate, and ways to advocate for SWDs.

Moreover, RETs in the current study expressed the lack of opportunities for professional learning related to inclusion. According to findings from other studies, teachers need (a) PD programs and/or regular professional learning committee meetings to facilitate learning about improved inclusive practices (Blank & Smithson, 2014; Morningstar et al., 2015; Paju et al., 2016; Shogren, Gross, et al., 2015) and (b) administrative support to build stronger collaborative efforts (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Paju et al., 2016). There is a lack of knowledge and practice about intentional and regular planning between regular and special education teachers. Future research could address

ways that administrators can support RETs and SETs in cooperative efforts to support all students in inclusive classrooms.

Based on current study findings, SETs' caseload size is within the state's caseload requirements, 15 is maximum and 16 for waiver without teacher assistant (see Special Education Waiver Process, 2018). However, given the SET participants' caseloads (with students in multiple grade levels and significantly varying deficits in reading, math, writing, and/or behavior), SETs are not meeting each child's individual needs in ways that should be addressed. Oversized caseloads cause teachers to experience difficulties in addressing students' individual needs (Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Lakkala et al., 2016; Roiha, 2014; Umhoefer et al., 2014). Moreover, SETs play minimal roles in collaborative teaching. Unless state legislators reduce the maximum caseload for special education teachers, future research is needed to identify more effective ways of managing SETs' assignments and caseloads.

Implications

I explored teacher-reported circumstances and experiences in providing support to students in elementary inclusive classrooms. The findings may be beneficial for parents and caregivers when collaborating with educators to advocate for their children's needs. Also, teachers and administrators could use the results in this study to configure the resources in their buildings for maximized educational support. Additionally, findings may benefit teacher preparation institutions and district- regional- and state-level organizations in providing support to educators.

This research added to the current literature on how inclusion materializes in public school classrooms. As more research-based evidence arises, practitioners, researchers, and legislators can make more informed decisions to improve the quality of inclusive efforts. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by raising awareness to support improved pedagogical practices that impact schools and communities.

Methodical Implication

Twelve regular and special education teachers from six different schools and three different school districts provided the data analyzed in this study. The statements from 11 participants expressing the need for more human resources, which were consistent with other study findings regarding oversized caseloads, indicated that teachers need more support to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio in inclusive classrooms. Class and caseload sizes should be reduced to allow for inclusion of all students in the same classroom regardless of ability.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend that college and university leaders offer more special education courses in teacher preparation programs. Also, educational leaders at the regional or state levels could offer the same type of support to administrators at the district and school levels. Regional- and state-level leaders could provide quality training paired with comprehensive resources to support best inclusion practices. For example, states like Louisiana have a comprehensive Co-Teaching Resource Guide (Louisiana Department of Education, 2011) that educational leaders and

teachers can use as a resource. Other states do not have a similar document with details as extensive. Even if co-teaching is currently not feasible, ideas included in this document could provide administrators and teachers with tools regarding planning, implementing, and fine-tuning the inclusive service delivery models in their buildings. A document that contains all of these helpful ideas could be an invaluable resource to schools. In summary, awareness of other states' processes could help in improving inclusion practices.

As a result of having a resource guide, administrators and staff could explore other ideas on how to improve the inclusive service delivery models in their schools. For example, it was common in some schools how all teachers who share SWDs meet in beginning of the year to discuss students' needs using IEP-@-a-Glance documents. As included in the above-mentioned resource guide, I also recommend discussing regular and special education teachers' expected roles, curriculum expectations, and their philosophies in meeting the needs of all students. Doing so could help clarify misconceptions and confusions among educators.

As supported by the current study's findings on SETs being assigned to multiple grades and/or classes, further recommendations include minimizing the grade levels that SETs serve. For SETs to have more flexibility in scheduling small groups (by ability level), they would need the support of administrators and other RETs in creating schedules for the SWDs. This is a strategy that teachers devised in the school of one of the SETs—to maximize the special education support since there is only one SET for Grades 3-6. To be specific, once the master schedule is created, the administrator could

allow the SET to schedule small group pull-out based on ability levels, not only by grade levels. For schools who have more than one SET, the SETs could also pull small groups based on ability level irrespective of grade levels. This implies that SETs share caseloads and also progress monitoring responsibilities. There will be a complex schedule to figure out in the beginning, but the students in the same group would have needs that are closer (if not the same) to each other's, and the resource time could be maximized to meet specific student needs.

School and district leaders who oversee both the regular and special education programs could leverage funding for human resources and time for professional learning and collaboration. Ongoing PLCs could include several ideas presented in the Co-teaching Resource Guide on Finding Time to Co-plan (Louisiana Department of Education, 2011) such as getting a sub for part or entirety of the day, scheduling SETs to have common planning with their RETs, or allowing SETs to have floating planning periods to meet with every RET for 15 minutes weekly. With a systemic support in place, future and current teachers' capacity to provide inclusive services could be optimized.

Conclusion

As noted in previous literature, the results of this study confirmed that there are different ways that inclusion support is provided to SWDs (see Blank & Smithson, 2014; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Umhoefer, Vargas, & Beyer, 2015). While this does not necessarily mean that some schools are falling short of a standard, it is important to be cognizant of different ways that educators or other school systems carry inclusion through to

completion. Since educators in different school systems have varying resources available to them, I explored and included in this study the circumstances that participants have in their buildings. With as much details about how inclusion is currently provided, I hoped that some educators could find circumstances similar to theirs and learn from others' system of implementing inclusive support.

However, as I completed this study, I came to a realization of how much support educators need from the administrative level. As a result, I came to think about the school leaders' circumstances and what needs they may also require from the district, region, and state levels to sustain inclusive efforts. With all the initiatives and responsibilities that teachers and school leaders are expected to deliver (i.e., to meet the core standards, state accountability systems, differentiation, grading, RtI, research-based practices & interventions, parent-teacher relations, schoolwide events & obligations, etc.), it could be challenging to implement inclusion with fidelity and effectively—given the lack of support and resources as supported in this study's findings. Granted that all these initiatives and mandates aim to improve the quality of education, support should also be structured and scaffolded for educators in all levels. I therefore conclude that current circumstances in schools have to be considered, and teacher preparation programs and systemic support for educators in all levels should be aligned with the educational mandates—so that effective inclusion could come to fruition in the classrooms.

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Appendix A: Pre-Interview Google Form

Pre-Interview Form

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. I truly appreciate your time and effort. ~Grace

While your name and school will be kept confidential, please fill out this form for the purpose of the interview process. Thank you very much!

* Required

1. **Name** *

2. **School and District** *

3. **I am a:** *
   Mark only one oval.
   - ◯ Regular Education Teacher
   - ◯ Special Education Teacher

4. **Grade level/(s) & subject/(s) (e.g. 3rd and 4th/reading and math)** *

5. **Years of experience in the school and/or district:** *

6. **For Regular Education Teachers: Number of classes I teach (including # of students in each class) or For Special Education Teachers: Number of students in caseload** *

7. **Please upload your daily schedule here.**
   Files submitted:

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Teacher Code Name: _____

Basic Information (from the pre-interview Google Form)

Grade level & subject	
Reg Ed: Classes & number of students Special Ed: # of students in caseload	
Years of experience	
See attachment/(s)	**Daily Schedule**

1. **What type of inclusion service delivery model is provided in your school?**

   (i.e., full inclusion with a full-time collab, inclusion w/ part-time collab, w/ pull-out or push-in, etc.)

2. Ratio of SWDs to SWoDs: **For each inclusion class, how many students have IEPs? How many do not have IEPs?**

3. **For each inclusion class, what are the different disabilities that your students have? How did you learn about their disabilities and their needs?**

4. **What forms of collaborative practices do you have with your regular/special education teacher?** (e.g. co-planning, co-teaching, consulting, etc.)

Instruction or Lesson Preparation:

5. **Looking back, what preparations, if any, di you receive to teach inclusion classes? (***e.g. staff meeting or PD, special education formal training, PDs on differentiation or RTI, special ed manual/memos, emails, curriculum map, etc.)*

6. **What kinds of ongoing support do you receive to help you teach in the inclusive classroom?** (*e.g. regular PLCs, consultation with academic/instruction coach, collaboration with special education teacher, emails, etc.*)

7. **Who has the responsibility, or do you share it, of planning the lesson/test accommodations for your SWDs in class? How did you know about such accommodations?**

8. **What resources do you have to teach the curriculum or (for special ed teachers) to provide intervention?**
    a. **What pre-planned differentiated tasks, if any, did you have?**

b. **If so, who is responsible for, or do you share it, for planning these? What are they?** (e.g. leveled text, differentiated worksheet, modified or shortened work, etc.)

Lesson Implementation:

9. **During the lesson, what support/(s) do you receive to help you teach your inclusion class?** (e.g. co-teaching, alternate teaching, one-teach one-assist, paraprofessional, etc.)

10. **During the actual lesson, who is responsible for, or do you share it, for providing accommodations for your SWDs? What are these accommodations?**

- ☐ Task analysis
- ☐ Small groups
- ☐ Reader
- ☐ Paraphrasing
- ☐ Often check for understanding
- ☐ Other: _____

Assessment and Grading

11. **For assessments, what accommodations, if any, did you provide for your SWDs?** (e.g. opportunity to re-do missed items, partial credit, shortened/modified tests)

12. **For grading, is there anything that you differently for your SWDs?**

Final questions:

13. **Overall, how do you feel about meeting the instructional needs of your:**

    a. **SWDs in the inclusion class?**

    b. **SWoDs?**

14. **What do you perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion?**

15. **Is there anything that, if you could change, you think might help you in providing inclusive services to all students?**