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Elementary and Middle School Administrators' Perceptions on Implementing Change Toward Inclusion Practices

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MA, Lamar University, 2009

BS, Texas State University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Inclusive education programs exist in public schools to provide equitable education opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. However, the processes for administrators to implement change toward inclusive classrooms and achieve program sustainability remain unclear. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their roles in initiating change. An integration of Fullan and Quinn's coherence framework and Lewin's 3-step change model was the conceptual lens for the study. Research questions were focused on how administrators view aspects that hinder or influence implementation of inclusion practices. Data were collected from 11 elementary and middle school principals during individual semistructured interviews. The data were analyzed using a cyclical coding process, which included a priori, open, and pattern coding. The results were aligned with the conceptual framework. The findings indicated that an environment including *intentional learning*, *effective leadership*, *investment in human capital*, and *collective responsibility* is needed to sustain the implementation of inclusive practices. It is recommended that district personnel explore the ideals identified in this study to provide principals with relevant and reflective learning opportunities to develop skills to support change initiatives and to lead staff in inclusion efforts; the latter includes more learning about special education. Positive social change may result from the findings of this study that inform an establishment of reflective practices, continuous learning and development programs, and procedures for inclusion implementation that address equity issues concerning educational opportunities of students with disabilities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents (Adelaida, Honorio, and Precious), who relentlessly pushed me to reach beyond what was right in front of me. I am blessed to have a mom, dad, and bonus mom who always believed in my abilities even when I didn't. These three individuals are the epitome of unconditional love and support. I did it! Just like they said I could.

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There are not enough words to express the gratitude I have for my committee chair, Dr. Kathryn Swetnam. In so many ways, she was my accountability partner. She made sure I always persevered to the end goal, but she also never let me ignore my job, my family, my dogs, and my self-preservation. Dr. Kate, I couldn't have asked for a better person to share in this journey.

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I also want to recognize my family, who always cheered me on and were gracious when I couldn't make a party or was MIA in our group message. I also very much appreciate my immediate circle of support, who put up with me, let me incessantly talk about scholarly things, and did not let me quit, even though I said I would every other week. And of course, I give praise to God, for through Him, all things are possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Education of all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975) ignited the concept of providing students with disabilities access to general curriculum alongside their peers, which was later reemphasized through the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). The law mandated students with disabilities, regardless of the disability, to be educated, to the maximum extent possible, with peers without disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Because of these laws, local education agencies (LEA) must make decisions to place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to gain access to the general curriculum. The Every Student Achieves Act (ESSA, 2015), which was an amendment to IDEA, reiterated the idea of equity for all students by enacting policy to afford all students opportunities for fair, high-quality education and to close academic achievement gaps across all groups of students (ESSA, 2015).

Although the language in IDEA (2004) did not clearly define what constitutes the LRE, many schools have gravitated toward using inclusive settings and practices to meet this requirement (Marks, Kurth, & Bartz, 2014). Inclusive education programs are common practices in public schools and benefit students in improved academic achievement, increased adaptive behavior skills, positive social skills, and peer acceptance (Marks et al., 2014). Since this movement toward inclusive education, however, there has not been research on how to initiate and sustain inclusion programs (Chitiyo, 2017). Researchers' findings indicate the principal as the administrator who must initiate the change process for implementation of inclusive practices in schools

(Chitiyo, 2017; Lyons, 2016; Roberts, Ruppar, & Olson, 2018; Yan & Sin, 2015). Fullan (2016a) identified the principal as the change leader for any educational innovation. However, it is unclear how principals should begin this process for change and address challenges or facilitators for inclusion program sustainability.

This qualitative exploratory case study addressed the phenomenon of inclusion programs in schools and the role administrators play in implementation and sustainability. Understanding the way administrators perceive their role in facilitating change for inclusive practices and gaining clarity of their perceptions of challenges and leverages to sustainability is important to enrich the educational experiences of all students, including students with disabilities (Cobb, 2015). Potential findings could lead to positive social change in promoting quality education and equitable access for all students, especially students with disabilities. Additionally, findings from this study could influence the way administrators are prepared to lead for change and establish best practices, continuous learning and development opportunities, and guidelines for implementation in inclusive schools that meet the needs of students with disabilities. In the sections to follow, I provide detailed information, including background literature that supports the need for this study and the conceptual lens that contributed to the development of the research questions.

Background

This study addressed a gap in the research about how administrators can effectively implement and sustain inclusion programs and the factors that hinder successful execution (Chitiyo, 2017). Inclusive education is documented as the most

effective approach to achieve equal learning opportunities for students with disabilities (Avissar, Licht, & Vogel, 2016; Yan & Sin, 2015). Findings from researchers point to the principal as the administrator who has the most influence and power in initiating change for implementation and sustainability of inclusion practices in schools (Chitiyo, 2017; Cobb, 2015; Lyons, 2016; Roberts et al., 2018; Yan & Sin, 2015).

IDEA (2004) added to the many responsibilities of school principals because the law mandated that principals be more involved in decisions with placement and instruction for students with disabilities (Cobb, 2015; Lynch, 2012; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). Added pressure to have solid practices and supportive systems in place for inclusion are reiterated in ESSA (2015). The federal government requires states to annually assess students with standardized assessments to measure academic achievement and student growth as part of a state's accountability system. ESSA mandated a limit where no more than 1% of students with disabilities could be tested with an alternate standardized assessment. Many students with low-incident disabilities continue to be placed in segregated instructional settings and typically receive a highly modified curriculum (Marks et al., 2014; Morningstar, Kurth, & Johnson, 2017). Consequently, because of the nature of the modified curriculum, students with low-incident disabilities take an alternate standardized assessment. Many states exceed the 1% limit set forth through ESSA. This requirement is another factor that forces schools to ensure students with disabilities are appropriately placed in the LRE.

There is a lack of research on the role of administrators in the process of change to support and maintain inclusion practices in schools. Researchers' findings of

challenges and factors to consider while attempting to prepare schools for change to support inclusion practices include things such as school culture, teacher attitudes and beliefs, inclusion delivery methods, lack of administrator preparation, and lack of special education knowledge (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Kurth et al., 2015; Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016; Motala, Govender, & Nzima, 2015; Olson et al., 2016; Osiname, 2018; Srivastava, De Boer, & Pijl, 2017). However, little is documented on how inclusion should be implemented or how principals begin the change process to foster and maintain inclusive education (Chitiyo, 2017; Cobb, 2015; Lynch, 2012; Waldron et al., 2011).

Problem Statement

Since the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), philosophies guiding the educational services of special education programs continue to change, particularly in making decisions regarding placement of students with disabilities. To the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities should be educated with peers without disabilities regardless of the severity of their disability (IDEA, 2004). As a result, inclusive practices are the standard in addressing the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities (Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). Although placing students with disabilities in inclusive settings, such as the general education classroom, can create equitable access to the general curriculum and increase learning expectations for all students, an environment structured for inclusion practices needs to be established (Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015).

Nonetheless, insufficient understanding exists concerning the implementation process—specifically how elementary and middle school administrators guide teachers' change in practice to support inclusion and the aspects that may impede or promote program sustainability. School personnel struggle to implement inclusive practices and a need exists to understand how best practices can be implemented (Kurth et al., 2015). Researchers' findings point to the role of the school principal as critical in implementing and sustaining inclusive practices, but administrators require specific information and knowledge of the steps to begin a sustainable inclusionary program (Lyons, 2016). Campus administrators have significant power and influence over establishing and maintaining inclusive practices, but limited research has addressed the effective implementation and sustainability of inclusion programs in public schools and factors that hinder or increase successful execution (Chitiyo, 2017). Administrators' leadership is vital for fostering inclusive practices, yet little is known about how to begin the process of transforming current practices to support and maintain inclusion practices (Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. I interviewed 11 elementary and middle school administrators to collect data on strategies, best practices, challenges, and supports for implementing inclusionary programs. Findings from this study may assist campus and district administrators in

understanding obstacles or facilitators to sustain the implementation of inclusion programs and inform district staff of effective practices to develop consistent procedures and training programs on how those practices can be executed in schools.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding the cultivation of collaborative cultures to support inclusion practices?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices?

Conceptual Framework

For any innovation to become a lasting and meaningful part of an institution, whole-system improvement is necessary, which involves transforming the current model (Fullan, 2016b). Implementing and sustaining innovation, such as an inclusion program in schools, requires change in current practices and possibly attitudes and perceptions of members within a school. Fullan and Quinn's (2016) paradigm offers an overview of an educational change process that addresses factors affecting the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of educational change.

The goal of effective educational change is whole-system improvement that involves choosing the right strategies and policies or "drivers" (Fullan, 2016b, p. 41) designed to foster positive and lasting change within the whole system. The right drivers could be instrumental in the successful initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of the change—in this case, inclusionary practices (Fullan, 2016b). Four right drivers are articulated for whole-system improvement that Fullan and Quinn (2016) described as the coherence framework. When put into action, the right drivers are defined as (a) focusing direction, (b) cultivating collaborative cultures, (c) securing accountability, and (d) deepening learning. The central force of the right drivers is leadership. Leaders leading change work to find ways to link and connect the right drivers to achieve coherence for change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Hoppey, Black, and Mickelson (2018) conducted a case study following the evolution of successful inclusive practices in two elementary schools. The researchers uncovered four central themes that framed the success of inclusion implementation and continuation led by campus principals: (a) increasing confidence and capacity, (b) developing collaborative structures, (c) reframing the vision for special education, and (d) negotiating district and state policies (Hoppey et al., 2018). These themes mirror Fullan and Quinn's (2016) right drivers for whole-system change.

In regard to approaching change, Lewin (1946) believed that to understand and initiate change in any situation, it is first necessary to observe the current situation or status quo and how it is maintained by the forces within a group. By identifying the components of the current situation, it could then be possible to understand why groups

act in a particular way and what forces would need to be removed or supported to initiate change (Burnes, 2004). Administrators' leadership is vital for fostering inclusive practices, but little is known about how to begin the process of transforming current practices to support and maintain inclusion practices (Shogren et al., 2015). Lewin's (1943) three-step model to approaching change—defined as (a) unfreezing, (b) changing, and (c) refreezing—provides insight for identifying ways to begin the process of transforming current practices in an organization.

The conceptual lens used for this study was Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework integrated with elements of Lewin's (1943) three-step model for approaching change, as shown in Figure 1. At the center of the coherence framework and the three-step change model is the idea that a leader's actions are critical while attempting whole-system change. This conceptual lens was considered when analyzing principals' perceptions of implementation and sustainability of inclusionary practices and the perception of the role they play.

School administrators leading for change toward inclusive practices for all students need to be ready to be immersed in comprehensive and difficult educational reform and be committed to the time it takes to achieve lasting change (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). An integration of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework for change and Lewin's three-step model for approaching change frame this study because implementation and sustainability of inclusion practices require changes to the whole system. The study's research questions were designed to explore campus administrators' perceptions concerning strategies to guide teachers' change in practice and beliefs,

challenges to the implementation and sustainability of inclusion practices, and change factors that support and maintain inclusion practices. I developed an interview protocol based on Fullan and Quinn's (2016) and Lewin's (1943) paradigm and implemented a priori codes. During the data analysis stage, these codes helped identify patterns and created themes based on the elements of Fullan and Quinn's and Lewin's models for successful change in education. In Chapter 2, I discuss Figure 1 in depth, describe how each element interacts with each other, and support its necessity in attaining lasting systemic change.

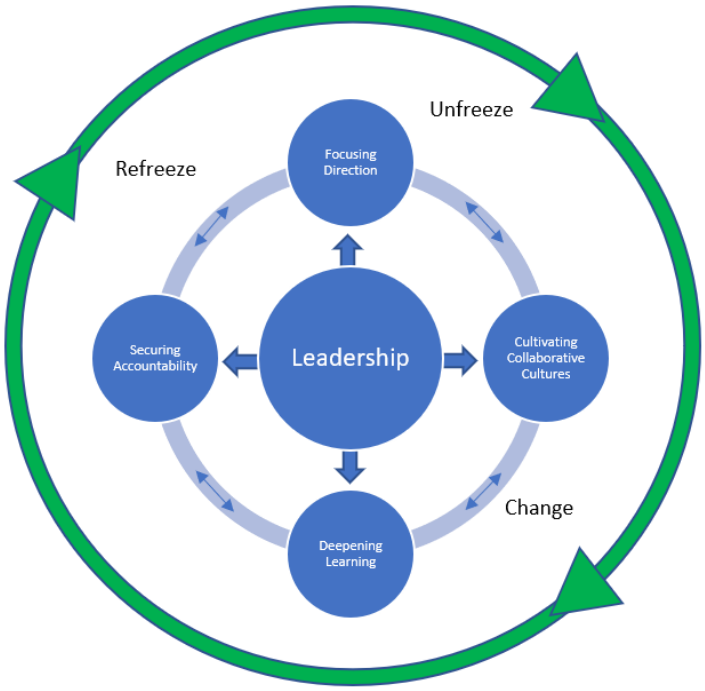

Figure 1. An integrated model for educational change based on two paradigms. Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step model.

Nature of the Study

I used an exploratory qualitative case study design for this research in educational administration. A case study can be defined as an empirical method that deeply investigates a phenomenon in the environment in which it exists and should be used when the contextual conditions of the phenomenon are not clear (Yin, 2018). The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. In selecting whether to use a case study as the choice method for a study, Yin (2018) suggested that the researcher consider three conditions that include (a) the research questions, (b) the researcher's control over behaviors, and (c) the focus on contemporary events.

The first condition to consider in selecting a case study are the research questions. Research questions that are designed to seek explanations, the how or why, and elicit deep understanding of a phenomenon, are typical when using case study designs (Yin, 2018). The research questions for this study are intended to seek understanding of how to initiate change and implement inclusion practices through the lens of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step change model.

The second condition used as a rationale for this design type was the researcher's control over behaviors. Case studies rely on observations of people involved in events and are preferred when the behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2018). To gain understanding, I interviewed elementary and middle school administrators to elicit information on how they view the change process for inclusion implementation and the

challenges and facilitators to sustainability. Because the data were primarily collected through interviews, I had no control over the behaviors or information uncovered. Positionality, which included my relationship to or interest in the topic, social identity/location, personal/professional goals, or biases was addressed throughout the interview process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The last condition I considered for this case study design was an emphasis on contemporary events. Yin (2018) described contemporary events as not concentrating on one single event but, rather, a focus on the cycle and processes of an event from its recent past to the present. When implementing an innovation—in this case, inclusion practices—whole system change is involved. Whole system change requires transformation of current practices that could encompass a change in attitudes and perceptions with the members in that environment (Lewin, 1943). This type of systematic and comprehensive change, if deep and lasting change is the goal, evolves over time (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). The initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of inclusion practices meets this condition as the study is designed to trace the process over time.

Because qualitative case study research relies on observations of individuals involved in the phenomenon, data collection occurred through semistructured interviews with elementary and middle school principals. After transcribing each interview, I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations of the interviews and analysis of the findings to filter the data using the study's conceptual lens (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I analyzed the data using a cyclical coding process. Coding is a way to

analyze qualitative data by assigning a word or phrase that summarizes or interprets meaning from information that has been contributed by a source (Saldaña, 2016). During the initial coding process, I used holistic and a priori codes based on the conceptual lens of this study to categorize interviewee responses. A second-stage coding cycle was required, and I used pattern coding to organize the entire data body into themes and attributes based on the elements of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) and Lewin's (1943) models for successful change in education. The nature and methodology of the study will be more thoroughly explained in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Unique words or phrases used throughout this study are defined for clarity.

Inclusion: Refers to the practice of providing students with disabilities access to the general curriculum along with students in the general education classroom without disabilities (Olson, Leko, & Roberts, 2016). The terms inclusion practices, inclusive education, and inclusive programs refer to the definition of inclusion.

Least restrictive environment (LRE): To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004).

Low-incident disabilities: Students with disabilities that are not as common, such as intellectual disabilities, autism, or deaf blindness (Marks et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2017).

Students with disabilities: IDEA (2004) defines *students with disabilities* as children who have been evaluated and determined to have one of the following disabilities and who need special education or related services: intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, and specific learning disabilities.

Sustainability: Or *institutionalization* of a program is achieved if systems have been designed so that program practices continue beyond the first 2 years of implementation and are revisited to monitor and make necessary adjustments (Fullan, 2016b).

Assumptions

Qualitative researchers play an integral part in shaping the data and findings of a study because the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher directs the research process, collection methods, and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A researcher needs to identify their own assumptions so that any biases can be reflected upon throughout the study and not used to influence the analysis and results of the study. Because of the unique interactions and relationship between the researcher and the participants, assumptions must be defined to better understand the researcher's positionality regarding the study's design.

Two assumptions were made for this study. First it was assumed that principals would respond honestly to the interview questions, producing accurate reflections of experiences with implementation of inclusion practices and initiating change. Second, it was assumed that principals would see the value in the study resulting from relevant responses and descriptive narratives that answer the research questions. Each of these assumptions are important to the context of the study because they have the potential to affect inferences that may be drawn from the study (Walters, 2001).

Scope and Delimitations

The problem addressed in this study is the limited research concerning the practice of how administrators initiate the change process to implement and sustain an inclusive learning environment in schools. Administrators in school districts include principals, assistant principals, and certain district-level staff (i.e., directors, coordinators, assistant superintendents). However, researchers' findings have indicated that the principal is the administrator who must instigate the change process for implementation of inclusive practices (Chitiyo, 2017; Lyons, 2016; Roberts et al., 2018; Yan & Sin, 2015). To facilitate programs in schools, principals must lead this change and encourage responsibility and collaborative cultures among staff (Fullan, 2016b; Yan & Sin, 2015).

Although the scope of this study is administrators, attention on the campus principal as the change leader for inclusion creates a delimitation. Elementary and middle school principals were purposefully selected because of their experiences with inclusion practices. I used purposive homogenous sampling to select participants (see Patton,

2015). Purposive homogenous sampling is a strategy that selects cases that are similar so a phenomenon can be studied based on similar contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This study was concentrated on inclusive practices regarding students with disabilities. Inclusive practices are considered to benefit all students, but I did not directly explore perceptions of implementing inclusive practices for other groups, such as English language learners. The specificity of the student group forms another delimitation.

Transferability assumes that the findings from a study can be applicable to similar situations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One potential issue with transferability that directly relates to the scope and delimitations of this study is the amount of experience a principal has regarding special education. Issues with transferability can be addressed by providing details about the participants, including background information.

Limitations

Qualitative researchers explore and analyze stories and perspectives of individuals, which result in findings that represent one version of the multiple truths individuals experience with the phenomenon (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Because of the subjective nature of qualitative studies, limitations may arise in the design or methodology that can weaken the results of a study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Qualitative researchers must develop approaches to ensure validity and address possible limitations, such as creating an interview protocol and designing questions that focus on depth (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Limitations in this study included confirmability, my bias as the researcher, and transferability.

Confirmability has to do with the subjective nature of qualitative research and the responsibility of the researcher to confirm the data are accurate and without bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My position as a district-level administrator may affect how question responses are given. To address this, I explicitly stated the need for the study and assured confidentiality of participation. Within the design of the study, triangulation, member checking, and follow-up questioning were part of the analysis protocol (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation included the inclusion of elementary and middle school administrators as participants to add to the credibility of the study. Giving participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of responses to the interview questions by reviewing my initial interpretations reduced the risk of subjective inferencing. Asking probing questions captured data that encompassed depth and rich description.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. My bias as the researcher was recognized as a limitation because of the possible affect my partiality could have on data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The district chosen for this study was a district where I have been employed for 15 years. Although I do not work in the special education department, I work with the district administrators who oversee inclusion program implementation and development. In addition, I work collaboratively with campus administrators and have built rapport as a resource for support. Using reflexivity processes helped me become more aware of and monitor my own bias. Reflexive bracketing provided guiding questions that helped me identify bias and personal feelings specific to the study and guided the way I reviewed and interpreted the data (see Ahrens, 1999).

Transferability occurs when findings from a study can be applied in another context and yield similar results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). From the perspective of the reader, transferability may be a limitation. The district that was used in this study is in its second year of implementing coteaching models as part of promoting inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Findings from this study may not be transferable to other districts that do not have any inclusive practices currently in place. Providing rich detailed descriptions of the data and contextual information could help readers filter out relevant information that is appropriate to use for their specific circumstances (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Significance

This study addressed a local problem by focusing specifically on the perceptions of campus administrators concerning challenges and facilitators that influence implementation and sustainability of inclusion practices. The gap in the research about practice that this study addressed is the limited research that reports how to effectively implement and sustain inclusion programs and the factors that hamper successful execution (Chitiyo, 2017). There appears to be insufficient understanding concerning the implementation of best practices within inclusion programs, including how to begin a change in practice, and barriers that impede program sustainability.

Potential findings could lead to positive social change in promoting quality education and equitable access for all students, including students with disabilities. Historically, students with disabilities were taught in segregated classes. Inclusive classrooms have the potential to provide students with disabilities opportunities to

meaningfully interact with their peers and receive supportive individualized learning (Gupta & Rous, 2016). However, Roberts, Ruppar, and Olson (2018) suggested that even within inclusive settings, students with disabilities continue to be segregated. Findings from the study indicated that the expectation in some inclusive classrooms was that students with disabilities should adapt and change rather than changing the way general education classrooms were set up to welcome students with disabilities (Roberts et al., 2018). Researchers' findings show that students with disabilities can learn academic and social skills in inclusive classroom settings as well as increasing learning expectations for all students (Kurth et al., 2015; Marks et al., 2014). However, simply placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms will not guarantee positive outcomes; a change in the classroom must occur (Kurth et al., 2015). Positive social change may result from the findings of this study, which could inform an establishment of best practices, continuous learning and development opportunities, and guidelines for implementation in inclusive classrooms that meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Summary

Through brief summaries of literature, I explained the research problem, purpose, limitations, assumptions, and the significance of the study with references to positive social change. The conceptual framework defined in this chapter was used to develop the research questions and solidify the nature and design of the study. In Chapter 2, I describe the conceptual framework in detail to explain the integration of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) and Lewin's (1943) approach to the change process and how the elements interconnect and support the role of the principal. Also, within Chapter 2, I provide a

detailed review of the literature that outlines various perspectives of inclusion practices from the lens of teachers and administrators, preparation programs, perceived barriers and supports, inclusion as reform, and roles of the leader initiating change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem this study addressed is the insufficient understanding concerning the implementation process of inclusive education practices, specifically how campus administrators guide teachers' changes in practice to support inclusion and the aspects that may impede or promote program sustainability. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. Inclusive education programs are common practices in public schools and are documented to benefit students in the areas of enhanced academic achievement, increased adaptive behavior skills, positive social skills, and peer acceptance for all students (Marks et al., 2014). However, there is a need to further explore how to implement and sustain inclusive practices to achieve those benefits. Researchers' findings have indicated that the principal is the administrator who must initiate the change process for implementation of inclusive practices in schools (Chitiyo, 2017; Lyons, 2016; Roberts et al., 2018; Yan & Sin, 2015). The literature lacks adequate information on how administrators initiate the change process to implement and sustain inclusive practices in schools.

In Chapter 2, I emphasize the literature related to the topic of this study. The conceptual framework used to anchor this study is described in detail, which includes synthesized literature mirroring how elements of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) model for whole system change can support the leader's role in initiating change to implement and sustain inclusion practices. Specific

information of the strategies used to ascertain germane literature are conveyed in this chapter. In addition, a comprehensive review of the literature is provided outlining background information on inclusion, perspectives of inclusion practices from the lens of teachers and administrators, preparation programs, perceived barriers and supports, inclusion as reform, and the role of the leader initiating change.

Literature Search Strategy

Through the Walden University Library, I used the following databases to search for current peer-reviewed literature and dissertations: ERIC, Sage Journals, Education Source, ProQuest, and Science Direct. I also used Google Scholar as another source for academic literature and later linked Google Scholar to my Walden University account so that articles available in the Walden University library were more easily accessed. For articles not available through the Walden University Library that I felt useful for the study I requested and obtained through Document Delivery. Examples of search terms and combinations of search terms I used included *inclusion*, *special education*, *implementation*, *administrators*, *change*, *reform*, *inclusive schools*, *principal perceptions*, *support*, *administrative leadership*, *inclusion challenges*, *effective inclusion practices*, *students with disabilities*, *teacher attitudes*, *change process*, *change leaders*, and *inclusion support*.

During initial searches for pertinent literature, I refined the results to include only those that were published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals within the last 5 years, except for seminal articles that would provide historical background to this study. Reading the abstracts allowed me to make preliminary decisions on which articles to

consider using to support the background and need to conduct the study. After reading each study, I annotated and synthesized key ideas using a matrix spreadsheet to efficiently sort and filter themes. This process assisted in increasing my knowledge base, cultivating the conceptual framework for the study, and justifying the research.

Another strategy involved chain searching through relevant scholarly articles and dissertations of similar topics. By examining the references of selected articles and applicable dissertations, I was able to find other works related to my topic and expand my literature collection. Additionally, when evaluating the search results in the databases, I used the link that indicated how many times an article was cited to ascertain whether the works the article was cited in would be useful for my study. When applying this strategy, I expanded the date parameters and selected articles that were pertinent and not necessarily current. I continued my literature search and reviews of germane scholarship until I reached a saturation point on the topic of study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual lens that framed this study is an integration of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step model for change (see Figure 1). Both the coherence framework and the three-step model for change account for the critical role of leadership while attempting whole-system change. When attempting to change current behaviors toward innovation, the actions of organizational leaders can positively or negatively influence the likelihood that change will occur and that desirable behaviors will be sustained (Fullan, 2016b; Lewin, 1943). Both models also provided paradigms to guide such a process. Fullan and Quinn's coherence framework highlighted

four drivers necessary for educational leaders to achieve and maintain success within the change process in schools. Lewin's three-step model for change pointed to steps for one to initiate change, facilitate the change, and sustain the desired change. The purpose of this study was framed by the concept that to implement inclusion practices and to achieve sustainability, leaders must engage in a process that encompasses elements of Fullan and Quinn's and Lewin's models.

Lewin's Three-Step Model

Lewin (1943) labeled the first step of organizational change in the three-step model *unfreezing*. Unfreezing is the process of understanding the current state, the circumstances in which the status quo continues, and how the forces that drive the current state need to be supported or removed. Understanding the current state allows leaders to identify who is resisting change and possible sources of intransigence. Lewin argued that this step of catharsis must transpire before undesirable behaviors are abandoned and new behavior can be assimilated, with the understanding that changes to a person's beliefs are highly driven by personal emotions and that defensiveness to complacency may occur. The change goal identified within this step is *groups and individuals embrace and accept that transformation is necessary*. Within this step individual or group motivation can be established, but motivation needs to be focused toward the direction of the desired change (Burnes, 2004).

The second step to Lewin's three-step model is *change*. During this step, learning occurs within the group through research, then action takes place, followed by more research. The research and action refer to identifying and assessing multiple strategies to

change behaviors and using trial and error to determine what works and what does not and which components can be used to modify a specific strategy. This step enables the group to change from undesirable behavior to behavior more aligned to the change goal. However, Lewin emphasized that without reinforcement, monitoring, and adjustment, change will not last.

The final step to Lewin's three-step model is *refreezing*. The goal of refreezing is to stabilize the group in the newly transformed status quo to ensure that the new behaviors can be sustained (Burnes, 2004). In Lewin's three-step model, the group is the force that allows transformational change to organizational culture, norms, policies, and practices, and this desired state does not occur quickly or without solid leadership. The organizational leader is key to the process of implementing and managing change. Lewin's three-step model provides a straightforward outline for leaders to engage in the change process, but the process is dynamic and can be reignited for various reasons.

Fullan and Quinn's Coherence Framework

Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework provides specific action steps that occur within the stages of Lewin's three-step model. For whole-system educational change, Fullan (2016b) stated it is necessary for leaders to identify what it takes for groups of people and individuals to become motivated to engage in the change process. Fullan (2016b) described several aspects to the change process that are important to keep in mind when considering motivating factors in achieving whole-system change: (a) people's emotions and behaviors will change before their beliefs, (b) the length and words of the planning document do not equate to the quality of action and attainment of

change, and (c) collective ownership and shared vision is a result of successful change, not necessarily a prerequisite. Choosing the right "drivers" (Fullan, 2016b, p. 41) that can uncover motivators for whole-system improvement is instrumental when beginning the change process. Fullan and Quinn articulated the coherence framework that identified four drivers that support school leaders in initiating a mindset shift for sustainable whole-system change: (a) focusing direction, (b) cultivating collaborative cultures, (c) securing accountability, and (d) deepening learning. Throughout these four drivers, elements of Lewin's (1943) three-step model support the leader in initiating change.

Focusing direction, the first driver in the framework, requires a sense of urgency to identify purpose and participate in continuous engagement to turn focus into action. Fullan and Quinn (2016) stressed the importance of leaders recognizing their own moral purpose to touch on individuals' emotions to begin to identify the group's purpose. Leaders can foster moral purpose within a group by building relationships, listening to understand all perspectives, demonstrating respect, and finding ways to connect the group around the purpose. In the coherence framework, once the group establishes purpose, goals become purpose driven, clarity in strategies to achieve goals become more attainable, and purposeful adjustments in practice become more evident.

Within the first driver, leaders become change leaders who focus on participating with the group as a learner, build vertical and horizontal capacity, create collaborative cultures, and recognize individuals who take risks into the unknown (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). When approaching change to implement innovations, purpose with small attainable goals, are set along with explicit strategies to reach those goals. This driver

would occur in Lewin's three-step model stage of unfreezing, where the leader assesses the status quo to identify those resistant to change and uses their own moral compass to build and continuously strengthen relationships.

Cultivating collaborative cultures, the second driver in the coherence framework, involves processes that empower people in the school so that, ultimately, the group becomes committed to one collective purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Fullan (2016b) theorized that any successful change effort results when collaborative cultures are developed where they did not previously exist. A collaborative culture is a dynamic force that includes using relationships and expertise to leverage the group into focused and shared responsibility (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). According to Fullan and Quinn, processes to this driver include (a) shifting the mindset toward creating a culture of growth through relationship-building, commitment, and collective purpose; (b) building capacity within the staff by developing common language and skill base across all staff; (c) participating in learning leadership through modeling, shaping culture, and concentrating on learning; and (d) incorporating intentionally designed practices that foster collaborative work. This second driver occurs within the unfreeze and change stages of Lewin's three-step model wherein the group embraces the necessity for change and begins to work together toward a common goal.

The third driver in the coherence framework, deepening learning, presents the concept that people are learners who reflect on their practices to continuously progress and incorporate innovation in instructional practices (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Fullan (2013) argued that traditional schooling is quickly becoming outdated and that the

innovations of current educational environments may impede student engagement because individuals have not embraced new ideas into their learning. Deepening learning refers to enhancing pedagogical practices and increasing the knowledge base across the group. When individuals deepen their learning, it allows for increased understanding of the learning process and how it can be influenced to support student outcomes (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In the coherence framework, the conditions necessary for deep learning include leaders who (a) learn alongside the group, (b) foster a culture where risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, (c) empower individuals by allowing them to engage in learning that has been identified based on need rather than dictated, and (d) value teachers by trusting them, respecting their time, and holding everyone to the same high standards. Because this driver involves individuals learning, taking action, evaluating practices, and making necessary adjustments, deepening learning would likely occur in the change stage of Lewin's (1943) three-step model.

Securing accountability is the final driver described in the coherence framework. Fullan and Quinn (2016) purported that before a school leader can expect positive results in external accountability, the development of internal accountability is imperative. External accountability refers to the state or federal mandates set forth to hold schools and districts responsible for academic achievement, student well-being, and all things encompassing a student's right to a free and appropriate public education. Additionally, for Fullan and Quinn, external accountability includes meeting the expectations of society or local community. Internal accountability, on the other hand, is based on the notion that individuals are accountable to themselves and feel that same sense of responsibility and

accountability to the group. In other words, it is the individual's willingness to take collective responsibility for improvement and success for all students.

When other elements of the coherence framework such as focused direction and collaborative cultures are established, leaders can concentrate on building internal accountability within the organization. Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested several factors to achieve increased internal accountability that combine individual responsibility, collective expectations, and corrective action. In the coherence framework, vital factors to concentrate on include having only a small number of ambitious goals; using and evaluating relevant data to develop understanding and refine processes; implementing strategies that are developed, taught, and learned through the group; and monitoring and assessing progress to determine next steps toward greater performance. Securing accountability is a necessary factor for sustainability and is a process that arises during the refreezing stage of Lewin's three-step model where leaders work to stabilize the newly formed status quo.

Osiname (2018) conducted a study following five principals as they successfully used different leadership styles to implement inclusive school cultures. Osiname concluded that success occurred when communication and collaboration were key factors in building school culture. Fostering positive school culture or a culture of commitment was integral and had to occur prior to any implementation of change for transformation to occur. The implementation, management, and institutionalization of change was the responsibility of the leader, who needed to build capacity within the group so the change could be collectively led by a leadership team (Osiname, 2018). People who are resistant

to change fear the unknown, and the first step to overcoming resistance is to identify the individuals and determine the source of their fear (Osiname, 2018). Findings from this study revealed elements from both Fullan and Quinn's (2016) and Lewin's (1943) paradigms for whole-system change.

McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014) conducted a case study of a highly effective inclusive school and interviewed staff on the processes and practices of meeting the academic needs of all students. Teacher interviews revealed important contributors in beginning the culture of focusing on all students. Teachers stated that staff at this campus had a shared vision and common perspectives that made for a culture that all staff are responsible for all students (McLeskey et al., 2014). Researchers' findings indicated that the campus staff participated in shared decision making, ongoing progress monitoring, and targeted professional development and training to build the skill set and instructional practices for all staff (McLeskey et al., 2014). Findings from this study are supported by constructs of whole-system change as described by Fullan and Quinn (2016) and Lewin (1943).

The drivers of the coherence framework do not work in isolation, rather, they can ensue simultaneously and repeatedly. In addition, the drivers are interweaved throughout Lewin's three-step model, occurring and reoccurring during each step of the process. Whole-system educational change can be considered a dynamic process where success is measured not by simply arriving at the end goal, but by creating an environment where strategic continuous improvement is always the goal.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The idea of providing equal educational opportunities and integrating students with disabilities into general education settings has evolved. In 1970, only 1 in 5 children with disabilities were taught in public schools and many states had laws in place that prevented educating students with low incident disabilities, which included students identified as deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Students with disabilities who could attend public schools were typically educated in separate classrooms or special segregated schools based on the students' disability rather than their educational needs (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). In 1975, the United States Congress enacted the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which required all states receiving federal funds to identify children with physical and mental disabilities and provide them with equal access to public education (EAHCA, 1975). Additionally, the language in EAHCA (1975) mandated public schools to evaluate the students with disabilities and create a plan, with parental input, that would place students in an educational environment that replicated the educational experiences of nondisabled students (EAHCA, 1975). EAHCA imposed regulations requiring all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and delivered with an individual education plan (IEP). Ambiguity within the language of the law was clarified through several U.S. Supreme Court decisions, ultimately enforcing that all children with disabilities be serviced regardless of the severity of the disability (Hawkins, 2012).

In 1994 and with its reauthorization in 2004, IDEA was the primary catalyst for the phenomenon of inclusive education by introducing verbiage that mandated all students with disabilities be educated in the LRE. The LRE was defined as educating students with disabilities, to the maximum extent possible, alongside their non-disabled peers (IDEA, 2004). IDEA (2004) regulations also stated that the removal of students from this environment should only occur if the disability was so severe that education could not be achieved satisfactorily even with supports and the use of supplementary resources. Researchers' findings indicated increases in inclusive placement, however, uncertainty existed in what defines the LRE and how the students access the general education curriculum within it (Cramer, 2015; Marks et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014).

The phenomenon of inclusion has progressed since EAHCA and IDEA. Although inclusive education is the norm to meet the requirements of the LRE, the idea of simply mainstreaming, placing students with disabilities into the general education classroom, is not enough; providing students with access to the general education curriculum would need to take place (Hawkins, 2012; Morningstar et al., 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Olson et al., 2016). Although IDEA mandated access to the general education curriculum, specificity of what the delivery method should look like in the classroom was not clear.

Access to General Curriculum and the Least Restrictive Environment

The latest version of IDEA, established in 2006, placed more emphasis on the necessity for teachers to be trained in inclusion in order to provide services to students with disabilities that support their unique needs (Zirkel, 2015). Zirkel (2015) stressed that

administrators must be well versed in the substantial changes in the law to support inclusionary practices and develop an IEP that appropriately places students with disabilities in an environment where they receive access to the general education curriculum. After examining literature on access to the general curriculum, Ruppar, Allcock, and Gonsier-Gerdin (2017) concluded the definition of what access to the general education curriculum should look like is not consistent among educators. Decision making concerning access occurs collectively and individually through formal methods, such as during the development of the IEP, or informally where decisions are made in the moment based on context and implicit knowledge of the student (Ruppar et al., 2017). Thus, decisions regarding access in LREs should be explicitly defined and individualized for each student (Cramer, 2015; Ruppar et al., 2017). Because the law does not provide this clarity, districts and administrators must develop procedures to allow educators to make consistent decisions.

Actualizing the concept of providing students with equitable access to general curriculum is difficult to achieve because of the varying definitions of access and the instructional practices that must take place (Sailor, 2015). Access is often achieved through inclusive placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom while providing an array of supports and service delivery methods to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Coteaching is the most commonly used school-based practice that addresses access within inclusive settings (Chitiyo, 2017; Friend, 2008; Sailor, 2015). Coteaching involves the collaboration of two teachers delivering instruction to a group of students with diverse needs in the same classroom (Friend,

2008). The coteaching model assumes the two teachers share collective responsibility in the instruction, assessment, and classroom management of all students in the group without isolating certain students for instruction in a separate environment. Friend (2008) described several models of coteaching carried out in inclusive classrooms including station teaching, teaming, one teach-one assist, collaborative teaching, and parallel teaching.

Theoharis, Causton, and Tracy-Bronson (2016) conducted a study at two schools that were moving toward inclusionary models. The researchers followed a cohort of students over the course of 4 years and examined the role leadership and staff played in the change, instructional practices of teachers, and the effects on student achievement. Findings from this study showed that students with disabilities had significant increases in academic achievement in reading and mathematics after the second year of inclusion practices (Theoharis, Causton, & Tracy-Bronson, 2016). Theoharis et al. (2016) noted that a significant contribution to the increased academic achievement was the way in which the two schools adjusted and refined their models for coteaching.

Sailor (2015) claimed that coteaching models are not the only strategies educators should consider to advance toward equitable access for students with disabilities. In addition to the collaborative instruction that a coteaching model offers, Sailor (2015) suggested educators use evidence-based instructional strategies researched in special education through a multitiered system of support (MTSS). MTSS encompasses instructional strategies that support student academics and behavior in a proactive way (Sailor, 2015). Lastly, Sailor (2015) determined that differentiated instruction using the

universal design for learning (UDL) framework would provide optimal learning opportunities that would address the needs of all students in the classroom.

National trends indicate that providing access in the LRE through inclusion in the general education classroom have substantially increased in schools. Between 1990 and 2007, there was a 93% increase in the number of students placed in the general education classroom (McLeskey et al., 2012). However, researchers' findings also indicated that the optimal environment and delivery methods for students with disabilities remains unclear and that the most appropriate setting for all students with disabilities may not be an inclusive classroom (Marks et al., 2014; Olson et al., 2016).

Case studies were conducted to explore how staff from highly successful inclusive schools provided students with severe disabilities access to the general curriculum. Researchers' findings revealed that school staff agreed the general education setting was the most appropriate and preferred setting to provide equitable access; nonetheless, several participants indicated that some disabilities were extremely severe that the setting needed to be more restrictive to meet the unique needs of those students (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Olson et al., 2016). Other teachers were unprepared to address the significant behavioral issues exhibited by identified special education students in an included classroom (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Olson et al., 2016). Students in more restrictive settings would be provided opportunities to socially interact with their nondisabled peers, however, based on the demands placed on the teacher to heavily modify curriculum, equal access was perceived as difficult to attain for some students (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Olson et al., 2016).

Marks et al. (2014) provided information based on an exploratory case study comparing inclusive and segregated school districts and stated that there is a lack of a consistent view of the LRE in relation to inclusion. Participants in this study expressed concern regarding whether the severity or specificity of a disability would constitute a student to start in a less restrictive environment then move toward a more restrictive environment or start in a more restrictive environment then move to a less restrictive one (Marks et al., 2014). Without a clear definition from district administrators, it appeared difficult for campus administrators to make appropriate and individualized decisions for students with disabilities and still comply with the intent of the law (Marks et al., 2014).

Inclusionary Practices and Schoolwide Reform

The concept of inclusion is based on a belief that all students have the right to an equitable educational experience. Federal laws that stipulated schools to move from segregated environments to more inclusive classroom settings assume that improvement in the education of marginalized groups of students, including students with disabilities, is necessary. Schools advance when whole system transformation is successful, nonetheless, improving systems in schools is difficult to attain (Fullan, 2016a; King & Stevenson, 2017). Fullan stated that whole system educational change is dependent on shifting the culture within schools and changing the relationship between policy and practice. Inclusion can be considered a reform initiative because inclusive education requires transformations in educational practice and culture within the school to improve the entire system (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Gupta & Rous, 2016; King & Stevenson, 2017; Osiname, 2018).

Including students with disabilities in the general education environment to provide children with equitable learning opportunities is a common practice in schools; yet, inclusive education is interpreted differently among educators (Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015). Kozleski et al. (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to explore how staff from six highly effective inclusive schools understood and experienced inclusive education. Participants of the study expressed varied definitions of inclusion, however, within each school, a consistent concept of inclusion was maintained (Kozleski et al., 2015). Supporting whole school transformation for inclusion involves a common vision of inclusive education, open communication between all stakeholders, and a culture of growth and trust (Kozleski et al., 2015). Researchers determined that although beliefs and definitions of inclusion differed among educators, whole school transformation was imperative to build capacity for inclusive practices in schools (King & Stevenson, 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015).

Researchers' findings imply the importance of school culture within schoolwide transformation efforts is related to successful implementation of inclusive practices (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Gupta & Rous, 2016; King & Stevenson, 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf, Williamson, & Novak, 2015). In a review of whole school re-culturing programs intended to sustain inclusive change from schools across the country, McMaster (2013) found six common characteristics connecting school culture and successful inclusion: (a) an uncompromising commitment and shared vision for inclusion; (b) the importance of voice, individualism, and using differences among students and staff as a resource; (c)

willingness of staff to accept struggle to sustain practice; (d) inclusion understood as a social justice issue, rather than a disability issue; (e) inclusive ideals communicated across the school and into the community; and (f) the role of collaborative school leadership. These standards, which identified the schools' culture, required adjustments in the attitudes of all stakeholders and encouraged collaborative efforts that continuously shaped and defined the schools' individual definition and practices of inclusion; none of which could be achieved without whole school reform (McMaster, 2013).

Inclusive education models that primarily center on students with disabilities are challenging for some educators (Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2017; Hoppey et al., 2018; Kaufmann, Landrum, Mock, Sayeski, & Sayeski, 2005 Morningstar et al., 2017). Educators, including teachers, administrators, and service providers, expressed concern about the effects of allocating resources to target instruction and inclusion for students with disabilities and the possibility of diminishing the quality of instruction for students without disabilities (Choi et al., 2017; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2005). Based on this argument, Choi et al. (2017) investigated an inclusive reform model that addressed equity-based practices. The study was framed around principles of the schoolwide applications model (SAM) that support equity-based inclusion for all students, without specific emphasis on students with disabilities. The major values of SAM that support equity-based inclusive school reform include (a) general education guides all instruction; (b) resources are configured to benefit all students; (c) schools are collectively data-driven, problem-solving systems; and (d) districts have structural support systems in place that aid schoolwide

transformation efforts (Choi et al., 2017). Researchers found that implementing a systematic approach to inclusive reform, addressing the diversity of all students, showed greater results of academic achievement in reading and mathematics for every student, including students with disabilities (Choi et al., 2017; Kozleski & Choi, 2018).

Findings from other studies revealed principals agreed that successful implementation of initiatives were a result of support and involvement from all staff, and in order to achieve the desired change, the principal needed to facilitate schoolwide transformation (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Osiname, 2018). Principals expressed the need to involve the staff in the decision-making process to build a collaborative culture and proactively address those who were resistant to the change (Osiname, 2018). These findings are supported by Fullan and Quinn (2016) who noted the importance of collaborative efforts during the change process, and Lewin (1943) who articulated the necessity of identifying who is resisting change and addressing the reasons for resistance. However, King and Stevenson (2017) reported that at some schools where successful and continued inclusion practices were evident, teacher resistance was not addressed at the onset of change efforts. Unreceptive teachers eventually engaged in supporting inclusive initiatives after observing and interacting with other teachers within the school who experienced desirable results in teaching and student outcomes. The transformation in teacher beliefs and engagement enacted a move toward a culture of collective responsibility, which occurred because of the change initiative (Fullan, 2016b; King & Stevenson, 2017). Regardless of whether resistors participate in reform efforts, the culture administrators develop can socially and emotionally influence the teacher's

willingness to take collective responsibility for academic gains and the success and well-being of all students.

Role of the Principal as a Change Leader

School principals are identified as playing a crucial role in school reform and leading change to implement inclusive education for all students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lyons, 2016; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015; Yan & Sin, 2015). Principals must understand that implementation of any initiative is a systematic process where the desired change is not automatic and change likely will transpire in stages of acceptance (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lewin, 1946). Principals are faced with the difficult task of meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities while influencing staff to reconsider and change their philosophies and practices to more inclusive ones (Lynch, 2012). As the change leader, principals must involve school staff in activities that support inclusive education and build a culture that will sustain inclusivity (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Lewin, 1943; Osiname, 2018; Waldron et al., 2011).

Successful reform efforts are dependent on the work and ideals of teachers because of their direct involvement with student learning and because their attitudes and beliefs significantly shape and define the culture of the school (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Campus administrators must recognize the critical role teachers play in whole school improvement and that leadership approaches, or lack thereof, can affect progress in guiding teachers' beliefs about change in educational practices (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; King & Stevenson, 2017). Principals hold significant

power to influence teachers' engagement toward implementing and building inclusive environments and can instigate this transformation by facilitating a culture of collaboration and communication within the staff that builds on a common vision and others' expertise while promoting collective decision-making and shared responsibility (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; King & Stevenson, 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018).

Principals must also be responsible for creating organizational systems to foster effective teacher practices, support continuous learning, and enhance working conditions (Gupta & Rous, 2016; Osiname, 2018; Waldron et al., 2011). Professional development is essential for change initiatives to be sustained. King and Stevenson (2017) purported that professional development led, managed, and supported by the principal increases teacher motivation to adjust their instructional practices because of the training. Additionally, when principals take an active role in participating in professional development activities, the increase in knowledge, awareness of challenges teachers may face, and the perception of shared learning by the staff contribute to the nurturing of a culture that includes collective responsibility instead of authoritative leadership (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; King & Stevenson, 2017).

The principal's role in initiating change is complex and involves a myriad of interconnecting processes to continuously support and institutionalize inclusive education. The most common theme uncovered in researchers' findings for implementation of inclusion stressed the importance of the principal's role in improving the culture of the school (Gupta & Rous, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Nichols & Sheffield,

2014; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015; Waldron et al., 2011). Other principal roles to support inclusive education have been identified as (a) understanding and developing people; (b) distributing leadership and building capacity; (c) possessing a leadership style that includes open-mindedness, a willingness to learn from others, and service oriented; (d) responding to challenges and mediating staff differences; (e) fostering a growth mindset; and (f) having knowledge of special education laws, disabilities, and differentiated instructional practices (Gupta & Rous, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lynch, 2012; Lyons, 2016; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015; Waldron et al., 2011; Yan & Sin, 2015; Zirkel, 2015). Researchers, however, also indicated that there is a need to conduct further studies to provide additional and specific insight on the activities related to initiating the change process, gain more insight on how principals can address challenges, and offer more comprehensive views of how to build teacher capacity strategically and continuously, while sustaining the desired change (Hoppey et al., 2018; King & Stevenson, 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018).

Role of the Principal as a Special Education Leader

Principals are not only a significant factor in instigating the change process for inclusive education, but also administrators must be a leader of special education programs to facilitate schoolwide reform for inclusion practices. Principals must be knowledgeable and aware of current special education law and differentiated learning practices to be a learning partner with the staff, monitor proper implementation of policies, and provide ongoing support to teachers (Bai & Martin, 2015; Cobb, 2015;

Zirkel, 2015). Schools where unsuccessful implementation of special education inclusion occurred were led by administrators with little knowledge of the procedural, conceptual, or contextual aspects of academic differentiation and had minimal direct involvement with professional development activities for teachers (Avissar et al., 2016; King & Stevenson, 2017).

After reviewing a meta-analysis of research regarding principals and the special education arena, Cobb (2015) pointed that teacher perceptions are an important factor in the momentum of creating a shared vision. Principal knowledge and support for inclusion, as perceived by teachers, can positively or negatively affect its implementation (Cobb, 2015). To cultivate an environment where inclusion is supported, practiced, and sustained, it is necessary to further research principals' perceptions of their understanding of special education program needs, specific actions required to promote implementation change and sustainability, and the type of support needed to thrive as special education leaders (Bai & Martin, 2015; Cobb, 2015; King & Stevenson, 2017).

School administrators' perceptions of their readiness to handle special education issues was investigated and yielded similar results from different studies. The results of a survey conducted by Schaaf, Williamson, and Novak (2015) indicated that even though principals had sufficient understanding regarding policies associated with IDEA and felt well prepared to support instructional methods of general education teachers, the administrators were not as confident in supporting inclusive practices and overseeing special education curriculum, which would benefit teachers and students. Roberts et al. (2018) found that school administrators could not articulate a deep understanding of

instructional practices specific to students with disabilities, which would make it difficult to advance toward more inclusive educational environment. Further research is imperative to understand the needs of principals concerning special education and could assist in providing more comprehensive preparation programs and ongoing professional development opportunities to prepare principals for the challenges of educating students with disabilities and sustaining inclusive practices (Bai & Martin, 2015; Cramer, 2015; Lynch, 2012; Rinehart, 2017; Roberts et al., 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015). Without special education schema, principals are less prepared to influence change in teachers' beliefs about inclusion for students with disabilities.

As change leaders, principals take on multiple and complex roles and are paramount in the implementation and institutionalization of inclusive practices. However, issues relating to students with disabilities and inclusive education are minimally referenced within principal preparation programs or leadership for social justice courses (Bai & Martin, 2015; Pazey & Cole, 2012). Because effective leadership is a necessary component for instigating change, a need exists for requisite education in special education to be embedded in leadership preparation programs, specifically inclusive pedagogy and real-world issues related to students with disabilities, (Bai & Martin, 2015; Lyons, 2016; Rinehart, 2017). Although the principal is not the only leader needed to support special education, the principal is vital for setting the tone, facilitating the process, and monitoring, adjusting, and evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive practices within the school (Cobb, 2015; Lyons, 2016).

Role of the Principal as a Leader for Social Change

Leaders who lead to improve the educational outcomes for marginalized groups of students are inherently leading for social change. The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that in 2015–2016, 6.7 million students in United States public schools were identified as receiving special education services. Of all students receiving special education services, 77% were minority students, with students identified as American Indian and African American comprising the highest percentages of minority students receiving services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Addressing the disproportionate rate of minority students identified with disabilities and inequities regarding educational opportunities is fundamentally work for social change (Capper & Young, 2014; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Theoharis & Causton, 2016). Principals advocating for and facilitating implementation of inclusive educational environments face additional roles as a social change leader (DeMatthews & Mawhinney; Pazey & Cole, 2012). Social change leaders must recognize injustice, value diversity, and commit to action concerning creating equal structures and opportunities that support inclusive practices (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis & Causton, 2016).

Theoharis (2007), who is one of few scholars who specifically addressed and described social change as a leadership style, purported that social justice leaders pledge to make issues of inequity, concerning marginalized groups of students, a foundational tenet of their leadership practices. Concentrating on this ideal, principals must challenge teachers and district administrators to evaluate their current beliefs and systems to move

toward creating educational environments that address the diverse needs of all students, including students with disabilities (Capper & Young, 2014; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis & Causton, 2016). Theoharis argued that inclusion is the epitome of social justice and that an effective leader must centralize efforts on creating just and equitable opportunities for all students so that inclusivity can become a natural part of the culture of a school.

Challenges of Implementation and Sustainability of Inclusive Practices

Implementation of education initiatives is multidimensional and implies a need to change current practices to accomplish innovation goals. Change, however, is not automatic; actualizing a new educational idea or policy into practice suggests the possibility of using new or revised instructional resources, applying new teaching approaches, and altering one's beliefs (Fullan, 2016b; Lowrey & Smith, 2018). Thus, implementation approaches must be further examined to explore barriers to institutionalization and challenges regarding how to evolve teachers' understanding of policy into effective inclusive practices (Cook & Odom, 2013; Fullan, 2016b; Lowrey & Smith, 2018; Theoharis & Causton, 2016).

Although educators are familiar with laws that require schools to provide equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities, there are broad definitions of inclusion across government agencies and schools worldwide concerning how inclusive programs should be implemented and which students inclusive strategies apply to (Arduin, 2015; Avissar et al., 2016; Franck & Joshi, 2017; Jahnukainen, 2015; Marks et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014; Sakiz, 2016). Both government agencies and schools

agree that inclusion should happen but are not clear on how changes to instructional practices to become more inclusive should be implemented (Avissar et al., 2016; Franck & Joshi, 2017; Marks et al., 2014). The inconsistent definition of what constitutes the least restrictive environment created challenges in school districts because school administrators were unclear on how to focus direction toward goals and target instructional development when engaging staff toward change (Marks et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014). Broad conceptual ideas of inclusion translated into inconsistent teacher practices and delivery of instruction to students with disabilities and created confusion as to which disabilities would qualify a student to receive inclusive services (Arduin, 2015; Avissar et al., 2016; Franck & Joshi, 2017; Jahnukainen, 2015). Educators associated mainstreaming as a best practice in providing inclusion support to students with disabilities; however, teachers could not articulate a specific instructional delivery method as the most appropriate approach to provide equal access to students with disabilities (Arduin, 2015; Avissar et al., 2016; Franck & Joshi, 2017; Jahnukainen, 2015).

Teachers' perspectives. Teachers are integral agents for success of educational change initiatives (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; King & Stevenson, 2017; Lyons et al., 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014). However, teachers face multiple obstacles concerning the implementation of inclusive practices. Researchers explored the perceptions of teachers regarding barriers to accomplishing inclusive goals in schools initiating change toward inclusion. Teachers experienced a surface-level awareness of the complexities involved in working with students with high needs,

including having gaps in knowledge to address the various behaviors exhibited by students identified with disabilities (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Marks et al., 2014; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Managing student behaviors proved to be demanding for teachers; the constant interruptions caused by various student behaviors made lessons difficult for teachers to complete (Dagli & Oznacar, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). Teachers reported that the student behavior issues were not only exhibited by students identified with disabilities but also behavior issues were the product of the blend of students in the inclusive classroom (Kurth et al., 2015; Marks et al., 2014). When issues with extreme behaviors transpired, teachers did not feel supported in problem solving the situation and sensed an overall lack of support from campus administrators (Gavish, 2017; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). Some educators associated the absence of administrator support with the perception that principals did not possess the skills and knowledge to address diverse behaviors in order to support the classroom teacher (Cobb, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2017; Rinehart, 2017; Yan & Sin, 2015).

Teachers revealed that inclusive classrooms required differentiation and attention to many learning styles using a wide variety of new resources, which consumed time during and after the workday (Chitiyo, 2017). Educators in schools where inclusion practices did not thrive reported time as an essential resource needed but administrators did not understand the need nor gave the appropriate amount of time to reflect, produce differentiated lesson plans, and perform daily duties such as grading papers and contacting parents (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). Additionally, the lack of research on effective inclusive practices that support sustaining programs caused hesitation with

teachers to commit to goals concerning inclusivity of students with disabilities because there were limited data to reinforce the need to change (Chitiyo, 2017).

Coteaching, which is the most common school-based practice used in inclusive settings involves the collaboration of two teachers delivering instruction to a group of students with diverse needs in the same classroom (Chitiyo, 2017; Friend, 2008; Sailor, 2015). Working collaboratively was reported as a significant challenge by both general education and special education teachers. Special education teachers described the general education teacher as territorial and unwilling to share classroom responsibilities (Allison, 2012). That perception made it difficult to obtain a shared vision or experience collective responsibility for all students and left some special education teachers feeling like a classroom assistant rather than a partner teacher (Allison, 2012; Gavish, 2017). Because general education teachers felt sole accountability for the academic outcomes of all students, general education teachers were unwilling to share ideas or responsibilities with the special education partner teacher (Chitiyo, 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014).

Researchers' findings indicated there is a lack of preparation for teachers within course studies or on-the-job training (Chitiyo, 2017; Dagli & Oznacar, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Zion & Sobel, 2014). General and special education teachers needed additional professional development opportunities that were targeted to promote inclusion practices (Allison, 2012; Chitiyo, 2017; Gavish, 2017). Special education teachers were expected to be experts of multiple grade levels and multiple content areas if their caseloads include students in various grade levels with a wide range of skills (Hoppey et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018). Teachers felt

frustrated working side by side with co-teachers because neither teacher were experts in specialized instruction of all students (Mason-Williams, Bettini, & Gagnon, 2017; Osiname, 2018). Inadequate preparation contributed to a disparity in equitable access to well- qualified special education teachers in schools (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Mason-Williams, Bettini, & Gagnon, 2017). Researchers explicitly stated the need to dually train and prepare teachers in both special education issues and general education practices to nurture the collaborative relationship needed for coteaching models and strengthen capacity in specialized instruction (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Gavish, 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Zion & Sobel, 2014).

Administrators' perspectives. As the change leader, administrators face many challenges in the transformation of instructional practices and beliefs toward inclusive schools. Motivating teachers into believing that modifications in current teaching practices are necessary is not only an obstacle that principals must overcome but also is an essential element for successful change (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lewin, 1943; Marks et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). Teachers may be resistant to change for multiple reasons and administrators are responsible to persuade educators that evaluation and adjustment in instructional practices is imperative to improve academic outcomes of students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; Kozleski & Choi, 2018; Lyons, 2016). Although administrators cannot alter teachers' beliefs concerning inclusion, the type of culture and learning environments campus principals create can help influence educators' emotions, behaviors, and attitudes, which Fullan (2016b) suggested will change before teachers'

beliefs will transform. Researchers' findings revealed commonalities of teacher perceptions that may hinder inclusion implementation including teachers' (a) beliefs that increasing segregated resource time and decreasing inclusion time is a better way to address the needs of students with disabilities; (b) assumptions and stereotypes of deficits relating to students of minority, disability, and family background; (c) awareness of student gaps in learning diminished confidence in self-efficacy; and (d) relationship building abilities with all students (Chitiyo, 2017; Dagli & Oznacar, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018; Zion & Sobel, 2014).

Campus administrators are tasked to equitably budget, staff, and distribute resources to create collaborative environments; however, principals reported having limited resources to be able to structure class size and address scheduling complexities. (Chitiyo, 2017; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Zion & Sobel, 2014). Personnel changes each year and the lack of access to qualified special education teachers contributed to the challenge of managing a master schedule that supported time for teachers to collaborate (Avissar et al., 2016; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). When faced with making staffing decision or allocating resources, principals felt conflicted in supporting one class or program over another (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Administrators acknowledged deficiencies in knowledge of inclusivity related to cultural change and collaborative activities (Rinehart, 2017; Schaaf et al., 2015; Ward, 2018). Researchers' findings pointed to a need for more robust administrator preparation programs that include developing problem-solving skills through engaging in real-life

scenarios, acquiring best practice strategies to lead inclusive school reform, studying pedagogical content in specialized teaching methods, and identifying quality classroom instruction to evaluate program effectiveness (Hoppey et al., 2018; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018; Ward, 2018). Bai and Martin (2015) purported that professional development and training needs to be designed with different foci based on demographic factors and skill level of administrators. Quality instruction and program development, mutual support, appropriate educational placement, and comprehensive understanding of laws and policies is imperative to become effective and efficient administrators to implement inclusion programs (Bai & Martin, 2015; Zion & Sobel, 2014; Zirkel, 2015). Researchers recommended additional studies to explore perceptions of principals regarding special education and inclusion because administrators influence the internal accountability of staff members to implement change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Ward, 2018; Zion & Sobel, 2014; Zirkel, 2015).

Supports of Implementation and Sustainability of Inclusive Practices

Although there is a need to further research perceptions and aspects that negatively affect the implementation and sustainability of inclusive programs, some patterns and characteristics of facilitators are documented from schools with successful and sustained inclusive programs. For any change initiative to endure and be maintained, leaders must create conditions that will support the implementation and institutionalization of that initiative (Algozzine et al., 2017; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lewin, 1943). Administrators must guide the change process toward

inclusive schools by focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Each of these topics are addressed in more detail in the following sections.

Focusing direction. It is imperative for leaders to constantly engage with all stakeholders, including those who are skeptical, by listening to understand different perspectives and creating conditions where there is shared purpose behind the desired change and a focused plan to reach the goal (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Creating a collective vision is one way to keep the group motivated to accomplish the change goal. When schools have a shared vision and collectively work toward the same goal, teachers felt empowered to do what was necessary to strengthen academic achievement for all students because commitment to accomplishing the goal became a natural part of their everyday work (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hoppey et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2018). Teachers who successfully journeyed through implementation of inclusionary practices indicated that positive school culture where a unified vision was present and a shared commitment to improve educational outcomes for all students contributed to a transformation in behaviors toward more inclusive practices (Hoppey et al., 2018; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016).

To focus direction toward inclusive education, principals stated that support from district administration was imperative in engaging school staff and assisted in conveying the idea that change in instructional practices was necessary and urgent (Hoppey et al., 2018; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). Principals involved in successful implementation of inclusionary education stated that support from the district administrators made it easier

to direct resources when challenges transpired on the campus (Hoppey et al., 2018; Marks et al., 2014). When districts presented a unified understanding of the LRE and clearly articulated how inclusionary strategies could be implemented in schools, additional professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators were offered that targeted coteaching, differentiated instruction, behavior interventions, and other topics essential for the individual campus (Hoppey et al., 2018; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). District administrators' commitment to the hiring and development of qualified teachers supported the campus principal by allowing administrators to intentionally direct human resources based on the uniqueness of the campus, clearly define instructional duties, and flexibly schedule teachers according to program necessities (Hoppey et al., 2018; Marks et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014). When district administrators contributed to the campuses' shared vision, principals reported there was an increased willingness for district administrators to allow change to naturally occur on the campus with the understanding that sustainable change takes time (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Teacher and administrator perceptions concerning shared vision and district administrator support that foster implementation and sustainability closely align with elements of the conceptual lens of this study. Focusing direction, which transpires in the unfreeze stage of Lewin's (1943) three-step process for change, is a vital driver for educational change in Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework. During this process, leaders must first evaluate the status quo, engage with staff, and proactively understand those resistant to change (Lewin, 1943). Through a collaborative approach,

campus principals need to create and foster purpose, gain the support of stakeholders through continuous engagement, identify specific strategies to reach a goal, and allocate staff and resources in a way that aligns with the vision and goal (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Cultivating collaborative cultures. Researchers' findings suggested one of the strongest predictors of successful inclusive schools is collaboration (Allison, 2012; Chitiyo, 2017; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018; Ward, 2018). Fostering a collaborative environment with stakeholders is an essential component for change initiatives to thrive (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Collaboration entails mutual respect, reciprocal learning, and capacity building, which are all attributes that promote trust within a group (Fullan, 2016a; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Once trust is established, relationships are strengthened and teachers begin to work together toward focused and shared goals (Fullan, 2016b; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Teachers' perceived their role as an invaluable contribution for the success of inclusive practices (Allison, 2012; Gavish, 2017). When collaboration was part of the school's culture teachers felt enabled to become leaders, had a voice when making decisions, and developed trust between colleagues (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Gavish, 2017; Hoppey et al., 2018; Osiname, 2018). Problems teachers encountered while implementing inclusion strategies were able to be solved in collaborative ways that increased their sense of ownership and responsibility for all students (Algozzine et al., 2017; Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Osiname, 2018). Teachers felt better equipped to face the challenges of inclusive classrooms when time to collaborate was respected and they were able to meaningfully plan lessons and brainstorm strategies to address behavior and

instructional issues due to the extreme needs of students with disabilities (Allison, 2012; Hoppey et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014).

Not all collaborative work is effective. Ward (2018) stressed the importance for administrators to understand collaborative processes to effectively lead and manage change for inclusion. Creating a culture where collaboration is central to the success of the school means that approaches to collective work need to be intentional and provide teachers with opportunities for positive experiences (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). Campus administrators reported that collaboration and communication were important factors for success and that purposeful planning was essential to transform teacher practices, increase knowledge, and build leadership capacity (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; Osiname, 2018).

One example of intentional collaborative planning was shared by several principals regarding evaluating data. It is common practice to use data to assess processes and guide instructional decisions; but principals at schools where inclusion implementation was successful stated that selecting specific data to evaluate was crucial and required methodical, relevant, and non-punitive discussion (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2014; Waldron et al., 2011). Campus administrators conveyed that data needed to be carefully selected, with input from teachers, and from multiple sources; then, systematic procedures must be established, where tasks and contributors' roles were explicitly defined to analyze data and make informed educational decisions (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Waldron et al., 2011). This

deliberate opportunity for formal collaboration helped increase teacher contributions and build leadership capacity, in addition to making the role of the principal more manageable (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Osiname, 2018; Waldron et al., 2011).

These ideas support the study's conceptual framework in that collaboration is essential for change to occur. Fullan and Quinn's (2016) second driver in the coherence framework, cultivating collaborative cultures, offers the idea that collaboration is a dynamic force driven by the people within a school. When collaborative cultures exist, the group as a whole, begins to take collective responsibility, and the increased trust enables teachers to hold themselves and each other accountable for the shared goal (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Aspects of this driver that are associated with the perceptions of administrators include (a) building capacity within the staff by developing common language and increase skill base across all staff; (b) participating in learning leadership through modeling, shaping culture and focusing on learning; and (c) incorporating intentionally designed practices that foster collaborative work (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Deepening learning. Self-efficacy, a belief in a person's own ability to be successful in a particular task or situation (Bandura, 1977), can influence teachers' attitudes toward the implementation and institutionalization of inclusionary practices (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Ward, 2018). Teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy for inclusion increase when the school's culture provide opportunities for continued and shared learning. Through formal and informal opportunities for collaboration, teachers were able to share experiences and provide

input, which allowed teachers to feel valued and validated when colleagues were experiencing similar challenges and successes (Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Ward, 2018).

Teachers from successful inclusive schools identified professional learning and being explicitly taught strategies to address the various needs of students with disabilities, such as differentiated instruction and individualized behavior supports, as essential to the implementation of inclusionary practices (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). Professional development that simultaneously addressed the needs of general education and special education teachers was paramount to acquire an understanding of human behavior and professional expectations to enhance the ability to collaborate and coteaching in inclusive classrooms (Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Ward, 2018). When professional development and learning was purposeful and driven by need, collaborative relationships between co-teachers and deeper understanding of instructional strategies for diverse students was enhanced, which correlated to heightened perceptions of teacher self-efficacy (Allison, 2012; Gavish, 2017; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Campus administrators' perceptions of self-efficacy can be related to the level of preparedness regarding special education issues, initiating change for inclusion, and addressing the diverse needs of teachers and students. Principals who are abreast of current special education law and differentiated learning practices have an advantage in implementing and sustaining inclusion because the knowledge allows administrators to relate and respond to teacher and student needs (Allison, 2012; Cobb, 2015; Ward, 2018; Zirkel, 2015). After participating in training activities that promoted cultural diversity and real-world scenarios concerning special education issues, campus administrators

reported feeling more confident and prepared to support teachers by respecting their time to plan and collaborate with their peers (Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Ward, 2018). Because of increased knowledge of differentiated instruction relating to students with diverse needs, some principals restructured faculty meetings by sending memos to inform teachers of pertinent information and then dedicated the time after school for targeted learning and development opportunities, where the administrators learned alongside teachers (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). This practice solidified the principals' commitment toward inclusion and in turn amplified their apparent sense of self-efficacy (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Osiname (2018) argued that to lead transformation efforts administrators must change the behaviors of the group and at times their own behaviors. Principals with a heightened sense of self-efficacy were able to quickly identify which of their own behaviors needed adjusting to enable them to foster a collaborative school culture that valued learning from peers, learning through failures and successes, and shared decision-making responsibilities (McLeskey et al., 2014; Waldron et al., 2011). Collaborative structures that deepened learning by providing opportunities for sharing, scheduling time for planning, visiting exemplar inclusive settings, and celebrating success nurtured self-efficacy for all staff (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014).

Increasing self-efficacy in support of inclusion implementation is directly related to the conceptual lens of this study. Deepening learning, which is a driver in Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework, refers to enhancing pedagogical practices and

increasing the knowledge base across the group. When individuals deepen their learning, it allows for increased understanding of the learning process and confidence in applying the learning to support student outcomes; hence an increase in one's own belief that they can address the challenges of inclusionary practices (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). During the change stage of Lewin's (1943) three-step model, leaders need to cultivate conditions to allow for deeper learning that positively influences self-efficacy. Conditions imperative to deepen learning align with teachers' and principals' insights of facilitators that support successful inclusive programs (Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Waldron et al., 2011; Ward, 2018). These conditions to strengthen learning include leaders who (a) learn together with the group, (b) foster a culture where risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, (c) empower individuals by allowing them to engage in learning that has been identified based on need rather than dictated, and (d) value teachers by trusting them, respecting their time, and holding everyone to the same high standards (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Securing accountability. Principals who built successful inclusive schools attributed positive results to teachers' renewed sense of internal accountability (Osiname, 2018; Roberts et al., 2018). Accountability is taking responsibility for one's actions. When positive results, such as growth in academic outcomes and improved social behaviors, arise because of change efforts, attitudes begin to transform, and new beliefs become part of the school's culture (Fullan, 2016b; Gavish, 2017; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006; McLeskey et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Osiname, 2018; Waldron et al.,

2011). The development of positive school culture centered on collaboration and continuous learning, created environments where teachers felt a new sense of ownership; teachers became more reflective about their practices and began to realize more could be contributed to increase academic outcomes for all students (Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Gavish, 2017; McLeskey et al., 2014). Collective responsibility was apparent at effective inclusive schools when teachers and administrators made concerted efforts to collaborate with other schools in making academic decisions for students transitioning into middle or high schools (Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Roberts et al., 2018).

External accountability refers to state or federal statutes that hold schools and districts responsible for academic achievement, student well-being, and all things encompassing a student's right to a free and appropriate public education. While fostering a climate to increase internal accountability, principals should buffer teachers from the pressures of external accountability, such as results from standardized state assessment (Hoppey et al., 2018). Once teachers feel true collective responsibility, administrators can strategically place emphasis on establishing and promoting professional practices and monitoring performance systems to improve aspects of external accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Accountability is reinforced by a main component of the conceptual framework of this study. In Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework, internal accountability is described as the notion that individuals are accountable to themselves and feel that same sense of responsibility and accountability to the group. When internal accountability is

present, the emphasis on external accountability can begin and lasting change becomes more attainable (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

In addition to offering a detailed explanation of how the conceptual lens frames the purpose of this study, in Chapter 2 I provided a synthesis of information from seminal literature that highlighted trends and themes regarding the implementation of inclusion and the change process. Themes from the literature mirrored elements that support the conceptual framework in that certain conditions are necessary to produce lasting educational change. Researchers concluded that additional studies are warranted to understand effective implementation strategies, administrator needs, and detailed information on how to engage staff in evolving toward inclusive schools and the transformation of educators' beliefs (Chitiyo, 2017; Cook & Odom, 2013; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lowrey & Smith, 2018; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018; Theoharis & Causton, 2016; Ward, 2018). This information can help inform administrator preparation programs and assist in targeting training for teachers and other stakeholders. Findings from additional research may also provide information for districts to develop implementation guidelines for administrators to follow and address equity issues concerning educational opportunities of students with disabilities.

The problem of the study was concentrated on the lack of research that addressed the effective implementation and sustainability of inclusion programs in public schools and factors that hamper or influence successful execution. It was necessary to investigate the perceptions of administrators regarding their needs to implement inclusive education

practices. This exploratory qualitative case study addressed the gaps in literature by extrapolating the insights of campus principals to understand challenges and facilitators in initiating the change process to promote and sustain inclusionary practices.

Although the selected literature addressed studies that involved quantitative and mixed-method approaches, the preponderance of research was conducted through qualitative case studies, which provided rich description of the perceptions and beliefs of teachers, district and campus administrators, special education service providers, and other stakeholders. A case study is a pragmatic method that involves thoroughly investigating a phenomenon in the environment in which it exists and should be used if there is ambiguity of contextual conditions of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). This study is relevant because it involved deeply exploring the phenomenon of inclusion implementation and administrators' role in the change process, as deemed necessary by researchers' findings. By conducting a qualitative case study, rich data were captured to comprehend the essence of participants' perceptions and needs. In Chapter 3 I provide further details on the research design, methodology, and the connection between the apparent gap in literature and the rationale for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. Key aspects for qualitative research design include identifying the goal and rationale for the study; incorporating the conceptual framework; aligning the research questions, data collection, and analysis; ensuring proper treatment of participants; and planning for validity and trustworthiness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In Chapter 3, I present an overview of the research method, including the rationale of the study, and describe how the conceptual framework helped guide the development of the research questions and the research design. Information about the role of the researcher, participants, instrumentation, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are also offered in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative studies, based on a positivist paradigm, are descriptive in nature, take on an inductive approach where understanding is gleaned from the data, and assume a constructivism view in which new knowledge is formed based on individual points of view (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). Unlike the nature of quantitative studies, the data collected from qualitative studies cannot be measured with the intent that the results will confirm or refute a hypothesis (Burkholder et al., 2016). The data from qualitative studies aim to describe a phenomenon occurring so that deep understanding can be used to develop explanations or theories about the phenomenon.

Four common characteristics from various definitions of qualitative studies have been established: (a) they occur in the natural setting where the anomaly transpires rather than in a controlled setting; (b) data are collected in words through interviews, observations, and documents rather than in numbers and percentages gathered from surveys; (c) participants' perspectives are used when explaining the findings; and (d) they describe the phenomenon based on the exploration of the experiences of the individuals (Burkholder et al., 2016; Yin, 2016). Because the focus of this study was to explore the perceptions of campus administrators concerning challenges and enablers that influence implementation regarding inclusion practices and the role they play in engaging staff in the change process to sustain inclusivity, choosing a qualitative study as the research tradition was logical. Interactions with participants primarily occurred on either the principals' campus or a campus within the district, which was the natural setting; data were collected through interviews that allowed opportunities for administrators to provide descriptive and thorough information about inclusion implementation; and finally, the results were presented in a manner that a comprehensive view of the experiences and perspective of the principals are represented as the foundation of the findings. The preceding explanations provide further justification that a qualitative study was appropriate.

Several research designs can be applied in qualitative research including (a) grounded theory, which is meant to extrapolate a theory where one does not exist; (b) phenomenology, which concentrates on the lived experiences of participants; (c) case study, which examines behaviors of a group or individuals in relation to a phenomenon in

the environment that the phenomenon occurs; (d) ethnography, which emphasizes analyzing the behaviors of a culture; and (e) narratives, which highlight the meaning people make of their own experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016). A research design serves as an outline of a study that connects the questions of the study to the data that will be collected and ultimately to the conclusions determined by the analysis of the data (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) articulated three initial components necessary to develop a quality research design: (a) the questions, (b) the explorations or propositions, and (c) the case. The questions help to determine the nature of the study, the explorations attend to what should be examined or explored throughout the study, and the case identifies the individual, group, or entity that is the focus of the study (Yin, 2018).

Identifying a goal for the study helped narrow the types of questions used to determine the nature of the study. The goal for this study was to seek deep understanding of a phenomenon that little is known about. Because the goal sought to thoroughly understand the behaviors of a group in relation to a specific problem, the research design most appropriate was a case study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). A case study should answer questions that ask why or how, and is defined as an empirical method that deeply investigates a phenomenon in the environment in which it exists and should be used especially when the contextual conditions of the phenomenon are not clear (Yin, 2018). A case study should also be presented in a way that the reader understands the phenomenon as a real-life situation that has manifested in a concrete manner, not as an abstract idea (Yin, 2018). In developing a case study, Ravitch and Carl (2016) stressed the importance of identifying the study's goal and constructing a conceptual framework

that serves as an anchor in the cultivation of research questions and methodological approaches.

The conceptual framework supported the way in which this research study was designed (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and included Yin's (2018) second component for developing research design, the study's explorations, what was examined or explored within the scope of the study. The phenomenon of initiating change to integrate inclusive practices in schools was explored through a conceptual lens that incorporated Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step model for change (see Figure 1). The study was framed by the concept that to implement inclusion practices in schools and to achieve sustainability, leaders must engage in a process that encompasses elements of Fullan and Quinn's and Lewin's models.

I developed research questions to include core constructs of the conceptual framework to highlight administrators' perceptions of aspects that may influence or hinder the change process for inclusion program implementation. To explore the case thoroughly and set boundaries on the type of data to collect, the research questions explicitly stated Fullan and Quinn's (2016) four drivers of the coherence framework necessary for whole-system educational change to occur and be sustained. Cultivating the questions this way set a purpose or criteria by which the explorations were measured as successful, or not, and supported the determination that the nature of this study was exploratory (Yin, 2018). The research questions developed for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding the cultivation of collaborative cultures to support inclusion practices?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices?

The third initial component Yin (2018) deemed necessary to determine the research design is defining the case. The *case* refers to the details of the problem researchers face in developing a research study (Yin, 2018). Yin suggested two steps to strengthen the research design: defining the case and bounding the case. The case in a case study can focus on an individual, a group, an event, an entity, or a program (Yin, 2018). The case for this study was defined as inclusion program implementation. Bounding the case involves details that clarify the immediate focus and limit the data collection to the specific case and predetermined explorations (Yin, 2018). Clarifications included campus principals as the immediate and primary focus of the case study, specifically the role principals play in engaging staff through the change process to implement and sustain inclusion programs in schools. Other aspects or conditions were revealed as important once data were collected, such as perceived teacher attitudes and beliefs, district administrators, campus type, or culture; however, those aspects added relative information to principals' perceptions of inclusion implementation and were considered part of the context in which the phenomenon occurred.

This study addressed the phenomenon of inclusion implementation and whole-system change by exploring the perceptions of campus administrators concerning challenges and facilitators that influence implementation and sustainability of inclusion practices through an exploratory qualitative case study design. The gap in the research about practice that this study addressed was the limited research regarding how to effectively implement and sustain inclusion programs and obstacles that prevent successful execution. Researchers have documented and urged further research be conducted to address the insufficient understanding concerning the implementation of best practices within inclusion programs, including how to begin a change in practice, and obstacles that hamper program sustainability (Chitiyo, 2017; Cook & Odom, 2013; Hoppey et al., 2018; Lowrey & Smith, 2018; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Roberts et al., 2018; Theoharis & Causton, 2016; Ward, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher for this study, I was the exclusive instrument used to collect data. I developed interview questions, conducted interviews, collected data, analyzed data, and interpreted data to develop findings for the study. I was the interviewer and not an actual participant in the interviews. Yin (2018) stated that researchers often choose to explore a topic based on personal experiences or knowledge of a problem and warned that case studies should not be used to validate a preconceived stance. My point of view was not considered to extrapolate any conclusions of the study. It was imperative to define my bias as the researcher, and I had to be cognizant and monitor prejudice

throughout the study so that my bias did not affect the interpretation of the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Research integrity concerning the role of the researcher may become problematic if not addressed proactively. Disclosure includes revealing personal details about the researcher that may alter or influence the study's outcomes or the way in which interviews are conducted (Yin, 2016). Personal details may include the researcher's demographic information, the researcher's association with the selected study site and participants, or whether the researcher holds a specific position for or against the topic of the study (Yin, 2016). Revealing as much researcher information as possible helps readers make their own conclusions on how the role of the researcher may affect the findings of the study (Yin, 2016).

I have been employed for 15 years in the district that was the setting for this study. Although I do not serve in a supervisory capacity for any participants, I have developed both professional and personal relationships with administrators and other pertinent district personnel. I worked directly with each campus principal in disaggregating state assessment scores and guided data reviews for academic achievement for students, including students with disabilities. I do not work in the special education department; however, I worked collaboratively with the district administrators who direct the development and processes for the inclusion program. Additionally, I served as a classroom teacher for 7 years at a campus in the district where inclusion support was practiced using a type of coteaching model. Engaging in reflexivity

processes assisted me in monitoring the subjectivity of my own bias and staying as neutral as possible when I reported the study's conclusions.

As Yin (2018) suggested regarding personal bias, I accepted that evidence conflicting with my own beliefs may emerge during the collection and analysis of data and that contrary evidence must be reported in the findings. Rival thinking was a way I addressed evidence that conflicted with my own assumptions by recognizing that discrepant views are inevitable (see Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) stated that participant responses may be misleading and that embedding practices, including asking follow-up questions to participants and posing questions to promote self-reflection, increases the credibility of a researcher's interpretations of the data. I embraced skepticism when listening to responses and asked participants probing questions to gather more insight. I asked myself reflection questions to determine if participants were being candid in their responses, if participants' responses were misguided, or if my assumptions were interfering in the way I reacted to a response (see Yin, 2016).

I developed and followed processes that supported reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the researcher's ability to recognize personal feelings and presumptions and not let those feelings influence the way data are collected and analyzed (Ahrens, 1999; Yin, 2016). To help ensure that my bias as the researcher did not interfere with the goals of the study, I partook in reflexivity practices by engaging in reflective journaling and bracketing as part of the process to review and interpret data (see Ahrens, 1999; Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004).

To prepare for the process of bracketing, researchers suggested starting a journal to expose personal prejudices that may interfere with data collection or data interpretation and use the information to proactively plan when and how bracketing will occur (Wall et al., 2004). Ahrens (1999) offered several details researchers should acknowledge about themselves in a reflective journal such as gender; race; socioeconomic status; experiences associated with the study site or feelings associated with participants; and personal assumptions, experiences, and beliefs of the study's topic. The preceding details that should be included in a reflective journal align with Yin's (2016) elements for disclosure. After I disclosed known biases in my reflective journal, I anticipated ways in which my biases may interfere with data collection. During the interviews, when a participant responded in a way that I strongly agreed with or disagreed with, I engaged in neutral expression and feedback to the best extent possible. I recorded mental notes if situations or responses made me feel anxious, annoyed, or validated while collecting data (see Ahrens, 1999). If my personal feelings began to overwhelmingly guide the way I interpreted the data, I revisited my journal to determine if my reactions stemmed from a personal experience and refrained from using that experience to shape the data based on the connection (see Wall et al., 2004).

Methodology

In this section I describe the system of methods in which the study was designed. I conducted an exploratory qualitative case study to investigate the perceptions of elementary and middle school administrators using semistructured interviews to induce

explanations for the identified research questions. Procedures for participant recruitment and selection, along with interview and data analysis protocols are elucidated.

Participant Selection

Because researchers identified the campus principal as the administrator with the most influence to initiate the change process with staff to implement inclusive practices, the participants selected for this study were campus principals (see Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Lyons, 2016; Schaaf et al., 2015; Stein, Macaluso, & Stanulis, 2016; Yan & Sin, 2015). Sampling, in qualitative studies, is purposeful and is based on individuals' ability to provide relevant and information rich descriptions of the study's research questions based on their unique knowledge or experiences of the topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Homogenous sampling is described as a strategy to select cases that are similar so that commonalities can be studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposive homogenous sampling was the primary strategy I used to choose participants. In the partner district, except for employees being hired for the first time in the district, administrators had experienced 2 years of mandated inclusion program initiatives and had first-hand knowledge in the processes of engaging staff to implement inclusive practices in schools. The core constructs of the research questions were developed such that the experiences and perceptions of campus principals were the central means of data collection for the study.

Personnel from the partner organization, the district selected for this study, allowed me to participate in this study by signing a partner organization agreement form which permitted me to collect data from leaders within the district through an

Instructional Review Board (IRB) preapproval process. The preapproval agreement defined the leaders of the organization, which included campus administrators, and explicitly stated that I, as the researcher, must comply with ethical standards as required by the Walden University's IRB. By signing this agreement, the selected district gave me access to contact potential candidates to participate in the study once Walden University IRB formally notified me of ethics approval.

To be invited as a participant, possible candidates had to meet certain criteria. This case study was bounded by the points of view of campus administrators at the elementary and middle school level, which accordingly was included in the criteria a participant had to meet. Because the partner district had recently completed 2 years of inclusion program implementation at the time of the study, participants needed to have been employed in the district within that time frame so that the data collected were based on similar contextual background. To summarize, potential interview candidates needed to meet three specific standards to be selected including that they (a) were current principals in the participating district, (b) were assigned at an elementary or middle school campus, and (c) were employed in the district for at least 2 years in the administrative position. Although my knowledge as a district employee could have verified participant criteria, I confirmed employment information with the district's human resource department.

The district site selected to conduct this study offered a limited number of potential participants based on the predetermined criteria. However, Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that the goal of qualitative research is not concerned with generalizing

based on a significant number of participants, rather, that the sampling of participants should be determined based on relevance to the study's topic and whether selected participants can offer rich details from real lived experiences to answer research questions. Boddy (2016) argued that conveying depth of information can be achieved from as little as one participant particularly when the researcher can justify the sample size and that transferability can occur with the findings. The appropriate sample size is dependent on the context and paradigm of the study (Boddy, 2016). Every effort was made to secure 10 to 12 principals to participate, which would at most comprise 48% of the potential candidate pool. Because there was a limited number of middle school principal candidates, extra efforts were made to include at least three middle school administrators to ensure triangulation of multiple perspectives.

All potential participants were contacted initially through correspondence using district email. The first communication included a brief overview of the research study, the interview procedures, the potential risks and benefits, and a statement regarding voluntary participation. The communication sought to gain informed consent from the possible interviewee. The leader interview consent information was provided to potential participants in the body of the district email communication, not as a separate attachment. Informed consent was accepted when the participant responded via email. Follow-up communication by means of district email would have been initiated if there were not enough responses within 7 working days, but this step was not needed. Additional information specifying participation requirements and expectations, as well as data collection, are detailed in the following sections.

Instrumentation

This exploratory qualitative case study was intended to investigate the perceptions of campus administrators concerning the role they play in initializing change to implement and institutionalize inclusive practices by conducting semistructured interviews. As the researcher, I was the sole means for collecting data and developing the tool to collect the data. I conducted individual semistructured interviews with participants, which is a form of interview where the researcher develops interview questions that are central to the study's research questions (Burkholder et al., 2016). Semistructured interviews should be conversational and conducted in a way to build a connection between the interviewer and the interviewee (Yin, 2016). Because the interviews were meant to elicit open-ended responses and the interviewee may not have completely answer the questions with sufficient detail, it was important for me to develop follow-up probes to pursue additional information.

Yin (2016) stated that although an interview protocol is followed during qualitative data collection, the way the questions are exactly asked may differ depending on the context and the participant. Probing questions were constructed prior to the interview to anticipate vague responses and were not needed for all participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that a need for probing questions may arise during the interview and that if asking an unplanned question is necessary, researchers must record the new inquiry. Creating interview questions based on the core constructs of the research questions, pre-determining probing questions for the purposes of gaining clarity and keeping the interviewee on topic and anticipating the need to ask additional unplanned

questions based on the response to an initial question provided sufficient data to answer the research questions.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) offered guidance when developing interview questions that include using conversational language or language that is free of ambiguity, allowing participants to answer freely and in their own words, and paying meticulous attention as to how the questions are worded so that the questions allow for personal experiences to become a natural part of the responses. Questions should be designed in a manner that participants' responses are not restricted by the wording of the questions and participants' responses can be formed from their personal knowledge and experiences (Saldaña, 2016).

Saldaña (2016) suggested using three approaches to develop appropriate interview questions that align to the study's topic including the researcher's direct experience or knowledge, using literature to frame questions, and using preliminary research to discover relevant questions.

The research questions for this study were formed based on the core constructs of the conceptual lens, an integration of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step model for approaching change. Using the core constructs that are framed in the research questions as a foundation, I developed the main interview questions. Probing questions, such as attention probes, conversational management probes, and credibility probes were predetermined and included in the interview protocol (see Saldaña, 2016). The probes served several purposes including communicating active listening, keeping the participant focused, gaining clarity or confirmation of information,

and establishing credibility that the responses are based from personal experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Researcher developed data collection instrument. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) served as my guide in conducting each interview. The interview protocol included an introduction, conversation dialogue, general questions, main questions that specifically addressed the research questions, possible probing questions, concluding remarks, and a section for interviewer observations or notes. The main questions were ordered in a manner that bridged the previous question so that participants saw the relationship to offer more detailed responses (see Saldaña, 2016).

Content validity of the interview protocol was established using a dialogic engagement process that involved scrutiny of the interview questions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dialogic engagement is a collaborative process meant to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of research processes by engaging with peers who can help refine the procedures intended to achieve the goals of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers seek external checks by knowledgeable colleagues or experts who are willing to review and challenge the research methods to increase validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I elicited input from two administrators from other districts who possessed knowledge in the study's topic. Each administrator met the criteria of the research participant; however, the principals strictly advised as a reviewer and were not included as participants in the actual study. Both administrator reviewers had served in their district as principal for at least 2 years and had experience maintaining inclusion practices, specifically coteaching, on their campus. Reviewer A served as principal of an

elementary school and Reviewer B served as principal of a middle school with experience at the elementary level. Reviewer A was the sole administrator who made decisions for students with disabilities and Reviewer B shared that role with other administrative team members. I provided the reviewers with the research questions and interview protocol. The reviewers scrutinized the interview protocol by confirming that responses to the questions would provide enough data to answer to the research questions. The multiple perspectives of the reviewers assisted me in revising or removing ambiguous questions, thus, increasing content validity.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Including intricate details concerning techniques and methods used in a study is helpful to increase the likelihood that the study's outcomes will be deemed trustworthy and valid, and that a reader can replicate the study in the same manner and with the same kind of participants and produce similar outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). In the following section, I detail how I obtained participants for this study, collected the data, and analyzed the data.

Recruitment. To ensure that enough data could be collected to address the research problem and answer the research questions, recruitment of the best and most appropriate candidates was necessary. In the following section I describe steps I took to address recruitment:

1. Determined that an individual met established criteria.
2. Contacted potential participants.
3. Provided informed consent.

Determined that an individual met established criteria. Because the study aimed to investigate the perceptions of campus administrators concerning implementation of inclusive practices and the role they play in initiating change, specific criteria was established to select participants. The partner district had a total of 25 elementary and middle schools within the participating site. Of the 25 principals assigned to the schools, all principals met the established criteria, which included that the participant (a) was a current principal in the partner district, (b) was assigned to an elementary or middle school campus, and (c) had been employed in the district for at least 2 years as an administrator. It was critical for participants to meet the criteria to ensure that the data collected were relevant in addressing the research questions.

Contact potential participants. After obtaining the IRB approval #06-28-19-0748981 from Walden University, I made personal contact to each campus principal who met the established criteria via district email. Within the email, I provided an overview of the purpose of the research using the preapproved leader interview consent form provided by the Walden University. The contents of the leader interview consent form was included verbatim within the text of the email.

Participation. I asked for a response from interested individuals within 7 days. The leader interview consent form served to inform potential participants of information concerning interview procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the potential benefits of the study, the potential risk factors, and participant privacy assurances. Informed consent was accepted if the individual responded via email. I planned to send follow-up communication if there were limited responses after 7 days. Follow-up communication

was not necessary because enough candidates consented to participate within the allotted time. Follow-up communication by means of email or phone occurred only to confirm or adjust meeting logistics, such as date or location.

Data collection. The following steps highlight the way I collected data:

1. Established the location and time of interviews.
2. Conducted semistructured, in-person interviews.
3. Transcribed interviews.

Established the location and time of interviews. When data are collected through interviews, the location and timing is an essential part of the plan. Interviews should be conducted in an area where privacy can be maintained and is free of distractions in which audio recordings take place (Burkholder et al., 2016). For this study, data were collected via individual semistructured interviews at the campus the principal was assigned or in another location within the district. Principals recommended areas on their campus that were conducive to the privacy and environmental needs of conducting an interview. Interviews that were conducted in another location were done so at the request of certain administrators.

The interviews were anticipated to be completed within 60 minutes, but because the interview was focused on the convenience of the participant, I was prepared to adjust if unforeseen issues arose or if I anticipated the interview could not be completed in the allotted time frame. Adjustments may have included prolonging the interview until completed or stopping the interview and rescheduling. No interviews needed to be rescheduled; however, during one meeting, a staff member, who did not realize an

interview was taking place, entered the room to ask a question. The interaction occurred in less than 2 minutes. During that time, I paused the recording.

Conducted semistructured, in-person interviews. Each interview was conducted face-to-face and audio recorded not only to accurately document each spoken word but also to capture tone and inflections of the responses. Audio recordings allow the researcher to observe participants and script notes while the recorder captures each word that is expressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During each interview, the interview protocol was available for me to briefly document notes and observations of the participant and to engage in reflexive bracketing by notating a particular emotion or reaction to a response. Predetermined probes and unplanned probing questions were used to elicit deeper responses.

Transcribed Interviews. Once the interview concluded, I began transcribing each recording within 1 to 3 days. I listened to the recording and typed the participants' responses verbatim using a software program on my computer. When researchers elect to self-transcribe recordings of interviews, the researcher must commit to a time-consuming process; however, hearing the voices of participants can increase understanding of the individuals' idiosyncrasies in addition to internalizing individuals' responses (Burkholder et al., 2016). The transcribing process took longer than I anticipated; nonetheless, all transcriptions were completed within 28 days of the first interview.

Data Analysis Plan

After collecting the data, I analyzed patterns and interpretations of significance as related to the research questions. I made judgements of the data to produce categories and themes relevant to the study. The following steps were taken during this process:

1. Organized and analyzed data.
2. Sent analysis of findings to participants to ensure accuracy.
3. Wrote the findings and recommendations from the study.

Organized and analyzed data. In qualitative studies, the data collected primarily include text from interview transcripts and observational notes that are analyzed to develop new ideas through induction from the data, which are then categorized based on elements of the conceptual framework and research questions (Saldaña, 2016). After the recorded interviews are transcribed, researchers begin to analyze the data by a process called coding. Saldaña (2016) described coding as a cyclical process where the researcher identifies codes, refines the codes, puts codes into categories, and repeats the process at a higher level that invloves synthesizing and integrating codes into more comprehensive categories or themes. The methods to which researchers code depend on the construction of the research questions (Saldaña, 2016).

During first-stage coding, I used a combination of holistic coding and a priori coding. Holistic coding is described as identifying basic issues from the data as a whole and is used as a preliminary step to more detailed analysis while a priori is a process in which codes are pre-determined prior to collecting the data (Saldaña, 2016). The use of a priori codes guide the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on the conceptual

lens of the study, I pre-determined codes that represented elements of the core constructs of the research questions identified as (a) collaborative cultures, (b) focused direction, (c) deep learning, and (d) accountability. Common patterns were holistically coded then recoded into the a priori codes; but I was open to codes that emerged during the analysis process that may not have aligned with the a priori codes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During the second-stage coding process I reorganized all the data because further descriptions of the data were discovered that appeared to be more succinct and appropriate, or some codes were merged together because of their conceptual similarities (see Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding is described as grouping first-stage codes into smaller more succinct categories (Saldaña, 2016). Patterns that emerge in pattern coding will likely be related to questions that answer how or why (Yin, 2018). I used pattern coding in second-stage coding to identify similarly coded data and organized the entire body of data into concise categories that were used to identify emergent themes that included attributes of the conceptual framework.

I engaged in a manual process for coding. I did not use any type of program software to code the data. To begin identifying patterns, Yin (2018) suggested actively working with the data by placing it into different arrays, organizing data into matrices, or creating visual displays. I utilized a color-coding system on the transcripts and recorded codes onto a matrix spreadsheet using a data management program on my computer. I then used color-coding within the spreadsheet to classify codes. During this process, I wrote notes and memos about my initial discoveries in my journal, then I created process maps to assist in my understanding and self-processing of emerging themes.

After completing several stages of coding, I looked for developing categories in which to classify the codes. Categories or themes are broad ideas that develop a comprehensive and succinct concept and may encompass several codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To transition from coding to categorizing more seamlessly, I applied several strategies to triangulate the data consisting of writing analytic memos including details about relevant codes; highlighting and labeling relevant respondent quotes; identifying and making note of recurring or outlier data; and creating diagrams to illustrate relationships among codes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

Sent analysis of findings to participants to ensure accuracy. After transcribing the audio recordings and conducting analysis of the data, I used member checking to establish credibility of the findings in this study (see Abdalla, Lima Oliveira, Franco Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018; Yin, 2016). There were no unusual circumstances that required the need to conduct brief follow-up interviews for further clarification imperative to answering the research questions. Participants had the opportunity to review my interpretations of the data and the preliminary findings to confirm that I accurately captured the essence of their experiences and point of view. I provided, via email, a report of preliminary findings for participants to review and offer an opportunity to provide feedback. No participants provided feedback or information that warranted adjusting my preliminary findings.

Wrote the findings and recommendations of the study. Results of a qualitative study are presented in narrative form highlighting the understandings of the researcher's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to communicate the findings in a

manner that not only informs readers, but also enables readers to reproduce, challenge, or elaborate on the results (Yin, 2016). I explicitly stated each decision during the data analysis phase and incorporated direct quotes from participants when it was appropriate to emphasize or justify my interpretation. I synthesized the categorized data and offered a summary of findings that incorporated the core constructs of the research questions and included contradicting themes that may have emerged. These processes ensured a narrative written in such detail that a reader can conclude that the findings are valid (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Trustworthiness

Developing a valid and trustworthy study is essential to qualitative research to confirm that the methods to extrapolate the data are consistent and to ensure fidelity to the participants' points of view are maintained through the presentation of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Achieving trustworthiness is an iterative process that involves methodical planning to ensure quality is assessed and aligned with consideration of the research questions, goals, and context of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Planning for and executing deliberate steps to attain trustworthiness increase the likelihood that the reader will conclude that the study's results are valid (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). There are specific standards that should be assessed to increase the trustworthiness of a study identified as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the way researchers make decisions concerning participant selection, context, and the collection of data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). For a study to be credible, researchers must attend to the way data are objectively interpreted and how accurately the complex patterns gleaned from participant experiences are represented in the findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher and sole instrument in interpreting data, I engaged in several strategies to enhance credibility including, (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, (c) and specifying my approach to data collection (see Yin, 2016).

Triangulation is defined as using at least three various sources to verify the consistency of a procedure, data, or findings (Yin, 2016). One form of triangulation I used to increase credibility in this study was perspectival triangulation where campus administrators from different school types, elementary and middle schools, were included (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Including administrators from varying types of campuses captured a wider range of perspectives to ensure the research questions were answered. Multiple data sources, such as data collected from interviews, actual quotes from respondents, reflective bracketing notes, and observational field notes assisted in triangulating the themes reported in the study's results (see Yin, 2016).

I also applied member checking strategies to improve credibility and validate my interpretations of participants' experiences. Member checking was an opportunity for participants to review my interpretations of their statements for accuracy (see Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking was accomplished during interviews by summarizing

particular responses of the participant and asking whether or not my understanding was the message the participant intended to convey (see Yin, 2016). I also engaged in member checking toward the end of the research study by allowing participants to review the precision and completeness of my preliminary findings, not the actual transcripts (see Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checks not only confirmed that my explanations were an authentic representation of the participants' points of view but also gave participants the opportunity to add description or clarify responses thus enhancing authenticity of what they intended to convey during the interview (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another strategy I used to enhance credibility was providing specific details of the approach for the data collection process and methods I applied. I included particulars of the development of my interview protocol, disclosed information as the researcher including my own bias, and allowed for dialogic engagement of the interview questions. The information I provided in the description assured that the data I collected were appropriate measures and aligned to the research questions (see Abdalla et al., 2018).

Dependability

Researchers seek dependability of a study by attending to the processes in which the data are collected and ensuring that details from the inception of the study design to the reporting of the findings are explained thoroughly enough that another researcher can conduct the same process and yield similar results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because changes in any given setting are inevitable, data regarding the phenomenon may evolve during the research study (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A researcher must carefully document any changes that occurred within the research setting and whether the changes

affected the researcher's approach to the study or decision-making during the analysis process (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Rich description of the research techniques aid a reader to assess the adequacy of the researcher's practices and may increase the probability of the reader deciding to replicate the study in another environment (Abdalla et al., 2018). An audit trail, triangulation, and transparent reporting of the research process is imperative for establishing dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

To enhance dependability, I created a journal to log each phase of the process for data collection and analysis. Within the journal, I tracked and detailed each step, including any adjustments to the original plan, the rationale to support the change, and any consequences that may result from the modification (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Documenting each process and decision used when analyzing the data showed consistency in the way I coded the data. This journal may serve as an audit trail that can be used to review my processes and ensure transparency and intracoder reliability when creating the narrative to describe the conclusions of the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008).

Meticulous attention to the development of the data collection and analysis protocol was necessary as well as triangulation of the data. I developed a sequence for data collection so that interview questions progressed in a natural manner and pre-planned probing questions to ensure the data are aligned to the goals of the study. During data collection I kept fieldnotes to record observations and reactions. Probing questions and fieldnotes allowed for triangulation in that the re-questioning strengthened and added

description to the data of initial interview questions and fieldnotes ensured consistency of my interpretation of the data (see Yin, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to acknowledging researcher bias and ensuring that findings are not only neutral and free of subjectivity but also shaped by the participants' points of view and experiences as described during interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To increase objectivity as a researcher, I established structured reflexivity processes to assist me in recognizing how my biases and preconceptions could misrepresent interpretations of findings, such as self-reflection and reflexive bracketing (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Self-reflection occurred before, during, and after data collection and included scripting notes and answering reflexive data questions, which increased the validity of the research design (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflexive bracketing occurred during the data collection stage. My personal notes, observations, reactions, and feelings from participant responses during interviews were recorded as a means to monitor the reporting of objective conclusions that meaningfully represent participants experiences (see Ahrens, 1999).

Researchers must also be cognizant of the degree to which the study's findings may be confirmed with other studies or corroborated by others (Abdalla et al., 2018). To increase confirmability from this aspect, I used a journal to provide a detailed account of how the data were collected, how codes and categories were scrutinized into themes, and how decisions were made during data collection and analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016). An audit trail should demonstrate that my interpretations of the data are supported

by the processes and material documented in the journal and not guided by my personal preferences and experiences (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). I made references to literature and other researchers' findings that validated my interpretations to influence the reader's acknowledgment of confirmability.

Transferability

Transferability assumes the researchers convey relevant interpretations in the study's findings that apply to other contexts or situations without losing meaning or the essence of participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Essentially, transferability infers that conclusions from the study can be generalized to an extended population (Abdalla et al., 2018). Possible issues that may affect transferability in this study could be the principals' knowledge of special education matters or the number of years the participant has occupied the position of school principal. Providing thick descriptions addressed issues with transferability.

Thick description is a strategy where the researcher offers detailed accounts of relevant factors such as participant information, historical information of the setting provided by participants, and the time and length of the interview session (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because unique situations are present in any given setting, Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that it is the reader's decision whether the information a researcher details in the study's conclusion can be transferred to other settings or groups. I provided rich, clear, and distinct descriptions when presenting findings to allow readers of the study to make connections and comparisons to see if the information is relevant and can be applied to the readers' own situation (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Other strategies to increase transferability included member checking, acknowledging rival information, and variation of participants. Member checking was used to enhance transferability because information to follow-up questions contributed to contextual information that I used to provide thick descriptions. Acknowledging rival information, data that contradicted my beliefs or assumptions, increased neutrality and afforded the ability for me to provide a thorough report that recognized all perspectives of the participants (see Yin, 2016). Incorporating a variation of participants, principals from both elementary and middle school settings, added multiple perspectives, which a reader may find useful in deciding if the structure and results of the study can be transferred to other situations.

Trustworthiness is essential to guarantee quality in a research study. Attaining trustworthiness involved deliberate planning and presenting intricate accounts of each step of the research process. I was conscious of every decision made and documented and justified each choice so that I assured readers that the conclusions of the study accurately represented the phenomenon that was studied (see Yin, 2016). This section included processes to enhance trustworthiness through strategies that support credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability.

Ethical Procedures

Researchers not only ensure quality and validity in studies by including aspects of the data collection process and analysis, but also a researcher ensures quality by protecting the integrity of the institution supervising the researcher throughout the study, the partner site, and individuals who volunteered to participate in the study. A researcher

must adhere to the ethical principle of respecting the rights and confidentiality of people involved in research by anticipating and planning for ethical issues that may arise (Burkholder et al., 2016). To prepare myself in designing an ethical study, I took proactive steps to address ethical concerns. I successfully completed the training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants" offered by the National Institute of Health on September 29, 2017. I reviewed and considered the American Educational Code of Ethics (The American Educational Research Association, 2011) as guiding principles during all aspects of the research study.

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) assesses ethical compliance of dissertation proposals to guarantee safeguards are in place to protect individuals, institutions, and researchers (Burkholder et al., 2016). Walden University established a comprehensive IRB preapproval for case studies that fall within specific parameters for students enrolled in the Advanced Educational Administrative Leadership (AEAL) program. Preauthorized forms were provided for use to initiate steps for ethics approval. The forms included in the IRB preapproval were a partner organization agreement form and a leader interview consent form. The following section details the steps I took to obtain ethics approval based on the AEAL program structure.

First, I obtained agreement from the partner district by acquiring a signature of an appropriate representative of the entity. I used the Partner Organization Agreement, found in the AEAL dissertation manual, and submitted the signed form via email to the program coordinator and my committee chair.

Second, I electronically completed and submitted a preliminary informational form to Walden's IRB offices, which is the standard form that doctoral candidates use to begin the IRB process. Within this application, I affirmed this case study fell within the parameters set for AEAL dissertations. I included assurances of minimal risk. I did not commence any activities regarding participant recruitment or data collection until the Walden University IRB reviewed and approved the dissertation proposal.

The third step required me to wait up to 10 days for a response from an IRB staff member indicating ethics standards had been met. Upon receiving notification from the IRB staff, I continued to work on the dissertation proposal. I successfully defended my dissertation proposal, gained complete proposal approval, and obtained the IRB approval #06-28-19-0748981.

Once I was assigned the IRB approval number, I began contacting prospective participants through district email. Initial contact aimed to acquire informed consent from participants using the preapproved Leader Interview Consent Form. The consent form explained the participant's potential involvement of the study and contain essential information so that knowledgeable decisions to participate can be made (Burkholder et al., 2016). To ensure beneficence, I addressed possible risk factors by respecting autonomy, the person's choice to participate, and state who benefits from the study. Because participation was voluntary, I guaranteed that processes to protect a person's identity were established and assured participants that at any time during the study they could refuse to continue. This initial communication to gain informed consent was accomplished via district email.

Ethical concerns relating to data collection and treatment of data were considered. I was transparent in explaining what data would be collected, how the data would be used, who would have access to the data, and how the findings would be reported. Participant identities were kept confidential to ensure integrity of the study. Although participants had already been acknowledged as being campus principals, efforts to ensure confidentiality were made by masking information so that true identities were not known and specific names of persons or campuses were not used. To protect the data, I stored all information digitally with a password for access. Any observational field notes, reflective journal entries, or hard copy transcripts were stored offsite and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Relationships between the researcher and the participants must be considered when developing ethical procedures (Burkholder et al., 2016). I conducted research in the environment in which I have been employed for 15 years, therefore, my professional and personal relationships with participants were evaluated and monitored through reflexive practices. Although I do not directly supervise or appraise potential participants, I am a district level administrator who engages in regular conversation concerning strategies to improve student achievement and monitor student academic progress. It was important to reiterate my neutral stance as a researcher who was conducting the study and that any information gathered from the research would only be used to interpret meaning, report findings, and inform district procedures. Additionally, it was imperative to maintain professional standards and avoid any conflicts of interest with participants during the recruitment stage by clearly presenting the need for the study, providing assurances for

confidentiality, and offering opportunities for participants to be involved in confirming the reporting of the findings.

It is vital to anticipate and address ethical issues throughout all phases of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This section described the way I ensured a high standard of ethics including obtaining partner site approval, obtaining Walden IRB approval, maintaining confidentiality of participants and data, and preserving the integrity of my relationship with the participants. Each of these planned steps helped to increase the trustworthiness and ethical standards of this study.

Summary

This study addressed the experiences and points of view of campus administrators regarding the phenomenon of inclusion implementation and whole-system educational change through an exploratory qualitative case study design. Because the intent of the study was to explore and understand meaning from real-life experiences of principals concerning challenges and facilitators in initiating change toward more inclusive practices in schools, a qualitative case study was the most appropriate design choice (see Yin, 2018). In Chapter 3, I incorporated details of the methodology and techniques which ground the study to include parameters for participant selection, processes in developing the interview protocol, and the plan to collect and analyze data.

To increase validity in qualitative studies, researchers must assess the accuracy of the findings, as interpreted by the researcher, the participants, and the readers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In Chapter 3, I also offered strategies to enhance trustworthiness, which included descriptions to evaluate and establish a credible, reliable, dependable, and

transferable study. In addition to ensuring a trustworthy study, a researcher must also guarantee an ethical study. Procedures for ethics approval were described specific to the Walden University AEAL program. Included in Chapter 4 is a description of the setting, each phase of data collection, the data analysis process, and offers the results of this study in relation to the core constructs of the conceptual lens of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework and Lewin's (1943) three-step model for change.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. Using an exploratory case study design, I collected data from 11 principals and examined their insights and experiences. From the data, I developed categories and themes that may increase understanding concerning strengthening the processes to achieve sustained inclusion practices in schools.

The conceptual lens used to frame this study was an integration of Fullan and Quinn's (2016) and Lewin's (1943) approaches to the change process (see Figure 1). The research questions were developed using elements of the core constructs of the conceptual framework. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding the cultivation of collaborative cultures to support inclusion practices?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices?

In Chapter 4, I describe the setting, data collection, and data analysis. I explain the results in relation to each research question and detail the strategies I used to establish trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting for this study was a school district in a southern state. The district serves a diverse collection of learners. In 2018, the state reported the district demographics as 21% African American, 57% Hispanic, 15% Caucasian, 2% Asian, and 4% Multi-race. Other district demographic data included the percentage of students considered as economically disadvantaged at 64%, students documented as English language learners at 10%, and students identified as students with disabilities at 11%. The types of disabilities addressed through special education in the district are represented in Figure 2. The figure denotes the percentage of students identified with a specific disability. The category of intellectual disability not only includes students with deficits in adaptive and functional skills but also students with higher incident disabilities such as a learning disability in reading or mathematics.

During the time of the study, the district had completed its second year implementing inclusion practices through a coteaching model. The district partnered with the local education service center and provided training and feedback opportunities through coaching and modeling to participating teachers. The district's special education department extended inclusive practice support by hosting a summer special education

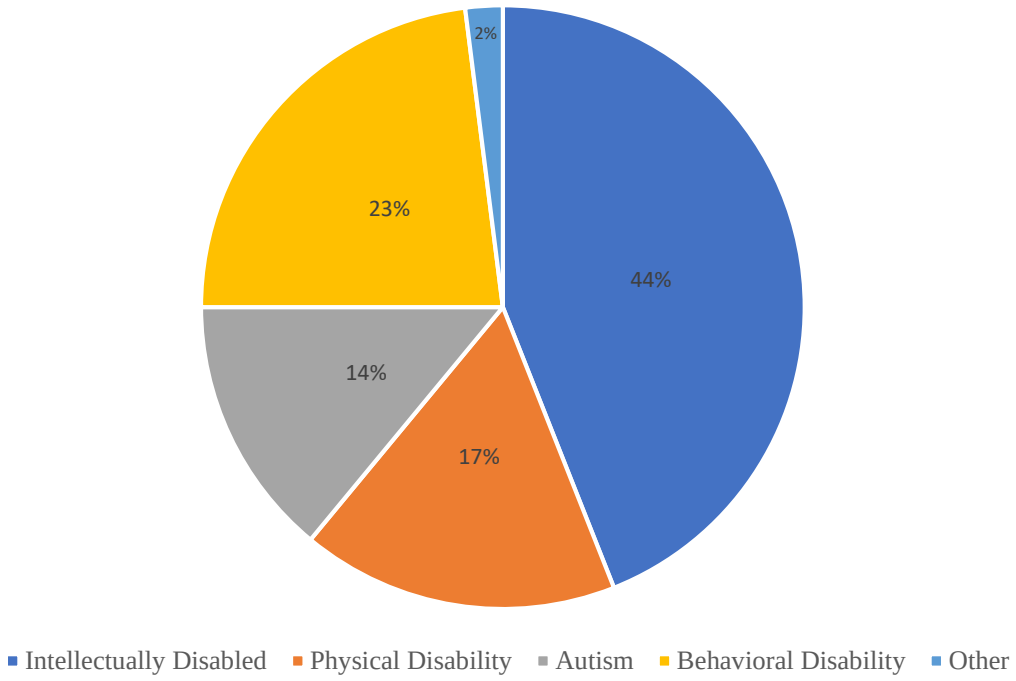

Figure 2. The types of disabilities in the participating district.

summit and offered sessions specific to the coteaching model. Attendance was highly recommended for teachers and administrators but was not required. To attract participants, the special education department offered a small monetary incentive to all teachers who attended. Additionally, the local service center reviewed the purpose of the partnership, summative assessment data for students with disabilities, and provided updates on the implementation of the coteaching model by means of a 45-minute presentation to campus and district administrators during a mandatory back-to-school conference.

Prior to data collection, the district's school board passed a budget with a significant deficit for the next school year. To address budget challenges, the district's

plan was to not replace positions lost through attrition. For each employee that parted with the district, the job description was evaluated, and the position was determined as vital for the campus or district department to function in an efficient and effective manner. If the position was determined as integral, the campus or district department could replace the individual. Consequently, for positions that were not replaced, those job duties were dispersed to other staff members who were still employed at the site.

Participants

The pool of administrator participants for selection was limited because of a defined delimitation of the study that specified that administrators must be principals. Of the 25 principals contacted with a request to participate in the study, 13 responded with interest. Participants were required to have been (a) an administrator in the district for at least 2 years, (b) assigned to an elementary or middle school campus, and (c) a current principal in the district. Two volunteers that initially agreed to be a part of the study declined to participate as their schedules did not permit the time, resulting in 11 participants.

Campus principals who participated in the study had varied knowledge and experiences, including years as a principal. Participants were asked a general question that prompted them to discuss their years of experience. The range of years serving as principal was 2 to 30 years. There were eight principals who worked in an elementary campus comprised of students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. Three principals worked in a middle school campus comprised of students in sixth through eighth grade. Three principals were male, eight were female. To deter including data that could

potentially identify the participants, no other demographic information was sought. Demographic information of each participant is represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Sex	Campus type	Administrative experience (years)
P01	Female	Elementary	3
P02	Male	Elementary	30
P03	Male	Middle	7
P04	Female	Elementary	10
P05	Female	Middle	6
P06	Female	Elementary	2
P07	Female	Elementary	3
P08	Female	Elementary	3
P09	Female	Elementary	8
P10	Female	Elementary	2
P11	Male	Middle	5

Once an adequate number of participants expressed interest in contributing to the study, data collection commenced. Data were collected by conducting individual interviews. The details regarding data collection for this study are presented in the next section.

Data Collection

Procedures to collect data began after final IRB approval from Walden University (#06-28-19-0748981). Under the guidelines of Walden University IRB and guidance of the superintendent from the partner district, administrators were contacted via district e-mail and invited to participate in the study. Potential candidates were provided with general information of the study, including possible risks and benefits. Interested individuals expressed their intent to participate by replying to the e-mail. Responses were sent to thank principals for volunteering and to set tentative meeting dates. Follow-up communication through e-mail and phone occurred to confirm logistics of the interviews. Although 13 individuals expressed interest in participating, only 11 principals participated in the study. I describe the procedures for collecting data in the following section.

Individual Semistructured Interviews

The research study involved examining the perspectives of principals regarding challenges and facilitators in the role they play in initiating change toward implementing inclusion practices on their campus. Because principals' perspectives could not physically be observed and the study was exploratory in nature, all data were gathered through individual interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with participants to elicit their personal experiences and yield thick descriptions that would address the research problem.

Semistructured interviews were determined to be the most appropriate way to gather data. The makeup of the semistructured interview allowed for a conversational

environment, which encouraged participants to speak openly and honestly. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed to provide a guide to extrapolate detailed information from the participants. The interview questions included probes to prompt for more information or to gain clarity when responses were vague. The interview protocol was developed to include conversational and general questions prior to asking specific questions relating to the research questions. This step served as a way to build rapport and increase the comfort level of the individuals. The main interview questions were ordered in a way that bridged each question and provided an opportunity for a comfortable segue to the next topic. During the interviews, though, the order of questions varied for each interview depending on if the participant's response naturally led to an interview question that was not in immediate queue. Semistructured interviews allowed the flexibility to ask additional questions as needed; however, any questions asked outside of the original plan should be recorded (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All questions asked that were not included in the original interview protocol were added to the document and identified as additional questions (see Appendix A).

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Semistructured Interviews

Each semistructured interview was conducted face to face at a time requested by the participant. The interviews were intended to take place on the principal's campus because that setting is where the phenomenon naturally occurs; though, as the researcher, I had to adapt to the needs of each participant. Two principals chose to participate at a different site within the district after work hours, eight principals preferred to conduct interviews on their campus during summer work hours at a time that would not cause

interference with academic or administrative responsibilities, and one principal opted to complete the interview process at a site outside of the district after work hours.

Interviews were conducted between July 13, 2019 to August 5, 2019. I allotted 60 minutes for each interview; however, the shortest interview was completed in 41 minutes, the longest interview was completed in 71 minutes. Prior to beginning the interview, I reviewed the purpose of the research and explained informed consent. I clarified the procedures I would take to maintain participant privacy during the study such as removing personal information, assigning a pseudonym, redacting specific names of people or entities, securing handwritten notes and transcripts in a locked personal file in my home, and maintaining audio recordings in a password protected file. I afforded a time for questions and a chance for each individual to decline participation with no consequence.

Methods to Record Data

Each interaction was audio recorded using a recording device that contained a built-in USB drive. After each interview, I downloaded the audio file using the USB drive into a password protected folder on my personal computer. Each file was labeled using the interviewee's pseudonym. I manually transcribed the file by listening to each recording and typing each word using a word processing program on my computer. The transcripts were saved in the same password-protected folder as the audio recordings. I transcribed all audio recordings by August 10, 2019. There were no unusual circumstances collecting the data.

The audio recording was a means to capture the words and voice tone or inflection of each participant. Listening to the audio recording and manually transcribing the data allowed me to recollect certain ideas or feelings that I may not have recorded during the actual interview. As the sole means of collecting the data, it was vital for me to practice active listening to engage with each individual and capitalize on opportunities to ask probes or recap responses to gauge or confirm my own understanding. I did not script responses. I engaged in reflexive bracketing and occasionally wrote field notes during the interviews for various reasons which included: (a) identifying personal feelings or reactions based on responses, (b) recording key words or phrases that I would revisit for clarification or confirmation, and (c) writing down possible connections to a priori categories to be considered during the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

During first-stage coding, I used a combination of holistic coding and a priori coding. I holistically identified responses that participants perceived as barriers or enablers toward implementing inclusion for each question by highlighting key words, phrases, or entire quotes on the actual transcripts. I arranged the holistic ideas into columns that were labeled with each interview question. This was done by creating a spreadsheet using a program on my computer so that I could easily filter and sort the text. Once I merged common concepts together, I reworded the ideas into codes and organized the codes into predetermined a priori codes. This was accomplished by handwriting codes onto sticky notes and placing them on large posters that were labeled with each a priori

code. The use of a priori codes guided my initial coding process (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Each interview question was developed so that responses could produce enough data to answer research questions. To ensure that each research question was answered, I scrutinized the data further. I used pattern coding during the second stage of analysis to identify similarly coded data. Then I organized the whole body of data into combined categories that I used to identify emergent themes that included attributes of the conceptual framework and answered the research questions. To develop codes into categories, I applied several strategies to triangulate the data consisting of (a) rereading field notes, which included preliminary themes that emerged during interviews; (b) reviewing the analytic memos I recorded during the coding stages which included details about relevant codes; (c) highlighting and labeling pertinent respondent quotes and referencing the quotes to emphasize the relationship to the theme; (d) identifying and making note of recurring or outlier data; and (e) creating diagrams to illustrate the relationships among codes and how the codes evolved into categories and themes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Holistic coding. Holistic coding is a method to identify broad themes or basic ideas found in the whole body of data and is meant as a precursory step to more detailed coding processes (Saldaña, 2016). During this step of coding, I compiled commonalities in two categories, barriers and enablers, in relation to the interview questions. This strategy enabled me to compile and arrange the holistic ideas in a logical format so that

later, I could scrutinize the data into smaller codes (see Yin, 2016). The categories centered on barriers and enablers of change for inclusion implementation in schools, which align with the purpose of the study.

For example, participants were asked a general question to describe how their district defines inclusion. The holistic idea that was generated from this question was that there is a varied definition of inclusion within the district. All 11 principals mentioned that the district definition of inclusion was not well defined or changed frequently; nonetheless, many principals acknowledged similar understandings for the models of inclusion the district expected. P0l described inclusion as an “umbrella of services” where a student could receive additional support from a professional teacher or a paraprofessional aide. Mirroring that defintion, P02 stated that inclusion was defined “programmatically in the form of coteaching and inclusion support” and that it is up to principals on how to develop those programs on campus. P10 described inclusion as students “receiving special education services in the general population.” Several other participants explained that inclusion was “more push-in support” or “less resource time”, which is a setting where students with disabilities are pulled out of class to recieve instructional support. Differing slightly from the previous repsonses, when asked how the district defined inclusion, P06 stated that “inclusion is a mindset” and was not confident that the district viewed inclusive education that way. Although there were analogous ideas for the manner inclusive education should be applied in classrooms, not all principals shared a common goal concerning the purpose of implementing inclsuive practices. Because principals did not clearly understand the district’s vision for inclusion,

I found the inconsistent defintition of inclusion to be a barrier during this stage of data analysis.

A priori coding. After compiling the data holistically, I was able to merge ideas together and place the newly labeled concepts into predetermined a priori codes. The a priori codes were determined based on the conceptual lens that framed this study. The conceptual lens was framed by the notion that certain elements must be in place for educational change to be successful and long lasting (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Lewin, 1943). The pre-determined codes represented fundamentals of the core constructs of the research questions. The a priori codes were (a) collaborative cultures, (b) focused direction, (c) deep learning, and (d) accountability. Any codes that emerged that did not align with the a priori codes I acknowledged and included on the spreadsheet with the label of a possible discrepant category. Some of the holistic concepts were placed in more than one a priori code. Under each a priori code, specific quotes or key phrases were recorded to support the newly developed category and an emergent category was identified. An example of the inductive pathway from holistic coding to a priori coding is represented in Table 2.

Pattern coding. During the second-stage of the analytic process, I used pattern coding to reorganize and combine similar ideas based on the emergent categories that were uncovered through a priori coding. I also revisited my journal and any analytic memos that I wrote during earlier coding stages to support the creation of possible themes. This process was accomplished by creating process maps on large poster paper that made clear connections between the data and the new substantive themes.

During a priori coding, building trust and staff validation were two categories that emerged. During the pattern coding stage, I combined these two ideas together to form a possible theme labeled investing in human capital. I reviewed interview transcripts and analytic memos from earlier coding stages to determine if this newly merged theme could be appropriate. P02 explained that the culture on the campus was such that teachers "are given some freedom to make decisions on how to achieve their goals." P05 stated that teachers respond to tangible feedback. Teachers "love gifts—it could be a jean pass, a positive note, or a compliment for their new haircut." Both responses have a direct connection to strengthening human relationships and self-efficacy thus investing on human capital.

Other themes emerged relative to the conceptual framework and the research questions of the study. Each established theme encompassed several categories within it. Regarding challenges and facilitators for inclusion implementation and sustainability, minor themes were combined to form overarching themes. I will describe the connection of the research questions and the four overarching themes that developed during the data analysis stage in the results section.

Table 2

An Example of the Inductive Pathway of Codes to Categories

Holistic concept	A priori code	Supporting quotes or key phrases	Emergent category
Provide intentional professional development opportunities to all staff	Deep learning	Teacher experts lead staff development; I include my paras as much as possible in the trainings in hopes to get them in the mindset that they are a teacher	Building leadership capacity
Explain the "why"	Focused direction	All conversations have to be about kids: "Is it good for kids?" "What is this kid capable of?"; Teacher and class schedules change a lot to make sure we service every student who needs something	Student centered
Be "real"	Collaborative cultures	Sometimes you have to tell them that you don't have all of the answers or that you were wrong; It's hard but sometimes I have to talk about the elephant in the room	Vulnerability
Foster adult relationships	Accountability	We put both adults' names on the door even if it is a paraprofessional; Overcome "learned helplessness"	Collective goals

Discrepant Cases

It was important to address discrepant cases or rival explanations during the data analysis stage. Discrepant cases refer to data uncovered that may not align or contradicts with the assumptions that support the conceptual lens that frames a research study (Yin, 2018). Throughout the interviews, I notated any obvious responses that could be considered a rival explanation. I evaluated any plausible contradictions during all stages of data analysis. However, after I examined all the data, I found no discrepant cases that conflicted with the emerging themes.

Results

The findings of this study were based on the understandings of principal perceptions regarding challenges and influencers with initiating change toward inclusive education for students with disabilities. I conducted the research to investigate the thoughts, feelings, practices, and experiences of elementary and middle school principals regarding the change process toward inclusion practices. Overall, I found several minor themes during the data analysis stage. I combined the minor themes to create one overarching theme for each research question. The overarching themes that emerged were (a) intentional learning, (b) effective leadership, (c) investing in human capital, and (d) collective responsibility. The themes that emerged are presented in Table 3. There were some overlapping themes within the research questions. In the following sections I describe the themes that emerged from the data, which answer the research questions of this study.

Research Question 1

The first research question was stated as: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation? After I reviewed the transcripts and applied several stages of coding, the following minor themes were revealed:

- Professional learning must be continuous, targeted, and inclusive to build leadership capacity and increase self-efficacy.
- Systems for learning must include modeling of best practices, peer observation, and evaluation of practice.

Deepening learning involves reflective learners who continuously enhance pedagogical practices and promote learning across an entire group (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Campus principals indicated barriers and enablers of deepening learning throughout the interviews.

Professional learning. All 11 participants stated that principals have many responsibilities; principals voiced that responsibilities, specifically regarding special education, can be difficult to balance and prioritize when principals' experiences and knowledge relating to students with disabilities vary.

Table 3

Minor and Overarching Themes by Research Question

Research question	Minor themes	Overarching theme
Deeper learning	Professional learning must be continuous, targeted, and to build leadership capacity and increase self-efficacy	Intentional learning
	Systems for learning must include teacher- and administrator-led modeling of best practices, peer observation, and evaluation of practice	
Focus direction	Professional development should include clearly defining inclusion and using that definition to make placement and service decisions for students with disabilities	Effective leadership
	Systems and processes to maximize time to analyze and use data to drive instruction is needed	
	Consistency from district staff is essential to support campus needs	
Cultivation of collaborative cultures	Administrators must create systems and practices that value staff and encourage vulnerability	Investing in human capital
	Clarity in communication, procedures, and expectations is necessary	
Securing accountability	Administrators must create an environment that supports a sense of acceptance and equitable expectations for all students	Collective responsibility
	Administrators must create systems for shared decision-making and encourage ownership of leadership opportunities	

For example, P11 described feeling overwhelmed in the many areas in which principals need to be knowledgeable:

> There's this thing called imposter syndrome, you know. I am the principal but I don't always feel like it so, I might have to fake it. Then I realized that you don't necessarily have to be the smartest person in the room, but you need to know how to go about finding things to help people, and that may be learning some things on your own.

Nine respondents indicated there were no preparation courses in college that trained them for special education programs or how to implement inclusion practices. P10 stated "I don't feel we've been prepared. I don't remember a single class or course or anything about laws and what can get you in trouble." All principals referenced a 3-day locally developed professional learning opportunity for teachers and administrators that was helpful in building the knowledge base for students with disabilities. However, there were mixed feelings regarding how the district supported professional learning in the special education arena overall. P02 admitted that reciting special education law is difficult and that most learning comes from relying on the relationships the principal built with people, from within the district and outside of the district, who are "more knowledgeable in the practice." P02 further stated that over the years, the district has made improvements toward providing more professional development but "they didn't even make the summit mandatory [for administrators], so what does that tell you about priorities?" P04 felt that "special education leadership is not in tune to what happens in a classroom in 2019" making it difficult to support campus administrators.

Regarding their administrative role for initiating change and deepening learning toward inclusive practices in their schools, seven principals expressed similar challenges concerning learning opportunities for special education paraprofessionals. Eight principals expressed that paraprofessionals were not viewed as part of an instructional support team for students with disabilities. Additionally, administrators shared that paraprofessionals considered themselves more as social behavior monitors or clerical assistants than collaborative partners in educating children. P06 stated:

> I walked onto a campus and asked the SPED (special education) paras how they supported students and they said, 'Oh I make all the copies for Mrs. So-and-So and I make sure the kids don't talk so they can finish the work.' It was clear that expectations were not in place.

P01 urged the necessity to be able to train the paraprofessional support staff because "these are the people who see the majority of our SPED kids; they should be considered teachers too, not just another person in the room assisting." It appeared that many paraprofessional staff did not understand their role in the classroom and providing the necessary training was challenging for administrators. P08 stated that the best learning is "when the paras and the teachers can be trained together, so that they are always on the same page." However, P09 further expressed that "it is difficult to train my paras after school when they are hourly employees." Principals believed that because paraprofessional personnel spend significant time with students, it is important that they receive training and are considered as another staff member that facilitates learning.

Another barrier that all principals articulated clearly was that both teachers and paraprofessionals struggled with understanding disabilities, addressing disabilities instructionally, and how to hold high expectations for all students. P04 explained that on the campus, teachers and paraprofessional staff have enabled certain students to use their disability as a crutch or excuse for gaps in learning. P08 stated that "we've got to get over this learned helplessness and get our kids to understand that they can learn and that we are going to help them." P10 voiced that "It's not okay to say 18 of my 20 kids are doing great [and] the other two are SPED. We cannot lower our expectations for any student, let alone students with disability." P05 echoed both statements with "these kids are general education kids first. You've got to understand their specific disability to really determine the best way this kid is going to learn and then you have to do it." Administrators saw the necessity for professional development to include topics relating to supporting the needs of students with disabilities.

One principal shared a slightly different view on how to target training for teachers and paraprofessionals concerning students with disabilities. P02 believed that there should be a "focus on pedagogy and use content to drive the learning" versus focusing on a specific learning style or content specific strategy. P02 added, "If teachers could become experts in the art of teaching, differentiation would come more naturally." Although this principal had a slightly different view on how professional learning should be targeted, there was a common pattern that professional learning opportunities must be intentional and continuous to support teaching practices.

Systems for learning. All participants mentioned professional learning and development as a factor that would support the change process toward inclusive practices. Providing coaching opportunities and modeling were among the top responses when asked questions regarding deepening learning. P07 explained that "just as we say students learn better from their peers, we can say that it works the same way for adults." Many administrators admitted that most of their learning concerning special education issues happened "by doing" and that they try to not only model that for their teachers, but also actually learn side by side with their teachers. P04 explained, "sometimes we are figuring things out and learning together…we've got to be ok with saying 'I don't know the answer to that' and figure it out together."

While being resourceful and discovering ways to support both their own learning and that of their staff, principals also expressed the need to develop procedures and processes so that modeling of instructional best practices and conducting peer observations can actually happen. "You can't just take away their [the teachers'] conference time for everything…you have to be intentional about creating pockets of time to build in observations and I think explaining the why might soften the blow," P05 explained. Similarly, P08 shared that the campus no longer participates in traditional faculty meetings and that after school meetings focus on instructional strategies. Then during one conference period, teachers are expected to model or observe the instructional strategy. During extended planning, time is set aside for teachers and administrators to debrief and adjust their instruction.

Not all principals were able to structure their learning systems in the same manner. Although the majority of principals stated that coaching and modeling is essential, administrators also stated that it was challenging to convince teachers to either change "the way things have always been done" or to overcome the inherent uncomfortableness of the idea of modeling or being coached. P11 explained:

> One of the difficulties with modeling and coaching [inclusive practices] is getting the teachers to see that there is a benefit. My teachers are still in the mindset that there is too much on their plate to add one more thing.

P02 expressed the challenge of prioritizing instructional strategies or focusing on specific differentiated strategies by stating:

> When you are interacting with six different learning levels in the classroom, when you are focused on one level, you are not attending to the other five. There are definite challenges when you look at the amount of time that you get on task with kids when you're having to meet the needs of multiple levels in the classroom. Teachers start to think if we are pushing the agenda of the individual over the needs of the whole.

In summary, administrator responses indicated that professional learning must be continuous, targeted, and inclusive to build leadership capacity and self-efficacy among staff. Additionally, participant experiences indicated that systems for professional learning must include modeling, coaching, and evaluation of practices to assist in prioritizing learning opportunities. I combined these two minor themes to form one overarching theme for this research question that I labeled intentional learning.

Participant responses pointed to the idea that intentionally planning for learning opportunities and designing time to dialogue about what was observed enhances deep learning. Administrators' responses indicated that increased knowledge in pedagogy and content could also create opportunities for increased student learning.

Research Question 2

The second research question was stated as: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward implementation of inclusion practices. After I reviewed the transcripts and applied several stages of coding, the following themes or patterns were uncovered:

- Professional learning should clearly define inclusion and guide staff in using that definition to make placement and service decisions for students with disabilities.
- Administrators must maximize time for staff to analyze and use data to drive instruction.
- Consistency from district office staff is essential to support campus needs.

Focusing direction is the idea that change must be initiated by defining purpose and engaging in activities that are anchored in that purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Administrators' responses to interview questions exposed challenges and enablers toward focusing direction toward inclusion implementation.

Clearly define inclusion. When asked a general question regarding how the district defines inclusion, all 11 principals responded in a manner that depicted an inconsistent understanding from the district point of view. Phrases that were used to describe inclusion as the district defines it included: "always changing," "not well

defined," "has evolved over time," and "is different depending on who you ask." The majority of administrators described the inclusion definition similarly to the way that P03 responded as "providing a student instructional support in the form of a co-teacher or a paraprofessional within a classroom of general education peers." Principals felt that establishing a clear definition of inclusion could create better understanding to work towards a common purpose or goal.

Five administrators felt that one of the biggest challenges in implementing inclusive practices is that principals and teachers do not understand how to interpret a student's disability and make appropriate decisions based on that interpretation. P02 explained that the district has pushed toward "less resource [pull-out models] and more co-teach[ing] models, so we are assigning these services to our kids…the problem is, are there enough resources? Like [are there enough] teachers? Then it becomes more of fitting people to the program." P05 expressed that because of the number of students with disabilities that needed inclusion support, the campus has had to "be creative in the way we assigned minutes [services] to students because we had to make sure a teacher or para would be available to provide the services in the IEP." P06 articulated that the root of the issue is that the district defines inclusion incorrectly, which affects appropriate decision-making regarding students with disabilities. P06 stated:

> They don't define it [inclusion] correctly. They want to define it as a program, like co-teach[ing]. Inclusion is a mindset. It is inclusive education for all students, wherever they enter the curriculum and wherever they can exit the curriculum…I mean you can put a gen ed [general education] kid anywhere also. You can put

> them in a good teacher's class, in a bad teacher's class and you can call that inclusion or not inclusion if they're in there. The mindset is the way they're thinking a kid is in mainstream and that's where they need to start. And until you can show me that this kid needs a lot, that they can't enter the curriculum in the right place and they're not going to exit the curriculum in the right place; then they need to stay in gen ed because they're gen ed kids first.

Principals agreed that professional learning would help focus efforts toward changing to more inclusive environment in schools if the learning targeted areas such as understanding how to read a student's full individual evaluation (FIE) and prescribe individualized interventions based on the evaluation. P11 stated that "educational plans are not individualized. We are assigning accommodations to kids just because they are eligible and not because they truly need it." P04 explained that because of inclusion implementation, it is difficult to create an individual education plan and not make decisions based on whether "there is enough personnel to address the number of minutes a student truly needs." P06 reiterated that "we have to dig deep to find out what the student actually needs. There will be a lot of trial and error and it would help if we had support in ways we can do that." Without articulating a clear vision for inclusion, it was difficult for principals to find clarity on how to provide support to engage and teach staff and to identify measures of successful implementation.

Maximize time to analyze data. Campus administrators revealed that in order to focus toward inclusive practices on their campuses, systems and processes need to be set that involve maximizing time to analyze and use data productively. All principals, in

some facet, expressed that time was a challenge when initiating change toward new initiatives such as inclusion. Frequent responses regarding lack of time involved areas such as: time to plan, time for follow-through, time to collaborate, and time to analyze data. Although principals mentioned different aspects involving time or lack thereof, all 11 administrators mentioned the use of data within these areas. Concerning time to plan, P06 said, "My teachers have common planning time and they are expected to use formative data to incorporate spiraling lessons and re-teach opportunities, but 45 minutes doesn't always cut it." P10 explained that "When we have PLCs, the plan is to look at the data to see if an instructional strategy we implemented worked." Regarding time to collaborate, P01 said:

> It is so important to collaborate. We are trying to get in the habit of looking at data as a whole so we can identify a teacher who is really doing it right…we want to set up a process to go and observe that teacher then talk about it.

P07 explained that "we [principals] can create ownership within our teachers when we can show them success through data."

Balancing the time to teach teachers how to effectively use data and the time teachers need to actually do the work planned from the data is a necessary practice many principals voiced as a concern. When analyzing data and having dialogue on instructional strategies, three principals expressed a need to constantly "evaluate what we are doing" and be willing to adjust when necessary. P11 stated that "I have to take a step back sometimes and accept when something is not working. Then I have to say, 'all right teachers, we need a better idea.'" P10 explained how teachers on the campus are focused

on student growth versus "passing a test" and when students are not growing, "we focus our attention on more resources or getting what the students need." Administrators shared that more often than not, planned data or progress meetings were cancelled due to campus issues that arose on that day. However, principals stressed the importance of consistently dedicating time to monitor not only student progress, but also teacher progress in terms of implementing inclusive instructional practices.

Support from district office staff. Campus administrators voiced both concern and praise regarding support from district office staff. There was a recurring pattern that was extrapolated from principals' responses that fixated on the need for consistency of district support for campuses to successfully move toward inclusion implementation. Regarding challenges in this area, P08 felt that "because my school does fairly well, there is an assumption that we don't need help…weaker staff gets placed in schools where there is less need." P02 expressed that "there's no real teeth in the department…we aren't forced to do things." P04 explained how staff turnover affects program implementation stating:

> There is constant turnover in SPED teachers, SPED paras, and on SPED district staff so training opportunities and learning is inconsistent…there is this message where programs are viewed as highly recommended and not required…and that's a problem when I am evaluating teachers.

Three principals expressed frustration for the lack of district support for students specifically with behavioral disabilities, which directly affect the number of staff allotted to campuses. P03 expressed concern that decisions about resources and staffing are made

"based on the number of students enrolled on each campus. Even though we have smaller numbers, they have to look at the type of behaviors we are dealing with and make decision based on need."

Some administrators pointed to and valued the efforts that district departments have made over time regarding special education issues. P01 said "I really appreciated when my SPED teachers were allowed to attend core content curriculum training. It is important for them to understand basic content and scope and sequence." Principals explained that attending curriculum trainings helped keep special education teachers abreast with where students need to be in each grade level so that expectations are kept high and scaffolding remained appropriate. P04 articulated that some teachers have to become experts in multiple grade levels and "it is evident that our district has started to recognize that and open up training for content, not just specialized instruction." P03 expressed that "our district staff has been more visible on the campuses and that helps us to reiterate to our teachers that they are being held accountable." Principals acknowledged that support from district administrators improved collaborative efforts and focused both human and instructional resources toward implementing inclusive best practices.

In summary, these three minor themes, clearly defining inclusion, maximizing time to analyze data, and support from district office staff were merged together to create one theme (see Table 3). The overarching theme for this research question was effective leadership. Findings from the interviews indicated that both campus and district leaders must be involved to develop a clear purpose to focus direction for change toward more

inclusive schools. Administrators felt that if district leaders set the expectation, the clear and focused direction would help campus leaders create an environment to carry out successful change.

Research Question 3

The third research question was stated as: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding the cultivation of collaborative cultures to support inclusion practices? After review of the data, the following themes emerged:

- Administrators must create systems and practices that value staff and encourage vulnerability.
- Clarity in communication, procedures, and expectations is necessary.

Cultivating collaborative cultures is a symbiotic energy where relationships are strong and people feel empowered to commit to a shared purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Principals' responses pointed to the importance of building trust and validating staff when initiating change.

Value staff and encourage vulnerability. When asked questions regarding cultivating collaborative culture, the most common response was that trusting relationships needed to be built. Each of the 11 principals' responses suggested that trust was earned by valuing staff. Staff validation occurred more often when teachers felt comfortable sharing their ideas. "You have to give teachers a voice…sometimes you just have to listen," stated P07. P09 explained that "even if we don't agree, you have to value a person's opinion and once there is a certain level of trust, we can work things out." P02 explained how teachers' expertise is valued on the campus with this response, "We

discuss the goals and I give my teachers the autonomy to get it done. I don't need to approve it; I trust that they will do what it takes to reach the goal."

Three other principals valued staff in the way that they identified and trained potential leaders. P08 spoke about hiring quality people "I'd rather start the year with a vacancy than to start the year with the wrong person." Similarly, P09 stated "We are looking for the right fit for the campus- everything else can be taught and learned." Three other principals mentioned the value of hiring from within and creating a pipeline of educators. "My new co-teacher this year was a para last year. We coached her up and were able to offer her a job," P04 stated. However, not all principals shared the view of building up teachers. P11 mentioned that "sometimes it is hard to invest in teachers because they end up leaving or using SPED as a steppingstone to find something better…it is hard to keep good SPED teachers around."

Six principals valued the work of their staff by monitoring and evaluating what instructional strategies or procedures proved to be successful and which required improvements. P01 expressed that "if you don't inspect what you expect, then you're not placing much importance on what the teachers are doing. So, if you want them to teach in tandem but you never follow-up, then you shouldn't expect things to change." P07 stated that "sometimes you just have to check in with a teacher, see how she is doing, or give her a little note of encouragement." Administrators also mentioned that work has to be valued by celebrating successes and strategically abandoning things that are not helping teachers and students be successful.

Six administrators responded that transparency is essential to lead teachers toward change. “My teachers get exactly what they see. I don’t sugar coat things. I tell them how I see it and sometimes that means admitting that I don’t know the answer,” explained P06. P05 stated, “I don’t get a lot of pushback from teachers. I really think they would rather deal with whatever change has to happen than to be somewhere else.” P04 admitted that:

> when something goes wrong it is my fault. I tell them it is my fault because I didn’t teach to the point of true understanding; I missed the boat. So now I need to make sure you [the teachers] have the tools you need.

Principals’ responses indicated that exhibiting transparency showed signs of vulnerability, which increased levels of trust. P03 spoke about the open-door policy on the campus, “I tell teachers my story. When you get to know your staff and they get to know you, that open-door [policy] is easier to walk through. It is also easier to get to the root of a problem.” When fostering collaborative cultures, principals expressed that building relationships with staff and understanding that reciprocal trust is essential to that relationship must be prioritized.

Clear communication, procedures, and expectations. Principals felt that an important aspect to building culture when trying to implement initiatives is to ensure clarity when communicating, developing procedures, and setting expectations. P01 explained that “when you are clear upfront, there should be little room for misunderstanding.” Providing clear expectations made it easier to for some principals to address conflict.

For one principal, providing clarity meant giving information honestly. When beginning the coteaching model, the campus was considered a school in need of improvement as rated by the state's accountability system. P04 shared:

> We didn't have time to build a culture for 'buy-in'. We were an improvement required campus, we had to do this. There was no choice, there was no 'what do you think.' I knew how to get us out and I just had to be brutally honest with them about where we were, and I promised them we would do it together.

When asked what practices or factors were necessary to support inclusion implementation, it appeared that clear expectations and procedures from district leaders was a significant lever for campuses to implement change for inclusion. P07 responded, "When central office sets clear expectations, it is easier to filter that down to our staff." Unclear expectations resulted in inconsistent implementation of inclusion practices. P07 explained:

> The co-teach[ing] model doesn't really work for our campus. We see more success when we pull kids out of class. I feel like I am able to do that, decide which programs work best for my campus. But I am not sure if it is like that at other campuses.

P08 referenced a lack of clear communication in regard to procedures and stated:

> Staffing procedures are not clear to us…an important part of a successful inclusion program is identification of students…the licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP) plays an important role in that. We've requested a certain LSSP because that person was part of our system and helped build our culture.

> The request was granted but then the decision to keep her on my campus was overturned with no clear reason why. It is frustrating because now we have to start from scratch.

In summary, valuing staff, encouraging vulnerability, and providing clear communication were recurring patterns that I combined into one theme. The overall theme for this research question I labeled as investing in human capital. Administrators' responses showed that investing in the affective side of people helped to shape culture. Principals who valued staff, were humble in their approach to making mistakes, and provided clear communication felt that the campus culture was well established, and that staff were more willing to take an active role when new initiatives were to be implemented.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was stated as: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices? After I analyzed the data, the following themes were constructed:

- Administrators must create an environment that supports a sense of acceptance and equitable expectations for all students.
- Administrators must create systems for shared decision-making and encourage ownership of leadership opportunities.

In education, accountability is commonly connected to external factors such as results on a standardized test or explaining decisions to constituents that could affect stakeholder expectations. However, securing accountability is an idea that not only

includes ownership of external factors, but also involves an internal, personal feeling of obligation or responsibility to do what is best for the whole and hold others accountable to do the same (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Campus administrators' experiences revealed areas that could be leveraged to enhance external and internal accountability.

Environment of acceptance and equitable expectations. When asked questions regarding practices and environmental factors necessary to support inclusive practices, seven principals stressed that an individual's personal belief was of utmost importance. Principals' responses indicated that educators must first believe that all children can learn. Acceptance of all students was stressed when P03 shared, "One of the things about public schools is that we don't get to pick who walks in the door. We have to accept the kids as they come and work with that." P04 shared that in order to have an inclusive mindset, teachers and principals have to be intentional with the way they speak about students explaining that "we have to quit labeling our kids when we talk about them. It is one of my biggest pet peeves when kids are referred to as 'SPED [special education] kids'. They are kids. Period." P11 stated that "we [principals] must preach that all kids can learn. All kids do learn. And hope that that idea filters down to teachers and kids can feel that they [teachers] care." Administrators felt that fostering an environment where all students are accepted could set the stage for implementation of an inclusive mindset.

P08 described that inclusion cannot be focused solely on students who could be placed in coteaching environments. Students with severe disabilities who are placed in more restrictive environment need to be accepted as part of the school and receive equitable educational opportunities. The principal described several examples of students

who were placed in specialized programs where the majority of instruction occurred in a separate classroom. Only during limited activities, such as physical education or music classes, would students be integrated in the general education classroom. P08 stated:

> My focus, when I first got here, [were] my [students in an autism unit] and my life skill students. When they went to lunch, they sat at their own table [away from their grade level] and I fixed it…I said, that is not inclusion. That is in no way including [all students]; that is segregation. And that was one of the first things that I changed. I have to be very intentional in making sure that during awards ceremonies that they [students in more restrictive environments] are included. During a graduation, they [the teachers] forgot a couple of the children and tacked them on at the end. Well, last year I told my team, I said, 'when you have your awards, those three life skills students will be in alpha order, like all the other students.' There is subtle discrimination that occurs, and you have to be always watching for that…the front office will forget to put any kind of flyer in their [the other teacher] box because, well, they just don't think about [it]…even though there are students in that classroom. Just those things still occur and I'm working on those things. You have to be vigilant and you have to [stress that] they're just as valuable and you have to remind them those kids are part of your class too.

Administrators' responses iterated that an attitude of acceptance takes time to build and could be more challenging if the staff had low academic and social expectations for students.

Principals voiced that teachers who correlate student academic outcomes with a student's home environment is a barrier that diminishes internal and external accountability. P03 shared:

> I do have a number of teachers that are not vested to help the students from this community. They don't look like the kids. They have no problem pronouncing [sharing], you know, special trips that they go on with their families and things that they do that the kids here can't relate [to]. I mean, our kids are lucky if they get [to go to] the [grocery store] on the corner. If they go there, it's something for them to talk about. And so, you know, the families work hard. We have moms and dads and single parents, and they are doing what they can to keep food on the table and clean clothes on the kids' backs. So, it's, you know, when I'm trying to help the situation, the parents plead and are pleading for help and they, the teachers, really turned off the kid, like a TV, just turned them off. So, I don't feel like a large percentage of my teachers are supportive of the needs of our kiddos. I think that they, I think they care, but I don't think they care enough to give the effort that's required to help the kids.

P01 agreed that "the more teachers know their kids, the better they can relate to them and plan relevant lessons." P06 shared that educators must foster relationships with kids, but "we cannot lower expectations based on a kid's circumstance, we have to push them. And we can, if the kid trusts us." Building relationships with students was mentioned by all principals as leverage to increase both teacher ownership of student outcomes and providing equitable opportunities for all students.

Campus leaders perceived that sharing student success specifically, publicly, and often was an enabler toward developing a philosophy for equitable learning experiences and expectations for students with disabilities. Principals revealed that having high but realistic expectations concerning student academic outcomes was essential when trying to increase internal accountability with staff. P05 shared:

> Most of these kids are not going to pass the test [state mandated test]. My focus is always on growth. I show them [teachers] that this kid was here last year, and this is where they are this year on this test. That's growth. And if the kids are growing, they are learning. And if they don't understand it [a concept], it's not that they can't do it, it's that they can't do it *yet*.

Four principals mentioned specifically that teachers need to be taught that equitable expectations do not mean the same interventions or the same goals for every student. Equity, as explained by P04, should mean that "we meet students where they are at." Administrators stressed that small, specific, and attainable academic goals should be set for students as expressed by P10, "We start with reasonable goals for each kid. [Goals should be] attainable based on their needs so that kids and teachers can see the growth." When the small successes are shared and celebrated teachers felt like they were really making a difference, P01 said "teachers felt empowered to own the data. They started saying things like 'our data' and other teachers in the grade level volunteered to help kids they didn't necessarily have in homeroom." When data are reviewed consistently and transparently, whether the data showed strengths or weakness, principals perceived that teachers became more comfortable taking ownership of the results and using the data to

make changes in instructional practices. P09 shared that teachers "become the change agents when they know where their kids stand and can see that what they are doing is working. Our teachers feel responsible for all kids. The accountability we feel for ourselves, we push on our kids." Principals agreed that if teachers considered the individual needs of students that both internal and external accountability could enhance.

Ownership of decision-making and leadership opportunities. An idea that resonated with eight principals was establishing platforms for staff to voice their thoughts can positively influence an individual's response to internal accountability. P01 explained the importance of teacher voice, "You have to give everyone an opportunity to give their opinion. Sometimes when people feel like their feelings are heard, you will get better buy-in." P07 shared a similar sentiment saying, "Teachers will buy-in to inclusion or whatever new thing that needs to be done if they feel like they were part of the decision-making process." P11 described how decision-making innately motivates teachers to improve on instructional practices and makes it easier for principals to hold teachers accountable:

> I try to find out from the teachers what they think our goals should be. I'm not gonna tell them this is what [they] are doing. They [teachers] are coming up with the goals. '[Principal], this is what we think we should be doing.' 'So, you all got together and you all came up with this, great'…ownership is already there. So one, the motivation to do it is already there because they [teachers] came up with it. And so now I'm just providing the support they need to do what they've already said they're going to do. And now when I do walkthroughs or whatever,

> I'm holding them accountable for what they said they were going to do to help our students.

P05 explained decision-making by participating in a thorough process of finding the root cause of non-mastery of a concept or low test scores:

> When teachers can collectively identify a problem and collectively come up with solutions, all of their efforts are validated, or not. But the practice helps them to not be afraid of finding out what the problem really is, even if it is them.

Five principals specifically mentioned that shared decision-making must be centered around "what is best for kids."

Opportunities for teachers to be involved in identifying challenges and developing plans for solutions was an enabler campus leaders attributed to securing accountability. On campuses where a culture of trust was established, principals perceived teachers felt more validated and more likely to have increased internal accountability, which could naturally increase external accountability. P09 explained "teachers don't want to let you down…they want to prove themselves worthy to be a teacher at the school." P03 made concerted efforts to provide teachers with autonomy to make decisions by trusting that "they will do what it takes to get it done." Trust played an important role in the way some administrators provided an atmosphere of feedback regarding student progress and instructional practices. P10 explained the connection between trust and feedback, "The teachers are comfortable enough with sharing data and [having] status meetings about kids. They ask for feedback and give each other feedback in the halls, at lunch, and in

official meetings." Three principals prioritize vertical planning meetings to ensure that all teachers value how each grade level contributes to the success of the entire school.

Principals' responses also pointed toward an idea that an enhanced feeling of accountability made it easier to build leadership capacity in staff within schools. "When teachers are validated and trusted, you [principals] don't have to work as hard. They are the ones influencing other teachers to do better," P01 explained. Further, P09 stated:

> Teachers feel the pressure to meet the standard of teaching here at [this campus]. Teachers that have been here a while model what is expected because of the way the culture has been established. We are not only accountable to our students but to each other.

Regarding securing accountability, principals felt that creating environments to sustain inclusive practices cannot be accomplished alone and that teachers must be a collaborative partner in the work.

In summary, to secure accountability, administrators must create an environment that supports a sense of acceptance and equitable expectations for all students and administrators must create systems for shared decision-making and encourage ownership of leadership opportunities. I merged these two minor themes into one overarching theme, collective responsibility (see Table 3). Campus leaders believe that the process to secure accountability to sustain the implementation of inclusive practices, must be a collaborative effort that is nurtured by the principal.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is integral to the authenticity of any qualitative study. Because qualitative studies afford researchers a sense of discretion in making choices and judgements while gathering, interpreting, and presenting data, it is important to ensure trustworthiness by communicating research procedures in a transparent way (Yin, 2016). Trustworthiness was accomplished by paying careful attention to four components vital to a trustworthy study including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

For a study to be credible, researchers must be cognizant of the decisions that are made in participant selection, the way data are objectively interpreted, and how accurately the complex patterns extrapolated from participant experiences are represented in the findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish credibility, I interviewed principals from both elementary and middle school settings. Using the practice of perspectival triangulation allowed me to gather information from an expansive range of perspectives and ensure multiple data sources that could yield a rich data set (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I further triangulated the data by using actual quotes from participants and referencing reflective bracketing notes and field notes to support the developed themes.

Member checking was used to increase credibility by asking participants to review and verify the accuracy of the data. I engaged in two methods to accomplish member checking. First, during the interviews, I summarized responses and asked if my

understanding was an accurate interpretation of what the principal intended to convey. This strategy permitted principals to confirm my thoughts or further explain their response. Second, once the data were analyzed, I sent a summary of preliminary findings to participants and requested any feedback or corrections within 7 days. No participants responded with changes. Two participants responded with confirmation that the preliminary findings were accurate.

Dependability

Researchers must recognize that data and results may change based on the conditions surrounding the phenomenon. Dependability in qualitative studies is the way researchers ensure that the processes of data collection are thoroughly explained and that the methods selected are appropriate to answer the research questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition, researchers should ensure that the conditions or setting in which the data were collected is detailed enough to provide a clear connection between the results and the interpretations gleaned from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transparent reporting of the research process, an audit trail, and triangulation is imperative for establishing dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

I established dependability by carefully documenting any changes that occurred within the research setting and whether the changes affected the approach to the study or influenced any decision-making matters during the analysis process (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). During the development of the interview protocol, I listed a standard set of question that would be asked. The questions were vetted using a dialogic engagement process with administrators who met the participant selection criteria but did not

participate in the study. The vetting process challenged me to revise certain questions to ensure maximum opportunity for participants to contribute rich information that would answer the research questions. During the first interview, one participant response prompted me to ask a question that was not listed and was not conducive to the preplanned probes. The additional question seemed relevant and aligned to the research questions. The addition of the question did not change the process to which I analyzed data. I recorded additional questions to the interview protocol and asked the question to all subsequent participants.

Furthermore, I recorded and tracked each step of the data collection and analysis process in a journal that served as an audit trail. During data collection, I kept fieldnotes to track observations, reactions, initial ideas related to possible codes, and keywords to assist in gaining more clarity from participants' responses. I also participated in several stages of data analysis to increase dependability, which included three methods of coding. Meticulous attention to the actual processes taken while collecting data was important to the consistency in interpreting the data (see Yin, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability is associated with researcher bias and ensures that findings are shaped by the participants' experiences and are free of researcher subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an employee of the district where the study took place, I worked directly and closely with each participant in a non-supervisory capacity. My personal opinions, beliefs, and experiences could have easily influenced the way I interpreted the data. I established structured reflexivity processes to assist me in acknowledging how my

biases and preconceptions could misrepresent interpretations of findings. I experienced strong reactions when I did or did not agree with a certain response that I felt a connection to or when a participant mentioned a person or program by name. The reactions I felt were internal; I tried my best to keep an indistinctive tone and neutral facial expressions. My notes, observations, reactions, and feelings from participant responses during interviews helped me monitor the reporting of objective conclusions that accurately represented participants' points of view (see Ahrens, 1999).

Transferability

Transferability infers that the conclusions from a study can be generalized to alternative contexts by conveying relevant interpretations in the study's findings without compromising the essence or reality of participants' experiences (Abdalla et al., 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I provided rich, clear, and distinct descriptions when presenting findings to allow readers of the study to make connections and comparisons to measure relevance and if the information could be applied to the readers' own situation (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Additionally, I acknowledged rival information, data that contradicted both my beliefs and the assumptions of the conceptual framework, to increase neutrality and render the ability for me to provide a thorough report that recognized discrepant cases (see Yin, 2016). Because I included participants with a wide range of experiences serving as a principal and a mixture of school settings, I added more variables for a reader to consider, thus increasing the possibilities of transferability.

To establish that the study's findings as valid and reliable, it was pertinent that measures to guarantee trustworthiness were in place. Attaining trustworthiness involved

careful planning and presenting intricate details of each step of the research process by addressing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To assure readers that the conclusions of the study accurately represented the phenomenon that was studied, I was intentional in justifying and documenting each decision that I made (see Yin, 2016). This section described the implementation and adjustments made to credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability strategies to enhance trustworthiness in this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided detailed information about the data collection and data analysis procedures used to explore administrators' perceptions of the principal's role of the change process for implementation of inclusion practices. I thoroughly explained the results of the scrutinized data by addressing each research question. Finally, I described how trustworthiness was established through processes that enhanced credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The research questions were anchored in the study's conceptual framework which incorporated Fullan and Quinn's coherence model and Lewin's 3 step method for approaching change (see Figure 1). I analyzed and holistically coded the data then categorized the information using a priori codes. A second cycle of coding was necessary, and I developed minor themes that connected to each research question. When I presented the overall results, a succinct overarching theme for each research question was established. From the data I collected, it is notable to state that for principals to foster lasting change for inclusion implementation, elements that embody characteristics of the

study's conceptual framework are necessary and can be difficult to achieve. In Chapter 5, I summarize the research by interpreting the findings, describing the limitations, discussing the recommendations, and explaining the implications of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate campus administrators' perceptions concerning challenges and facilitators that influence the implementation and continuation of inclusion practices and their role in initiating change. I used an exploratory qualitative case study approach. I conducted individual semistructured interviews with 11 elementary and middle school principals to explore administrators' perceptions of leading change toward the implementation of inclusion practices in schools. In this chapter, I provide a brief review of the study and interpretations of the findings. I address the research questions in relation to the conceptual framework. I describe the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and implications for positive social change.

The research questions guiding this study were grounded in the conceptual framework, which was an integrated model based on two paradigms: Fullan and Quinn's coherence framework and Lewin's three-step model for change (see Figure 1). The research questions were used to examine principals' experiences and perceptions of educational change concerning the implementation of inclusion programs. Four research questions were explored:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding the cultivation of collaborative cultures to support inclusion practices?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices?

Participants were asked questions regarding factors that enable or act as barriers to implementing change within inclusion programs. The questions were designed to extrapolate data regarding principals' role and experiences in initiating change and sustaining inclusion practices. Key findings that emerged from administrators' responses indicated that certain elements must be established in schools for change to occur and for inclusive programs to be sustained: (a) intentional learning, (b) effective leadership, (c) investing in human capital, and (d) collective responsibility. These key findings elicited from principals align with the study's conceptual framework, but how each factor was established on campus and the level of implementation of each idea varied for each principal.

Interpretation of the Findings

The conceptual framework for this study was an integration of Fullan and Quinn's coherence framework and Lewin's three-step model for change (see Table 1). Fullan and Quinn articulated four drivers that leaders must establish and nurture within schools to successfully implement innovation: (a) deep learning, (b) focusing direction, (c) cultivating collaborative cultures, and (d) securing accountability. Lewin's three-step model for change provided a progression of stages—unfreeze, change, and refreeze—that administrators must recognize and address during the implementation process. The

research questions were developed to allow me to explore principals' perceptions and experiences of the change process for inclusion implementation. My interpretations of the study's findings were grounded in the connections within the conceptual framework and previous research, as described in the literature review. In the following section, I describe each theme that emerged when interpreting the study's findings.

Intentional Learning

The theme of intentional learning was established based primarily on responses from the first research question which was, "What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning deeper learning of practices that influence inclusion implementation?" Principals' responses aligned with both the findings uncovered within the peer-reviewed literature presented in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework. Deepening learning involves the systematic processes of (a) developing collaborative and reflective work to master an understanding of pedagogy and (b) continuously incorporating new and enhanced skills from the learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Deep learning processes typically occur during the change stage of Lewin's 3-step model, after staff has accepted and embraced a need for changing the status quo.

Administrators interviewed in this study articulated the need for continuous professional development for teachers and administrators that is targeted toward supporting students with disabilities when initiating change toward inclusive practices. When professional learning was inconsistent and not targeted, principals believed that the information was not relevant, nor an effective way to support teachers in the area of providing inclusive experiences for students with disabilities. Teachers from successful

inclusive schools agreed that explicit and consistent learning opportunities are essential to the implementation of inclusion practices and increased self-efficacy (see Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Creating deliberate opportunities to strengthen one's craft is essential to promote administrators' efforts for implementing and sustaining inclusive practices. Researchers' findings revealed advantages to providing formal and informal opportunities for teacher collaboration to share instructional strategies and provide input and feedback (Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Ward, 2018). It is important for administrators to develop systems that purposely encourage collaboration and foster discussion so that staff can engage in authentic learning and translate that learning into instructional practices.

It is also vital for principals to participate in interactive and collaborative environments with their peers to optimize learning experiences. Principals indicated that knowledge regarding leading a school is associated with personal and significant experiences that are not necessarily taught in administrator preparation programs (Kim, 2020). If principals are expected to be the driving force in initiating change, intentional learning must also be on the forefront their own professional growth (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Kim, 2020; Osiname, 2018). The theme of intentional learning resonates with the conceptual framework, researchers' findings, and participant responses.

Effective Leadership

The theme for effective leadership emerged from the second research question, "What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?" According to researchers'

findings, the principal is the most influential agent for initiating change and for the implementation of any innovation (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; Lyons, 2016; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015). Before principals can focus direction toward inclusive practices, a lack of awareness that change is needed can be a barrier that needs to be considered. This idea aligns to Lewin's unfreeze stage, which is to articulate a need for a change in behaviors and convince people that change must occur. Leadership plays an important role in encouraging teachers to follow a principals' lead.

According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), focusing direction toward change involves more than creating and attaining a goal for inclusivity; it encompasses an evolution of identifying a need and building teacher capacity through continuous engagement of the learning process. Leaders are effective when they can focus the direction of their staff by explaining the reasoning behind the necessary change. Effective leadership involves (a) establishing the necessary conditions that enable learning, (b) fostering an environment to take risks, (c) participating in reflective practices, and (d) making adjustments if necessary. As evidenced in participants' responses, to focus direction, leaders need to be effective in clearly articulating expectations and developing systems to maximize continuous learning.

Effective leadership must be exhibited by campus administrators, as well as district administrators. Findings from this study indicated that both campus and district leaders must be involved in developing purpose for change toward inclusivity. Clear direction from the central office supports the principal when communicating a vision and expectations toward the goal for inclusive education. Without coherence in expectations,

it is difficult for principals to steer their staff in the direction toward a common goal. Clarity in roles, responsibilities, and expectations contributes to a culture of trust, which is necessary when implementing something new.

Investing in Human Capital

The theme for effective leadership emerged from the second research question, "What are the perceptions of campus administrators concerning facilitators that focus direction toward the implementation of inclusion practices?" According to researchers' findings, the principal is the most influential agent for initiating change and for the implementation of any innovation (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gupta & Rous, 2016; Lyons, 2016; Osiname, 2018; Schaaf et al., 2015). Before principals can focus direction toward inclusive practices, a lack of awareness that change is needed can be a barrier that needs to be considered. Administrators must also recognize that change efforts evoke an emotional response that could include resistance, anxiety, opposition, and doubt (Thompson, 2019). This idea aligns to Lewin's unfreeze stage, which is to articulate a need for a change in behaviors and convince people that change must occur. Leadership plays an important role in encouraging teachers to follow a principal's lead.

According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), focusing direction toward change involves more than creating and attaining a goal for inclusivity; it encompasses an evolution of identifying a need and building teacher capacity through continuous engagement of the learning process. Leaders are effective when they can focus the direction of their staff by explaining the reasoning behind the necessary change. Effective leadership involves (a) establishing the necessary conditions that enable learning, (b) fostering an environment to

take risks, (c) participating in reflective practices, and (d) making adjustments if necessary. As evidenced in participants' responses, to focus direction, leaders need to be effective in clearly articulating expectations and developing systems to maximize continuous learning.

Effective leadership must be exhibited by campus administrators, as well as district administrators. Findings from this study indicated that both campus and district leaders must be involved in developing purpose for change toward inclusivity. Clear direction from the central office supports the principal when communicating a vision and expectations toward the goal for inclusive education. Without coherence in expectations, it is difficult for principals to address any underlying fear of change and steer their staff in the direction toward a common goal. Clarity in roles, responsibilities, and expectations contributes to a culture of trust, which is necessary when implementing something new.

Collective Responsibility

The final theme of collective responsibility emerged while exploring the fourth research question, "What are the perceptions of campus administrators regarding their role in securing accountability to sustain inclusion practices?" Collective responsibility must be attained to secure accountability with inclusion implementation. Securing accountability comprises the idea of internal and external accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). If sustainability in student academic and emotional success through inclusive practices is the goal, administrators must create environments where internal accountability is a norm. When internal accountability is increased, there is an increased likelihood for improved external accountability (Thompson, 2019). Securing

accountability would happen during the final stage of Lewin's 3-step model, refreeze. The refreeze stage is when campus administrators would maintain new behaviors so that the desired change can be sustained.

Principals who create environments where campus staff felt invested and hold each other responsible for all students may have improved success to sustain inclusive practices. Effective leaders who foster adult relationships involve all staff in decision making, shared goal making, and an inclusive staff environment. Researchers' findings concluded that positive transformation of teacher behaviors and beliefs were observed when principals enacted a move toward a culture of collective responsibility (Fullan, 2016b; King & Stevenson, 2017; Thompson, 2019). Principals in this study agreed that efforts toward change for inclusivity needed to be a collective effort; all staff needed to feel invested in creating the goals and feel responsible for both positive and negative outcomes. The environment administrators develop can influence educators' willingness to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for academic success and well-being for all students.

Limitations of the Study

Transferability assumes that results of a study could be found applicable and relevant in another situation or environment based on the interpretation and perspective of the audience (Yin, 2016). Limitations to this study that affect transferability were defined in Chapter 1. However, during the study, other limitations for transferability were identified and are described in this section.

As stated in Chapter 1, the school district that participated in this study had recently completed the second year of implementing coteaching models as part of promoting inclusion programs at all campuses. In Chapter 4, the district's demographic makeup was described, including ethnic/racial information, percentage of students considered economically disadvantaged, percentage of students identified as English learners, and percentage of students serviced through special education, including the specific type of disability. The findings of this study may not be applicable to administrators whose district or school did not have any inclusion programs in place or did not serve a similar population of students.

The number of participants may serve as a limitation for this study. An effort was made to enhance credibility by triangulating data sources to include administrators from both elementary and middle school. Although credibility was enhanced by including perspectives from multiple types of schools, only 11 of the 25 possible principal participants were interviewed in the study. The limited sample size may be considered a challenge for transferability. Additionally, because only elementary and middle school principal experiences were explored, findings for this study may not be relevant to comprehensive grade schools or high schools.

Recommendations

There is an abundance of literature concerning inclusion from the lens of implementing specific models, such as coteaching. In addition, studies from the literature review focused on the perceptions of challenges, successes, and experiences from general education and special education teachers. Although researchers' findings point to the

principal as the most influential agent for change in schools (Fullan, 2016a; Hoppey et al., 2018; Kim, 2020; Lyons, 2016; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Osiname, 2018), there is limited research that articulates how administrators initiate change in practice to promote inclusivity.

In this study, I identified specific factors that enabled or acted as barriers toward inclusion implementation and the principals' perceived role of change in that process. Principals indicated several factors necessary to support change; however, further research may be necessary to explore how to establish certain ideals. For example, all participants indicated that establishing trust and building relationships was essential for a positive school culture; yet, not all principals felt that their campus had arrived at a comfortable state of positive school culture that specifically promoted inclusivity. It is recommended that districts explore the ideals indicated in the themes to provide administrators relevant learning opportunities to develop skills involving change initiatives and special education issues.

Secondly, campus leaders described the lack of preparation for issues regarding special education within formal education and district in-service. Principals expressed challenges in understanding how to instructionally and emotionally support both teacher and student needs in the area of special education. Further research could be beneficial to explore specific development programs or strategies administrators need that could directly influence teaching practices and increased student outcomes. In addition, district and campus administrators should focus on continuous and relevant in-service

opportunities to prepare campus leaders regarding special education within formal education.

Finally, the focus of this study was only on principals' experiences in elementary and middle school settings in a large urban district. Recognizing differences in alternate school settings (e.g., high schools, private schools, or comprehensive grade schools) or rural districts may be necessary. Results from further research could contribute to the body of research currently available regarding the implementation of inclusion practices.

Implications

Educators' efforts are essential for promoting positive social change. A student's educational experience can determine their level of self-worth, dignity, and contributions they make to society on a large scale. Together, teachers and administrators are critical in creating systems and applying processes to create equitable learning opportunities so that all students can be recipients of positive social change and then become the agents to sustain that change. This study has the potential to ignite social change initiatives in schools. The findings could provide information to foster specific and strategic professional development for principals as the change leader, regarding students with disabilities. The increased administrator efficacy for educational change toward inclusion implementation could then lead to an establishment of improved support systems for teachers, and ultimately produce improved academic and social emotional outcomes for all students.

Because the themes uncovered from this study have a direct focus on strengthening personal and collective accountability, the results and additional research

efforts could also affect inclusion in a broader sense. The focus of this study centered on inclusion practices for students with disabilities; however, inclusivity involves more than just one specific student group. Inclusive education involves not only recognizing the diversity of all groups, but also providing equitable opportunities for all students, whether the groups are historically marginalized or not. Establishing a school culture where shared decision making and internal accountability for self, staff, students, and stakeholders is the norm, could set a foundation to promote inclusive education where all students could benefit.

Conclusion

Regarding the implementation and sustainability of inclusive practices, this study shows that intentional learning, effective leadership, investing in human capital, and collective responsibility must be present. It is clear, though, that engaging in change toward inclusivity is a process and each element uncovered through this study takes time to develop. Regardless the status quo or baseline of a school when initiating change toward inclusive practices, administrators must have a deep commitment for continuous improvement to achieve sustainable results. Principals are the catalyst for leading educational change and fostering the environment for change to occur and be sustained. Campus leaders hold the power to influence the group, but effective leaders also learn from the group (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). It is important to contemplate that although principals are the main influencer for change, the job is not meant to be accomplished alone.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: Start Time: End Time:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Male ____ Female ____

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in my study. I am interested in gaining knowledge about experiences and challenges administrators have in initiating the change process for implementation and sustainability of inclusion programs for students with disabilities. Please feel free to speak openly and state your honest opinions to the questions I will ask.

This confidential interview will be audio recorded as stated in the interview consent form. You will be given a pseudonym to ensure that your personal information and identity remain confidential. Are there any questions before we proceed?

Conversation Dialogue

Before we begin, I'd like to get to know you a little more by gathering some background information that may help me with my study:

1. What has been your path to becoming an educator?
2. How long have you been in your current position?

General Questions

1. How is inclusion defined in your district?
2. What are your general feelings about inclusion?

Main Questions

1. How would you describe your role in the implementation of inclusionary practices on your campus? (RQ1-4)
2. Please describe the changes in practice that you thought were necessary in order to move toward a more inclusive school? (RQ 3)
3. How do you motivate staff to work toward common goals and improved student achievement for students with disabilities? (RQ2, 4)

   Tell me more about…

   Can you give me some examples?
4. What practices and environmental factors are necessary to support inclusion implementation? (RQ3, 4)
5. How were those practices or factors established on your campus?

   Please tell me more about how those were established or how they are maintained.
6. How would you measure the success of inclusion practices on your campus? (RQ2)
7. How do you know inclusion is successful?

   Tell me more about…

   Can you give me some examples?
8. How have you been prepared to support your staff with professional learning opportunities in regard to inclusion for students with disabilities? (RQ1, 2)

   Can you give me some examples?

9. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges in implementing and sustaining inclusion programs? (RQ1)

   Tell me more about…

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Additional Questions (not included in original interview protocol)

1. How is inclusion implemented on your campus?
2. How did you handle conflict, if any, when trying to engage staff in moving toward more inclusive practices?

Concluding Remarks

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. Your experiences and perceptions will help me further understand inclusion implementation and the principal's role in the change process toward inclusivity. My hope is that the information will assist in improving and sustaining practices toward student achievement for all students, including students with disabilities. You will have an opportunity to review my preliminary findings to make sure I convey your experiences accurately. Is there a specific email you prefer me to use to send you the document?